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Introduction

A few years ago a dear colleague of mine asked how it could be that a woman like me was *still single*. She simply couldn't "figure me out," she said; her facial expression was one of genuine concern. To her, it seemed that I was neither actively looking for a male partner nor concerned by my overly extended singlehood. As a thirty-plus single woman at the time, I had become accustomed to this line of speculative questioning, one which expected me to justify my personal social circumstances. This time, however, rather than parrying the question, I decided to take a different route and turned the question back on her.

Rather than trying to justify my single existence—or, alternatively, refusing to answer to what I've often considered to be an intrusive and a non-dialogical form of interrogation—I asked her if she was happily married. I did have the advantage of prior knowledge, it should be said; my question arose from previous conversations, in which my colleague had freely discussed her martial difficulties. Because we were habitually frank with one another, I knew that she was unhappily married, and that she and her husband had been living separate lives for some years. With this knowledge in mind, I asked her what stopped her from separating from her husband. "It's complicated," she replied. "Well, single life can be quite complicated too," I retorted.

A recurring experience for many single women is the need to account for their singlehood. This demand is articulated in different ways—blatant and subtle, explicit and implicit—but seems to lead to the same end. *Why are you still single? What's wrong with you? Why aren't you trying hard enough? Shouldn't you lower your standards?* This set of statements—part speculative, part unprompted advice, at times a blend of pity, alarm, and scorn—is a constant scourge for many single women. The forms of interactions in which single women are constantly required to account for their status are ubiquitous. It happens during family dinners, encounters with friends (and their friends), conversations with neighbors and even interactions with total strangers. Researching female singlehood for almost a decade has shown that many people are perplexed by what they consider to be a disturbing enigma: a woman in her "prime years," who has not entered matrimony and is yet to embrace the familial way of life. And so, otherwise banal questions have become the anchor for popular romantic

comedies, matchmaking reality shows, catchy newspaper article headlines, and the titles of bestselling self-help books worldwide.

Scholars and social commentators have extensively analyzed the growing population of single women worldwide, in an attempt both to understand the phenomenon and to propose alternatives to the popular portrayal of female singlehood. In 2014, the percentage of single-person households in England and Wales was 28.4%; in Israel, in 2013, it was 18.7%. In 2014, single women were 30.7% of the female population of England and Wales (6.45 million; Office for National Statistics 2015), while in Israel in 2013, they were 28.1% of the female population (830 thousand; Central Bureau of Statistics 2015), compared to the 54.6% who were married.[1] Similar percentages of single women have also been seen in other countries in recent years, such as the United States and Denmark, where singles are also almost 30% of the female population (40 million and 850 thousand, respectively; United States Census Bureau 2016; Statistics Denmark 2016).

This significant demographic shift has produced new conceptualizations of singlehood: "leftover women" in China; "parasite women" in Japan; "late singlehood" in Israel; the "singletons" of Australia, the US, and the UK. Whatever the name, the intent is to capture both the cause and the effect of singlehood on society. What is clear is that the phenomenon stirs public debate on a global scale—a debate that considers extended female singlehood as both a disturbing and an exciting new phenomenon.

Drawing on a wide range of cultural resources—including web columns, blogs, advice columns, popular clichés, advertisements, and references from television and cinema—I will attempt to outline some of the meaning-making processes of singlehood and time in Israel. The case study of Israel carries broader implications for contemporary discussions about singlehood and time in general, because it presents, in particular, the opportunity to raise questions about processes of continuity and change, transition, and tradition. These are all highly relevant concepts for societies undergoing dramatic shifts in personal relationships and the way new forms of femininity are regulated (Budgeon 2015).

It should be highlighted that the academic literature on singlehood often tends to group together different forms of non-marriage. However, singlehood is not a homogenous category of membership and social relations. Indeed, widowhood, divorce, and single parenthood are sometimes all conceptualized under the general umbrella of singlehood. Although there are undoubtedly many shared discursive patterns binding these categories, nonetheless some of the fundamental disparities between them are regularly overlooked. My working definition of singlehood throughout this study refers to long-term singles, whom according to socially constructed parameters are considered as "aging single women" and are ascribed with the category of "late singlehood." These are women who are not in a committed long-term relationship, and do not have children. I also include divorced women, who did not remarry, nor subsequently feel the inclination to remarry. It is important to stress that I do not include in this research the social categories of single mothers, or widows, and neither do I include women who share their lives with a permanent partner.

The term "late singlehood" has evolved in the Israeli public discourse since around the year 2000. The term designates men and women whose single status is no longer regarded as socially acceptable, and mirrors terms used elsewhere, such as "always single" (Maeda and Hecht 2012) or "extended singlehood" (Sharp and Ganong 2011). By referring to the term I will specifically deal with representations of the socio-temporal phase wherein singlehood becomes a "problem in the eyes of society," or, in other words, when it ceases to be considered as a "normative stage" preceding marriage and parenthood.

I have decided to use the term "late singlehood" throughout this study as it emerges from the Jewish Israeli public discourse about single persons, across both religious and secular populations. It is interesting to note how the term has also been adopted in both lay discourse as well as the language of psychological and popular therapeutic treatment offering "cures" for late singlehood. By using the term "late singlehood," I aim to reflect and to be attuned to contemporary discourses which reveal how "late singlehood" and "aging single women" defy the hegemonic temporal norms, thus creating what Diane Negra describes as a "feminized temporal crisis" (Negra 2009, 54). My definition of "late singlehood" in this study (ranging from the mid–late twenties onwards) is somewhat arbitrary but non-arbitrary at the same time. My contention is that late singlehood is a non-scheduled, non-institutionalized transition process; therefore it does not entail precise entry or exit passages which can be defined, mandated, or celebrated. Nonetheless, although these processes are individualized, they are socially synchronized with collective schedules.

With this in mind, I stress that singlehood is a contingent notion which varies according to gender, age, class, religion, ethnicity, ableness, sexual orientation, or other axes of social differentiation. This definition, then, takes into account a feminist inter-sectional methodological approach as it recognizes that singlehood is not a homogen-ized category of one identity and is formed through different positionalities and distinctive structures of oppression (Collins 2000).[2]

Thus, this analysis also seeks to contribute towards conceptualizing a more complex gender intersectional analysis, by adding singlism (DePaulo 2006; DePaulo and Morris 2005)—namely the discrimination and mistreatment of single persons—as a category for analysis. In other words, there is thus a necessity for future studies to incorporate singlehood and relationship status in feminist theorizing of intersectionality. There-fore, my interest here is in considering how patriarchy and heteronormativity overlap and intersect with other structures of domination such as singlism and ageism, and are carried out through gendered configurations of time. It is important to stress that singlism is a socially shared belief, one that impacts upon multiple facets of life includ-ing housing, wages, and unequal access to services and benefits (DePaulo 2006). As DePaulo (2006) and Hacker (2001) point out, single persons are often excluded from discounted health benefits, greater social security options, lower tax bills, and higher salaries. This point will be further developed in the last chapter of this study.

To put it another way, the experience of singlehood intersects with various factors which manifest themselves in varying social contexts and are therefore subject to dif-ferent forms of exclusions, privileges, and discrimination. Moreover, Israel is a society

characterized by various cleavages, such as the Jewish-Arab cleavage, the secular-religious cleavage, the ethnic cleavage, and class cleavage (Ben-Porat 2006; Horowitz and Lissak 1989). Thus, when I refer here to the concept of singlehood I do not include "all" single women, but rather refer mainly to heterosexual, cisgender, white, Jewish (in the Israeli context), middle-upper-class, able-bodied single women. Given these parameters, I do not analyze experiences of women who identify themselves as religious, as lesbians, or as having a disability, for example. In that respect, this book is also a call for future studies that can examine the nuanced influences of religious beliefs, homophobia, or ableism upon the experience of singlehood.[3]

My choice to focus on single women and not single men derives from my attempt to understand how patriarchy and heteronormativity affects women's lives. From this vantage point, I seek to re-examine the effects of what Adrienne Rich (1980), in her seminal article, termed *compulsory heterosexuality*. By this, I refer to the cultural, social, financial, and other mechanisms that direct women into being sexually involved with men and deny the possibility of sexual, as well as emotional, intimacy with other women. Or, in other words, the social forces or structures which maintain women as sexually, emotionally, and reproductively available to men. This is one of the reasons why long-term singlehood is still seen by many as not representing a viable option for women, because it does not conform to gendered expectations and defies gender socialization in general. Moreover, the fact that long-term singlehood is not perceived as a feasible possibility may be one reason why some women remain in unhappy and even abusive relationships. In this manner, my work corresponds with feminist criticism which has long sought to debunk the traditional discourse of feminine ideals. For example, I want to challenge the assumption that the status and social worth of women is dependent upon and defined in terms of their relationships to men, or the prevailing conviction that the primary role of a woman is to care for her family members.

Putting singlehood on the critical desktop

An inspiring number of critical works about single women have been published since 2000.[4] One key research direction underlying these works is the attempt to scrutinize and debunk the widespread myths and stereotypes attached to single women. To a large extent, these studies confirm the impression that single women in different parts of the world are regularly typecast as desperate, hysterical, childish, irresponsible, or lazy.[5]

Certainly, these studies have succeeded in promoting the voices and experiences of single women, as well as introducing a more diversified picture of their everyday lives. This book joins these significant endeavors in establishing singlehood as a field of study that warrants separate consideration on its own terms (Byrne 2009). As such, it stresses that the study of singlehood should take into consideration not just the prevalence of these ideologies, but also the need to direct its attention to the paradigms and strict categorization which constantly define and limit what singlehood means and stands for. Undoubtedly, this is a significant challenge. My claim is that in order to understand what infuses these pejorative interpretations of female singlehood with such discursive

force, we need to deepen our understandings of their sources, social mechanisms, and consequences.

The groundwork for understanding the social meaning of singlehood, I argue, can be drawn from one of the central arguments of this book: the concept and comprehension of *Time* plays a crucial role in the discursive formation of traditional conventions about female singlehood, and in the production of single women's subjectivities. It is a premise of my study that our understanding of singlehood is dominated by unquestioned temporal models, premises, and concepts. This is one reason why one cannot understand these everyday dynamics, as well as the natural and authoritative tone through which they are conveyed, without understanding how over-determined frameworks of temporal categories are constituted. This might also be why it can be so difficult to resist and challenge many of the convictions about singlehood, because they are articulated through the language of time, a language characterized by its normative self-evident positions and regimes of truth.

This study seeks to locate singlehood within a broader critical theory and context. To achieve this goal, I juxtapose two theoretical subfields that are rarely linked: the social study of Time, and the study of Singlehood.[6] This conjunction of two supposedly separate bodies of knowledge can be of benefit to one another. For one thing, temporality plays a crucial role in the formation of singlehood; at the same time, analyzing singlehood can shed fresh light on how temporal orders are constructed and maintained. Indeed, this integration demands the rethinking and the reconfiguration of the categories and cultural forces that create the framework through which singlehood and temporal orders are constituted.

The socially related studies of Time can offer us both a new analytical framework and the innovative conceptual vocabulary from which we can reassess some of our dominant taken-for-granted conceptual frameworks. They give us the opportunity to explore and theorize singlehood through temporal concepts such as *Ageism and accelerated aging* (Chapter 4), *Temporal economy* (Chapter 5), and *Waiting* (Chapter 7). Other temporal categories which are examined throughout this book, such as age, the life course, linearity, and heteronormativity, enable a fresh consideration of our dominant perceptions about collective clocks, schedules, time tables, and the temporal organization of social life in general. By proposing this new analytical direction, this book seeks to rework some of our common conceptions of singlehood, and presents a new theoretical arsenal with which the temporal paradigms that devalue and marginalize single women can be reinterpreted.

We give little thought to the everyday workings of socio-temporal templates, and how these underpin most of our thought habits, social practices, and everyday interactions. However, the interpretation of these socio-temporal constructs—as I will attempt to show in the subsequent chapters—will reconfigure our understanding of the ways by which temporal knowledge is constructed, and will question the very terms upon which this is based. In this context, central to my study is the fundamental sociological question about how meaning is produced, as well as how temporal assumptions about singlehood are consolidated through interactions with others. From this perspective, neither singlehood nor time can be fixed and neutral categories, as they

are constituted through changing social contexts, discourses, and human interactions. In this vein, I import some of the basic ideas advanced by discourse analysis, social constructionists, and symbolic interaction approaches, as well as ideas taken from feminist and queer scholarship.

The surge in singlehood literature published from around 2000 onwards undoubtedly contributes to a more critical reading of prevalent representations of single women. It also challenges widespread hegemonic assumptions about them. The literature responds to what is now a well-established fact, namely that more and more people are living on their own. Scholars like Shelly Budgeon (2008; 2015) Michael Cobb (2012), Bella DePaulo (2006), Lyn Jamieson and Roona Simpson (2013), Lyne Nakano (2011, 2014), Jill Reynolds (2008), Jesook Song (2014), and Anthea Taylor (2012) point out that despite the global growth of single-person households, late singlehood is still commonly perceived in terms of negations: a lack, an absence, a deficient identity. Questions like "Why are you single?" and "What is wrong with you?" (as my colleague asked me), and the dominant image of single women as lonely, desperate "cat ladies" embody this view.

Underpinning these attitudes is also a fear of female singlehood, which has been allowed to exceed its temporal boundaries. For many, long-term singlehood represents a threat to social order, and to subjectivity, thus demanding increased scrutiny and control. Central to this perspective is the assumption that singlehood can only be a temporal, liminal transitory status, during which single women can only hope to *unsingle* (DePaulo 2008) themselves and get married.

Consequently, long-term singlehood cannot possibly be a desired or chosen position. Implicit in this is the assumption that singlehood, when chosen at a younger age, will slowly and inevitably degrade into the miserable, vulnerable, lonely life of an "aging old maid." As I have argued elsewhere (Lahad 2013; 2014), chosen spinsterhood, or the notion of an "old maid" by choice appears to be a contradiction in terms, as though no one could possibly wish to grow older as a single woman. These well-worn stereotypes have a powerful presence in popular imagery, associating the category of the old maid with an unfortunate sequence of events and an empty and lonely form of existence.

The new scholarship on singlehood shows that there are increasing numbers of single women who report high levels of life satisfaction, and others who refuse to compromise and marry men who have not met their marriage expectations.[7] Singlehood is not, by any stretch of the imagination, automatically a catastrophe. Eric Klinenberg's (2012) *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*, which received significant media exposure in the US, dismisses the widespread assumption that living alone necessary leads to isolation, misery, and loneliness. He notes that many single persons enthusiastically embrace singular forms of living, and are content with their single status.

However, being single does not always necessarily imply living alone. First, it is worth noting that the capacity for living alone may depend upon one's material resources. Second, a different perspective on singlehood and prevailing living arrangements may also take into consideration more varied household compositions, such as

co-housing and community housing, which do not necessarily subscribe to the conception of the nuclear family household unit. These issues are beyond the scope of the current discussion, but is it important to note that these alternative living arrangements can promote other forms of economic and emotional exchanges, and encourage a more ecological and environmentally friendly mindset.

Further studies also disclose diverse responses to solo living. Interviews with single women conducted by scholars like Tuula Gordon (1994), Jill Reynolds (2008), and Lyne Nakano (2011) reveal that some of their respondents fluctuate between choosing and non-choosing singlehood, or occupy the subject position of singlehood by chance. And yet, despite what appears to be a dramatic demographic shift, it seems that the stereotypes and mythical narratives of single women as desperate, lonely, and miserable remain as prevalent as ever.

My approach to understanding singlehood is very much influenced by Haim Hazan's (2002) approach to the study of old age. Hazan suggests that the aged should be seen as *carriers of the cultural tag of old age* (ibid., 232). Based upon this theoretical formulation, I would like to suggest that conceptualizing single women as *carriers of the cultural tag of singlehood* can illuminate more discursive dimensions and open up new avenues for the analysis of social life.

Another important source of inspiration is the work of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2002), a feminist disability scholar. In a study calling for the integration of feminist and disability theory, Garland-Thomson claims that:

> There has been no archive, no template for understanding disability as a category of analysis and knowledge, as a cultural trope, and an historical community. So just as the now widely recognized centrality of gender and race analyses to all knowledge was unthinkable thirty years ago, disability is still not an icon on many critical desktop. (ibid., 2)

I would like to make a similar claim with regard to singlehood. Singlehood has no archive, and does not act as a category of analysis and knowledge. Borrowing Garland-Thomson's formulation, I argue that singlehood lends a new perspective to critical theory and possesses the potential to enrich sociological, feminist, disability, and queer theory.

Queer theory provides a significant conceptual lens to this study. In his reassessment of queer politics, Michael Warner contends that many of the "environments in which lesbian and gay politics arises have not been adequately theorized and continue to act as unrecognized constraints" (Warner 1993, xi). Notably, he stresses that these concepts embed a heteronormative understanding of society. In a similar vein, I employ Warner's insights to explore the unrecognized constraints to our understandings of the normative force of our couple-familial oriented social models. Warner claims that queer politics must address the broader questions related to views of "social institutions and norms of the most basic sort" (ibid.). My line of thinking here builds on Lauren Berlant and Warner Warner's analysis of heteronormativity:

> A whole field of social relations become intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatised sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This

sense of rightness embedded in things and not just in sex is what we call heteronormativ-
ity. Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and
lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social
life: nationality, the state and the law, commerce, medicine and education, as well as in
the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance and other protected spaces of culture.
(Berlant and Warner 1998, 548)

This important theoretical orientation presents us with the opportunity to think
about singlehood in broader social and political terms, and prompts the consideration
of issues related to social membership, identities, and normativity. Beyond this, it
creates a new agenda for singlehood studies, one which highlights singlehood as a
significant and unacknowledged aspect of social positioning. So, my argument is that
the study of singlehood provides us with novel and significant tools to explore not only
"What does it mean not to be in a couple?" (Budgeon 2008, 302), but—by extending
Warner's observations—creates the framework within which we can ask what single-
hood can tell us about subjectivity and the categories of the social and the human.

Within this context, it is important to refer to Rachel Moran's (2004) argument that
the feminist movement has left singlehood off the feminist agenda. In a fascinating
historical analysis, Moran observes that "second wave feminism has failed to give full
recognition to single women as a distinct constituency with unique needs" (ibid.,
224–225). Feminism, she continues, has indeed lobbied for economic and political
equality and independence for women, yet seems never to have come to grips with the
possibilities of emotional individuality that are not incorporated within family and
marriage structures (ibid., 225).

I find Moran's observation applicable also to feminist theory and activism in general.
To a large extent, most feminist struggles take parental and conjugal ties as their points
of reference. Accordingly, in the final section of this book, I will revisit the political
and theoretical aims of this study. I do not merely call for acceptance or tolerance of
single women within a heteronormative, couple-oriented society but highlight new
modes of thinking, in which women can resist the narrow definitions of what is con-
sidered as women's appropriate conduct.

By adopting an interdisciplinary approach and integrating different theoretical
realms and perspectives, this book paves way for a new theorization of singlehood. To
accomplish this, a new conceptual groundwork is needed, within which singlehood is
moved from its simplistic temporary location and is understood in a wider social cul-
tural context. That is to say, I conceptualize singlehood not merely as a troubling/
fascinating demographic phenomenon, a crisis, a social problem, or as anther sub-
category of family studies, but rather as a social phenomenon worthy of inquiry in its
own right.

Moreover, as a feminist sociologist, my interests are not confined to singlehood
alone. I think of singlehood as sociologically important, because it touches upon some
of the key questions in social thinking and raises pertinent questions about how people
make sense of their lives and organize their lives with others. A politicized analysis of
single living can open up and serve as a basis for advancing new visions of possible
subjectivities, communality, and sociability. A temporal reading of singlehood is an

important step in this direction, and the next section will develop the merits of this theoretical intersection further.

Theorizing singlehood and time

My first encounter with the sociology of time evolved, interestingly enough, from an attempt to collate different kinds of clichés ascribed to singlehood. Whilst doing so, I could not help but notice that one of the salient aspects of those clichés was time: "In the end she will die alone" was one, for instance; "What is she waiting for?" was another. People often comment that the single woman is about to "miss her train" or that she is "wasting her time." We ask single women if they are *still* single—and why; we also wish for them to get married *next* or *soon.* "Still; eventually; ever-after; waste of time; waiting; how long; when"—all these form part of the rich language of time.

As far as single women are concerned, time ever so often is perceived to be "on hold," "wasted," "empty," or "frozen." One can easily find cultural expressions that mock single women, characterizing them as overly selective, unable to make timely choices, and/or uptight and obsessed about getting married—an obsession which supposedly intensifies once they realize that "time is running out." When one compares the temporal notions of singlehood to those related to conventional discourses of couplehood, parenthood, and family life, a temporal hierarchy is revealed, one which distinguishes between those who are on time/off time, investing time/losing time, spending meaningful time/empty time, or controlling time/being controlled by time.

We often neglect to acknowledge that time is a socially constructed concept. However, social time is gradually becoming a significant conceptual category in critical thinking. Sociologists like Norbert Elias (1992) and Eviatar Zerubavel (1981) have studied how the invention of the clock and the calendar became a collective tool for time measurement imposing a secular time order.

As anthropologist Edmund Leach (1971) has noted, the regularity of time is not an intrinsic part of nature but rather a man-made notion which we project onto our environment for our own particular purposes. These devices endow society with different rhythms and measurements by dividing time into minutes, hours, days, weeks, and years. In this connection, Zerubavel notes that the socio-temporal order is "a socially constructed artifact which rests upon rather arbitrary social conventions" (Zerubavel 1981, xii). These symbols, according to time scholars, are significant tools for orientation, interaction, coordination, and regulation with which people establish orientation points along a continuum of change (Elias 1992; Zerubavel 1981).

As Émile Durkheim has pointed out, "a calendar expresses the rhythms of the collective activities, while at the same time its function is to assure their regularity" (Durkheim 2008, 10–11). For Elias (1992), time is not a personal reality but a collective one and, as he crucially asserts, although time feels private it is dictated by collective norms and forms. By the same token, Zerubavel has stated that "given its considerable temporal regularity, our social environment can easily function as the most reliable clock or calendar" (Zerubavel 1985, 14). Incorporating these important

conceptual observations, I will challenge this seemingly private language of time, as well as its socially situated trajectories and identities.

Another significant point that should be made is that time is not singular, but multiple and heterogeneous (Adam 1990; Nowotny 1992). As Helga Nowotny notes, time "has many faces and assumes various shapes and forms of expression" (Nowotny 1992, 499). The temporal discourse of singlehood corroborates this assumption. It relies upon an abundance of metaphors, clichés, narratives, temporal concepts, and orientations, in which time moves quickly and slowly; is subjected to pauses and delays; or suddenly accelerates or takes unexpected turns, backwards and sideways. Often, single women have the experience of their time both running out and standing still at precisely the same time. Their time can simultaneously be perceived as empty, wasted, lost, and frozen. The different chapters in this book seek to problematize and contextualize these different temporal modes, and in that respect delve into the rich and multilayered temporalities which are reflected and produced by the category of singlehood.

Taking this into consideration, this discussion cannot limit itself to one, singular timescale which regularly evaluates women's social worth in accordance with normative prescriptions of linear trajectories embedded in heteronormative and reproduction regimes. As substantial feminist scholarship has shown, gendered perceptions of time are chiefly constructed by the biological deterministic arguments which perceive marriage and motherhood as women's primary life goals. Within this context, the discourse of the biological clock—so prominent in western societies today—reduces women's existence to features mainly articulated in biological and evolutionary terms.

Exemplifying this point, Merav Amir (2007) points out that the metaphor of the biological clock has become a new regulatory mechanism for producing gendered differences, and for disciplining single women to behave as timely feminine subjects. For Amir, the notion of the biological clock is embedded in essentialist assumptions of linear, goal-oriented, clock-driven temporal patterns, which individually and collectively impose fundamental constraints on women's lives. Evidently, this line of inquiry coheres with a long tradition of feminist criticism, which argues that women's subordination to men is sustained by beliefs of biological determinism. Clearly, one can easily detect the metaphor of the biological clock as having a hovering effect in single women's lives. However, my argument here is that a deconstructive study of singlehood and time must address the multilayered aspects of time, rather than a singular one. That is, stressing the role of the biological clock is merely a partial dimension of a complex phenomenon. Moreover, it is impossible to challenge the multi-layered and multi-formed temporal disciplining of single women by merely referring to the biological clock mythology as the only ideological order.

Following this line of thought, one of the objectives of this project is to problematize and broaden the scope of a new inquiry, which would subsume a wider range of temporal discourses, contexts, and concepts. Accordingly, my intent to deflate concepts such as *Wasting time* (Chapter 5) or *Waiting time* (Chapter 7), for example, does not accept them as given. Instead, it observes the social and cultural processes which produce them. Consequently, the chapters of this book are organized according to

theses standpoints. Specifically, each chapter focuses on a different temporal concept, thereby acknowledging the rich and multifaceted temporalities which produce the category of singlehood and interpretations of time.

These issues will be addressed in more detail in subsequent chapters. For example, I will discuss how single women are perceived as failing to advance in a linear fashion and/or are accused of "wasting" time (Chapter 5), and are therefore designated with a waiting position within which their life is "on hold" (Chapter 6). An approach which acknowledges this diversity can provide us with a more nuanced understanding of how time-units, authoritative clocks, time-tables, and collective social rhythms formulate customary images of singlehood. In turn, temporal conceptions such as being late, being on time, time on hold, waiting and empty time all play an essential role in constructing these notions, and pave the way for a situated and relational reading of time.

Subscribing to the heteronormative temporal order

If we look at mainstream films, television series, advertisements, and global popular media in general, the figure of the single woman still represents a discursive unease (Taylor 2012), and serves as an easy target for social scrutiny, fear, and mockery. Indeed, the stereotypes of single women are mostly banal in their everyday presence. Female singlehood is still regarded as counter-normative, a deviant identity which will only lead single women to a disastrous future. These convictions are echoed in both Israeli and global media outlets. For example, in the winter of 2013, Elite-Strauss, one of Israel's biggest food manufacturers, launched a billboard campaign portraying an elderly woman with a chocolate bar in her hand. The slogan that accompanied this image stated: "Even if your granddaughter is still single, have a sweet day." This slogan, with its significant public presence via billboards across Israel's highway network, conveys a clear message: if one's granddaughter is still single, then there is a need for comforting and sweet consolation. From this perspective, singlehood can only be a temporary position; when it exceeds its temporal boundaries, it becomes cause for collective agony and distress. Herein, one's single status is not only a matter for private concern, but a collective one which positions both granddaughter and grandmother in a shared waiting position.

In a different clip produced as part of this advertising campaign, called "Sweetening it for Single Women," the same message is further promoted when Reut—a single woman—is offered a basket of chocolates to sweeten her single status. "Reut" garnered much public attention when a Facebook message—in which she wrote that she was looking for a husband—went viral. The clip features a conversation between Reut and the grandmother (the cartoon character from the billboard campaign) in which they discuss a list of possible marriage candidates for Reut. Towards the end of the clip, the grandmother narrates the story of an old woman who failed in love and is now left to die alone. The moral of the story could not be clearer.

This commercial campaign can be located within a global postfeminist climate, one in which irony and humor are used to advance conservative and traditional messages (McRobbie 2004; Taylor 2012). In this case, like many others, all the single woman

can hope for is to unsingle herself (DePaulo 2006). Otherwise, she is warned, she will end up on her own just like that old woman who had no luck in her love life. These commercials are just two examples of the many textual artifacts which will be analyzed in this book.

Singlism in Israel is manifested through a rich repertoire of clichés, most of them with parallels in other languages. As an example, we can consider the manner in which single women are warned that they are about to "miss the train that everybody has already caught." "The train is departing soon!" or "The train won't wait for you and you'll be left waiting alone at the station!" they are told, again and again. I have heard these expressions in a variety of forms and versions. Many single women ask themselves, "Did I miss the train?," sensing that everyone around them is getting engaged and married. Images of old single women are often referred to as women "who have missed the train and now have no chance of catching the next one." To a certain extent, it could be argued that moving away from the linear, heteronormative expected life trajectory of marriage and parenthood are perceived as one's very own temporal miscalculations and failures.

The train is a key temporal metaphor in the discourse about single women, and not only in Israeli society. It represents a cosmic linear temporal order, upon which social order is established and regulated. In Zerubavel's (1981) words, this can be seen as our search for the temporal regularity which makes our life understandable. In this instance the train, the train tracks, and stations all symbolize the regularity of the temporal structure of our social life. Moreover, it also provides single women and their surroundings with the means of measuring their movements in time, and the extent to which they adhere—or not—to collective time schedules.

Thus, the fear of missing the train—like many of the examples discussed in this book—illustrates the ways in which collective schedules, clocks, and rhythms are translated and configured into an acute temporal awareness. Nonetheless, this temporal awareness is rarely problematized, and is left unquestioned in relation to representations of solo living. As Melucci (1996) stresses, our understandings of time are immediate and intuitive:

> Even when we understand immediately what we are talking about, we find it extremely hard to pin down what the experience of time actually means … in more ancient culture reference to time only conjured up a divine image—often a river god or another aquatic deity which, in the image of the flow, reflects the appearance and disappearance of things … the experience of time is characterized by a sense of thickness and a density that our definitions seldom provide and which, perhaps for this reason, cultures have sought to convey through the metaphor and myth. (ibid., 7)

In a similar vein, these temporal truths (such as "You will miss the train!") are rarely contested. In other words, they are formulated as objective facts reflecting the "real world" or the "facts of life," while neglecting the ways in which they are embedded in cultural practices and social relationships.

As my discussion in Chapters 5 and 7 will show, this rigid timetabling and scheduling is rooted in the sexist and ageist ideologies which imply that a single woman's

market value declines with her age. These warnings are articulated as a wakeup call based on objective market calculations. Accordingly, above a certain age, single women have no chance but to adapt to this logic. The heteronormative message is also clear: if one fails to catch the train in time, there is no hope of getting married and fulfilling the injunction of reproductive continuity. The consequences of such belated rhythms are social marginality and exclusion. This is one of the many examples which demonstrate the links between the social organization of time and relations of power and social control. Undoubtedly, conceptions of successful timing and time management are based on compliance for one's continued existence, otherwise one runs the risk of becoming an "old maid," a "crazy cat lady." Thus, missing the train infers that there is no chance of becoming respected female subjects, achieving full membership in a society articulated in familial, heteronormative terms. The extent to which these temporal truths and hierarchies are internalized by single women and their surroundings cannot be undermined.

It should also be noted that the theoretical lens offered in this study enables us to be attuned to what single women in Israel say about time, as well as to the temporal identities ascribed to them in this discursive process. In that respect, I have found Ramón Torre's (2007) theoretical and methodological advice particularly inspiring. Torre notes: "The clarification of time must always take into account what the social agents say or assume about time: their lexicon, their 'grammar,' their images, and even their ambivalences and inconsistencies" (158–159). Endorsing Torre's advice, and being attuned to the texts analyzed in this book, opens new directions of thinking about time and singlehood beyond clock time or linear heteronormativity.

However, the metaphors used may hide or highlight certain aspects of the singlehood experience, and their conventional perceptions. As Lakoff and Johnson point out:

> The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another (e.g., comprehending an aspect of arguing in terms of battle) will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e.g., the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor. For example, in the midst of a heated argument, when we are intent on attacking our opponent's position and defending our own, we may lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. Someone who is arguing with you can be viewed as giving you his time, a valuable commodity, in an effort at mutual understanding. But when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 458)

By exploring the hidden meanings of temporal metaphors such as the ticking of the biological clock or "missing the train," one can think of alternative temporalities. In other words, "missing the train" might actually present the opportunity for something else. By subverting these metaphors and turning them on their heads, one has the opportunity to reflect more closely on non-linear trajectories, and the liberties that are granted by having time beyond or outside the normative track. Counter-hegemonic timetables, such as the benefits of waiting and even in some cases preferring to miss

the train can enable women to move beyond what Halberstam terms as "conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood and responsibility" (Halberstam 2005, 13). Such alternatives to the temporal heteronormative framework will now be discussed.

Counter-representations of long-term singlehood

The heteronormative scripts about female singlehood are so deeply embedded in our social imaginary that it seems almost impossible to contest them. However, numerous internet sites, personal blogs, and local initiatives have sought to debunk common understandings and stereotypical attitudes towards single men and single women. In what follows, I will examine some of the alternative voices offering subversive views of female singlehood and gendered temporal timetables.

In a *New York Times* cover story published in February 2015, Emma Morano, the oldest woman in Europe and the fifth oldest person in the world, noted that one contributory factor to her longevity was being single. Morano's story was published under the suitably catchy headline, "Raw Eggs and No Husband Since '38 Keep Her Young at 115" (Povoledo 2015).

"I didn't want to be dominated by anyone" (Davies 2015), Morano explained, thus crediting her longevity to the fact the she did not re-marry after separating from her husband in 1938. The *New York Times* piece (Povoledo 2015) went viral, receiving extensive media coverage. But Morano is not alone; 109-year-old Jessie Gallan from Scotland, for example, revealed when interviewed by the *Daily Mail* (2015) that her "secret to a long life has been staying away from men. They're just more trouble than they're worth," she added, saying that "I also made sure that I got plenty of exercise, eat a nice warm bowl of porridge every morning and have never gotten married."

Various bloggers soon recognized the potential that these stories possessed for challenging some of the well-established discourses of singlehood. For example, Chrissa Hardy (2015), a blogger writing for Bustle argues that we should pay attention to Morano's views on romance: "The fact that she was able to put her needs first and end a relationship in which she was no longer happy says a lot about the kind of boss lady Morano has always been." According to Hardy, Morano "values her freedom, and she is perfectly comfortable with the life she has built since" (ibid.).

Thus, Morano's story leads Hardy to reach the following conclusion:

> So instead of wallowing about your lack of Valentine's Day (or Singles Awareness Day) plans yesterday and whether or not you'll end up finding "The One," think of Emma Morano, and how her long and happy life has been centered around her romantic freedom. She is living proof that a husband is not the key to eternal happiness for everyone, and that you should find what works for you and stick with it. (ibid.)

I concur with Hardy's reading. Morano and Gallan's stories, similar to many alternative scripts advanced by single women, carve out their own time path and life-course trajectory. Such paths are still rarely recognised in mainstream society, and reflect the need to harness conventional hegemonic discourses. Indeed, Morano and Gallan do not

define themselves through "the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way" (Berlant and Warner 1998, 554). Neither do they adhere, as Hardy points out, to the conventions of the "happily ever after" script; in this way, they show the possibilities that exist for resisting the regulatory effects of heteronormative time.

Such accounts also point to the possibility that singlehood is both a social category and an analytical tool for questioning some of our core understandings of the normative and the natural. Morano and Gallen's biographies, as presented above, echo some of the accounts presented in this book. These accounts do not follow the heteronormative linear trajectory, in which marriage and procreation are considered as obligatory milestones (see Chapter 2); neither do they define their lives as frantically waiting and searching for "Mr. Right" (see Chapter 7). On the contrary, Morano and Gallan tell us that their single life trajectory has provided them with longevity, health, autonomy, and freedom.

In Chapter 8, I contend that one of the common temporal scripts that single women are expected to identify with is of being miserable on Valentine's Day, or as Hardy terms it, "Singles Awareness Day." However, Hardy also provides an alternative script, in which one can appreciate one's romantic freedom and envision a different kind of futurity. Murano's story enables Hardy to envision a different life narrative, which neither follows the "happily ever after" life script, nor embraces the script that ends in catastrophe. As she emphasizes, Murano's biography reflects that "a husband is not necessarily the key to eternal happiness." Her suggestion could be read as perhaps providing a different set of "happy endings" scripts. This alternative storyline echoes Sara Ahmed's (2010) work, which explores the ways in which expectations of happiness operate as a regulatory brake, one which prioritizes normative ways of lives while precluding others. In this connection, Ahmed writes, one of the primary social indicators of happiness is marriage, which comes to represent "the best of all possible worlds" (ibid., 6). She further notes that this serves as an example of the ways in which happiness is used to reconfigure social norms as social goods, as well as restricting ways of imagining one's future.

Building on Ahmed's analysis, it could be argued that happiness is out of reach for the "miserable old maid," in common with representations of the queer, the migrant, or the feminist killjoy discussed in Ahmed's book. According to this line of analysis, the ever-single woman is excluded from the joys of conjugal and familial life which come to represent "that to which good feelings are directed towards" (ibid., 21). Moreover, the ever single woman is identified with the impossibility of happiness, an unhappiness which is perceived as a failure and as a deviance.

Thus, Hardy opposes the very exclusion of single women from the possibility of happiness and the way futurity is normatively envisioned. Moreover, if we follow Ahmed's line of analysis, we can argue that Murano's storyline questions the very process through which the norm of marriage becomes a social good and indicator of the good life. This line of analysis could thus also illuminate why long-term singlehood has political potential to challenge the common-sense norms regarding what makes life meaningful and valuable, and the norms that are ascribed to happiness and

normativity. Singlehood is understood as an alternative way of living, which is chosen from a profound sense of awareness and self-determination.

In this context, this project aims to challenge some of the binary models that dominate current thinking about singlehood and family life, differentiating between happiness and misery, loneliness and togetherness, health and pathology. By the same token, I have cautioned elsewhere (Lahad 2014) against the simplistic embrace of the "chosen singlehood" formula and its possible implications for novel forms of the politics of identity and recognition. I have argued that we should take into consideration the multiple experiences of women's lives, which should not be reduced to the choice/non-choice, happy/unhappy single woman dichotomy. I contend that the single-by-choice formula can obscure and delegitimize dualities, contradictions, and complexities.

This line of analysis builds on Reynolds's (2008) work, which provides a nuanced reading of single women's lives. In her studies, Reynolds has examined how single women juggle their repertoire of choices and chances and consequently view choice not as a factual notion, but rather as one of the discursive resources available to single women. Significantly, the choice discourse endorses the deeply rooted binary thinking which precludes other potential discourses on inconsistency, hesitation, ambivalence, and confusion.

I have also argued that the new images of liberated, empowered, freely-choosing single women could essentialize women's lives, and consequently constitute new hierarchies between those who can and those who cannot follow the dictates of the new regime of chosen/non chosen singlehood or the miserable/happy single. These types of classificatory categories create fixed and static boundaries, with limited possibilities for slippage between these poles.

Women's identities are connected to class, age, religion, ableness, and sexual orientation; all of these factors enable and narrow one's options for holding on to the position of chosen singlehood. Moreover, an intersectional perception of singlehood should take into consideration the fact that the identities of single women are connected to different experiences and changing discursive and material conditions. For example, singlehood is classed, and the single-by-choice discourse cannot be based solely on white middle-class female experiences to the exclusion of other women. While middle- and upper-class single women may have the material conditions for choosing singlehood and enjoying time on their own; such access for living alone or having time alone might not be as readily accessible for single working-class women. Viewing singlehood solely through the theoretical framework of individual choice, self-determination, and personal happiness could lead us into a conceptual dead-end, preventing us from developing a more political and nuanced understanding of singlehood. Bearing this in mind, my criticism does not aim to discount the importance of articulating singlehood from a confident and unapologetic position, as well as establishing new models which enable long-term singlehood as a viable and desirable life category.

However, despite the counter-representations of singlehood presented above, the negative stereotypes about single women are strong and remain common in many

societies, particularly, as I will show, in Israeli society. This then leads us to ask why this stigma is still so widespread and what bestows it with so much force? This question will be addressed throughout the book. Before winding up, the concluding section of this introduction lays out some of the methodological considerations and the social context for of this project.

The context for this study

Israel presents a fascinating case study that can help deepen our understanding of singlehood and temporality, particularly due to what has been termed as the traditionalism–modernism paradox of contemporary Israeli society (Bystrov 2012). On the one hand, Israel has undergone dramatic transitions in family life. In common with many European and American societies, the country has been affected by societal trends such as: the multiplicity of living arrangements; postponement of the age of marriage; rising rates of divorce (for example, in England in 2015 the divorce rate per 1,000 married men and women was 9.8, while in Israel in 2013 it was 9.1; see Bingham and Kirk 2015; Central Bureau of Statistics 2015); LGBT partnerships; single-parent families; and single-person households. On the other hand, despite these far-reaching changes, familism and traditional gendered expectations towards women prevail (Fogiel-Bijaoui 1999).

The centrality of family ideology and relatively high birthrates in Israel are perceived as related to various factors, such as: the "demographic war" to keep the Jewish population as a majority group; the effects of the Holocaust; the role of the religious establishment in the political and cultural system; and religious Jewish practices and beliefs aimed at enhancing the Jewish character of the state of Israel (Portuguese 1998). It should be mentioned that the fundamental place of Jewish religion in Israel is the reason why personal status is regulated through religious law. The obligation to be a mother is also present in religious commandments, such as "be fruitful and multiply," which have been given secular ideological validity as well (Donath 2015).

The formation of a large family is still considered, in many ways, to be a patriotic act and part of the national mission (Fogiel-Bijaoui 2002). The family-centered order of Israeli society is manifested, for example, in welfare policies, family allowances, and generous state funding for infertility treatment technologies (Portuguese 1998). For Portuguese, the signs of Israeli familism are easily detectable: Israeli women marry relatively earlier, bear more children, and divorce less than their counterparts (ibid.). The centrality of family in Israeli society today is also reflected in findings emerging from an impressive body of scholarly writings that have examined Israel's pro-natalist ideology and policy (Berkovitch 1997; Donath 2011; Hashiloni-Dolev 2007; Shalev and Gooldin 2006). In another study, Don Handelman also pointed out that the metaphor of the family in Israeli society is central to the construction of the national imagination. The nation, like the family, is perceived as an organic entity, Handelman writes, and Israelis correspondingly are imagined as one big family (Handelman 2004, 13).

Relatedly, *motherhood* is considered the most precious quality in women's lives, a significant indicator of women's inclusion in Israeli society, as well as an important

avenue for collective belonging (Teman 2010). Thus, to a large extent women are constructed first and foremost as wives and mothers (Berkovitch 1997), whose most important obligations consist of bearing and rearing children. Through this formulation, marriage and motherhood are rendered as intelligible forms of subjectivity, in turn construing dominant sets of hierarchies and the normative codes of an "imagined normality."

In this social setting—which demands that a woman be a wife and mother—single and childless women are the object of a constantly scrutinizing gaze, which creates a self-policing subject. Thus, and in the face of fundamental changes to the availability of reproductive choices, women who have chosen not to have children are still subjected to hostility and social disapproval, and are heavily stigmatized (Donath 2011). According to Orna Donath's (2011) study, Israeli women who do not take part in this venture are, to a large extent, still considered to be abnormal and therefore cannot "really" choose this life path.

Within this context, the category of chosen or long-term singlehood of women is rarely presented and legitimized. This is one reason why most of the Israeli texts analyzed in this study echo these relatively traditional views about motherhood and marriage. However, my study also reflects some of the new oppositional voices attempting to challenge the limiting stereotypical representations of single women and the hegemonic ideals of family life. These voices indeed cohere with women and gay liberation movements, who have led changes in cultural attitudes and expectations of Israeli women today. Indeed, as some studies have shown, these changes have led to a growing acceptance of divorce and single motherhood. This is not to say to say that the stigmas directed towards single mothers have vanished completely, but there are indications of certain shifts in the attitudes of the secular Jewish population towards single motherhood (Hashiloni-Dolev and Shkedi, 2007; Lahad and Shoshana 2015; Landau 1996). What distinguishes Israeli society from other societies is the significance of reproduction in Jewish culture (Kahn 2000; Lahad and Shoshana 2015); this cultural climate poses significant discursive barriers to the acceptance of childless single women in Israel.

Methodology

Drawing on a wide variety of Israeli cultural resources I will attempt to sketch some of the meaning-making processes of singlehood and time. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the various texts under examination are viewed as cultural sites, in which the discursive construction of the socio-temporal aspects of singlehood are reflected and produced. That is, the selection of data for this study stems from the contention that popular culture, everyday talk, and new media technologies affect, sustain, and alter the deeply ingrained understandings through which singlehood is constituted and formed nowadays.[8] The methodology and choice of materials is closely linked to these rapidly changing social realities. In other words, this study is attuned both to local-global discursive formations, and to the old-new contexts which constitute and represent contemporary understandings of singlehood and social time.[9]

This study employs a qualitative content analysis-based approach to explore the relevant themes that link the discursive categories of singlehood and time. My choice of Israeli internet columns written by and about single women, clichés, commercials, and popular articles is related to my contention that these sites convey deeply ingrained socio-temporal norms, with which the cultural tag of singlehood and representations of single women can be further interpreted. The majority of the texts are columns published on the Israeli portal *Ynet*, as I consider it one of the principal websites on which themes of singlehood, dating, and relationships are discussed.

However, during the years that I have researched singlehood, the online sphere in Israel has expanded significantly, with web platforms such as *Saloona* and *Tapuz,* as well as news websites like *nrg, Mako, Haaretz* and *The Marker*, publishing columns and articles which touch upon these issues. Indeed, this corresponds with the global tendency, within which a wide variety of internet portals, blogs, and forums have shown growing interest in single women's lives and singlehood in general (Taylor 2012).

Ynet currently remains the central platform within which issues related to singlehood, dating, and relationships are discussed, almost on a daily basis. This is why I visited *Ynet* (www.ynet.co.il) daily between 2006 and 2016, looking for columns discussing the lives of single women.[10] The texts examined were either personal columns written by single women recounting different aspects of their singlehood, or texts written by dating and/or relationship advisers who contribute regularly to *Ynet*. Most of the texts selected for analysis were chosen from a subsection in *Ynet* entitled "Relationships," where references to discussions about late singlehood (amongst other things) are discussed. This subsection contains various topics like "Dating," "Weddings," "Couples," "Pride" (LGTB discussions), and "Sexuality," alongside personal web columns and dating and relationships advice.

I have also visited other web platforms on a weekly basis, by using the Israeli google search engine and snowballing blogs and social media debates by typing phrases such as "single woman," "single women," "old/aging single woman," "extended singlehood," "late singlehood," and "long-term singlehood." I have taken into consideration several variables concerning the genre of the text (a blog, a column, a news or life-style column) and the author's position (a journalist, blogger, or a person interviewed for an article).

The columns analyzed form part of a flourishing Israeli internet culture, in which questions regarding personal relationships, dating, and single life come to the fore. I approach the web columns as a rich source of data, particularly as this medium has become a popular outlet of expression for both readers and writers. In this respect, I view the columns written by and about single women as forming an important global-cultural space for interpretation and debate. As will be demonstrated throughout this book, discourses on single women and time cross national boundaries, and in this sense demonstrate the shared temporal understandings of singlehood across the globe.

Hence, I occasionally analyze texts outside Israel for a couple of reasons. First, Israeli culture publishes translated texts and screens many international box office hits and popular television series revolving around singlehood and single women (e.g., *Sex and the City*; *Girls*; *The Bachelorette*; the *Bridget Jones* films). In effect, as media scholars

have shown (Taylor 2012), this globally mass-mediated imagery has changed the creation and circulation of discursive constructions of singlehood and this certainly applies to the Israeli context. Various studies have explored the Americanization of Israeli society and the ways in which many Israelis are fascinated with the "American way of life" and American culture. (See, for example: Aronoff 2000; Avraham and First 2003; Ram 2013)

The Israeli media regularly refers to and translates columns and articles relating to female singlehood that have attracted media attention on a global scale, most of these articles being from the US and the UK.[11] The global proliferation of the discourses of singlehood is especially pervasive, particularly taking into consideration just how open the Israeli media is to global influence. In this vein, *Ynet* is representative of the way in which cultural artefacts operate on a global scale.

Second, I attempt to show the similarities between the Israeli discourse and discourses outside the Israeli context. Third, most texts still echo a traditional attitude towards singlehood, reflecting hegemonic gendered perceptions. One of my objectives is to show alternatives to these temporal configurations and the ways in which female subjects are portrayed. As singlehood in the Israeli context has almost escaped politicization—for the moment—most examples of such discursive alternatives are to be found in studies and texts published outside Israel.

Drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis methods (Foucault 1972) and feminist discourse analysis (Lazar 2007), my objective is not just to understand the mechanisms that construct the cultural tag of single women, but also to deconstruct some of the underlying premises and regimes of truth. In other words, my reading of the texts derives from an attempt to locate these cultural schemas in a specific historical moment and understand their wider social and gendered contexts. As Michelle Lazar (2007) elaborates: "the aim of feminist critical discourse studies is to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (ibid., 142).

Discourse, according to Michel Foucault, "should constitute thought, clad in its signs and rendered visible by words or, conversely … the structures of language themselves should be brought into play, producing a certain effect of meaning" (Foucault 1972, 227). Furthermore, he emphasizes, discourse should be perceived "as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity" (ibid., 229). The underlying premise of critical discourse analysis is that discourse shapes reality in accordance with the ideological interests of social groups. More specifically, this approach seeks to determine "what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in these modes of reproduction" (Van Dijk 1993, 250).

In other words, the aim of critical discourse analysis is to shift the focus away from the "objective" or "essential" qualities of a text, and towards a reading that reveals the randomness, arbitrariness, and social construction of reality. I therefore consider the web columns to be compelling sites for understanding how taken-for-granted cultural

constructs of singlehood are represented and produced. Moreover, the different columns are also considered to be the site of a cultural struggle (Fiske 1996; Lazar 2007), which also offers a unique prism with which to understand how current cultural meanings of singlehood, time and feminine subjectivity are validated or contested.

Outline of the book
Chapter 2: The linear life-course imperative

Chapter 2 opens with what I consider to be two important temporal conceptions in the social interpretation of female singlehood: the belief in progressive linearity and the heteronormative paradigm of the life course. The approach guiding my analysis integrates a social constructionist lens as well as recent theoretical developments in feminist and queer time studies, which challenge the heteronormative life course. Building on these perspectives, this discussion demonstrates the ways in which linearity and its related concepts such as progress, reproduction, and continuity are socially and ideologically situated. A critical discussion of the linear temporal order serves as a point of departure for this chapter, which will be followed by examining its normative implications for female singlehood.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze the life course scheme, which I consider to be a major conceptual paradigm through which late singlehood is judged and evaluated. Thus, I make the case that the essentialist and naturalized life-course paradigm is a particularly powerful cultural template, but one that is rarely criticized in popular and scholarly discourses on singlehood and is taken as a given. Thus, instead of adhering to the prevailing normative linear paradigm of the progressive life-course order, I ask to critically re-evaluate its terms, convictions, and powers.

Chapter 3: Singlehood as unscheduled status passage

Chapter 3 expands the analysis of the expected linear life-course trajectory from a different perspective. The focus of this chapter is a conceptual analysis of *becoming single*. I also explore the discursive mechanisms that constitute it as a biographical disruption. I argue that this process is rarely problematized in relation to singlehood or figured as a default life trajectory. My discussion examines this path in relational terms, in which the process of becoming single and the transition from normative to late singlehood is produced by socio-temporal truth statements. Thus, the stages of singlehood—or more specifically what I term as the *singlehood career*, drawing on Goffman's use of the term—comes to existence through a hegemonic temporal gaze. Throughout this chapter, I show how this gaze is established through social interaction and is ingrained in collective social perceptions. In this chapter, I also demonstrate how becoming single is a subtle non-institutionalized transition process, in which the entry and exit from "normative singlehood" to "late singlehood" occurs without rituals or official formalities.

The second part of this chapter offers a temporal analysis of the question "Why is she *still* single?" as signifying the transition to late singlehood. My intent here is to

explain the discursive formations and implications of this ubiquitous question, and to shed light on how popular knowledge about single women is produced and circulated. Thus, I do not ask why single women are single, but rather examine how the question itself is discursively constructed in relation to how singlehood is figured as an unscheduled trajectory.

Chapter 4: Facing the horror: becoming an "old maid"

My analysis of time continues by exploring the temporal category of age. Incorporating recent literature on age, feminist theory, and singlehood, this chapter re-evaluates the image of the "old maid" alongside the omnipresence of age, sexism, and ageism in current discourses on female singlehood in Israel. It asks, what gives this powerful stereotypical image so much discursive force and makes it so defiant to resistance and deconstruction? I find that questions such as "Why are twenty and thirty-plus single women depicted as old?" and "Why are thirty-plus married mothers represented as 'young mothers?'" are illustrative questions which emphasize that single women are aged by a culture determined by socially framed expectations. Drawing on this, I also wish to understand the discursive process that causes single women to "age faster"; *how* do single women "age" differently from coupled and married ones? These queries reflect our line of inquiry, which views aging as a gendered and a heteronormative based process.

These questions are discussed by exploring how the predominant cultural perceptions of age appropriateness, age segregation, age norms, and ageism play a crucial role in the construction of late singlehood and gendered timetables in general. My contention is that single women are faced with a triple disfranchisement, based on age, gender, and single status. Given this, I argue that single women undergo a process of *accelerated aging*, leading towards their *social death*. Thus, this chapter also makes a significant contribution to critical age studies and feminist age studies, by reworking these categories and opening up new ways to critically revisit the authority of age and sexist and ageist practices. It also points out that ageism and age-based discrimination do not necessarily apply merely to the social category of old age, but are practiced at different phases of the life course.

Chapter 5: On commodification: from wasted time to damaged goods

While the previous chapter focused on how ageism, sexism, and singlism coalesce, this chapter covers an in-depth analysis of how they come together and are discursively articulated through the commodified language of time. Chapter 5 includes various examples in which singlehood and single women's subjectivity are constantly measured through the conditions of the marketplace. Single women are perceived as having a short shelf-life, and above a certain age will be considered as damaged goods and consequently warned "not to waste their time," and "to find a husband before it's too late." The reoccurrence of these concepts have prompted me to examine how this temporal economic language provides a set of powerful presuppositions,

through which single women are objectified and ascribed with an inferior social status. My discussion here considers this to be a significant discursive context, through which single women's oppression occurs and hierarchical gendered power relations are sustained.

This line of inquiry allows a rich analysis of how this age- and gender-based temporal logic conjoins with the rhetoric of supply and demand. In this chapter, my aim is to create a new understanding of what are considered as undisputed market laws, and the way time is reified and commodified. Following this line of thought, this discussion raises questions such as: To what extent does the abstraction of time act as a quantifiable measure that controls the lives of single women? In which ways does the commodified language of time set up our perceptions of female singlehood? What are the discursive mechanisms through which single women are considered as damaged goods, stamped with expiration dates? And lastly, how are temporal practices, such as *wasting time* and *accumulating time*, reconfigured in relation to single women's time? The discussion of these questions aims to set a broader perspective and provide alternative ways of thinking about singlehood. In particular, it seeks to disconnect this temporal discourse from normalized concepts of market logic, exchange value, consumer goods, and the assessment of women's ability to be "sold" and "traded."

Chapter 6: Taking a break

Chapter 6 gives us the opportunity to discuss temporal rhythms of daily life from a different perspective. In the first part of the chapter, I critically assess normative social rhythms by discussing temporal concepts such as *timeout* and *taking a break*, as well the implication of *breaking away* from the linear trajectory. The textual analysis of web columns written by and about single women reveals that taking a limitless break from the non-stop search for a husband is considered as a disrupting act, which might prevent them from attaining a reproductive and meaningful futurity.

According to this view, engaging in a non-stop search for a husband is regarded as a productive and required temporal trajectory. Drawing on Hogne Ÿian's (2004) sociological study of time, I argue that what is considered as a temporal *timeout* can turn into a permanent *dropout* from the collective linear trajectory, with limited chances of rejoining it. I suggest that the demand for a timeout is also an act of resistance, an attempt at breaking away and taking a timeout of time and therefore a subversive practice which conveys a claim for temporal agency and control of one's time.

In the second section of this chapter, I take this line of analysis further by exploring images of *time on hold* and *frozen time*. Central to this analysis are also questions of mobility, speed, and temporal subjectivity, which lead me to examine how and why single women are figured as immobile subjects frozen in time. According to these texts, single women are viewed as trapped in their own immobility, a temporal position in which they have lost their telos and agency. This leads to a discussion of what is figured as a breakdown in the articulation of time (Reith 1999) and arrested flow of time which disconnects the present from the future and empties them out of meaning and substance.

Chapter 7: Waiting and queuing

This chapter is devoted to a critical analysis of the temporal construct of "waiting." I analyze representations of waiting in everyday clichés, commercials, popular songs, and web columns, as well as representations of bridesmaids in popular culture. The figure of the single woman waiting to enter coupledom and married life has become deeply embedded in conventional thinking about single women, and these representations offer a useful case study as they highlight the temporal organization of social life and the related relations of power structures. From this viewpoint, waiting is examined as an interactive setting, representing and producing rigid societal timetables, as well as traditional feminine subjectivities.

Drawing on Leon Mann's (1969) and Barry Schwartz's (1975) observations of queue culture, I propose to examine representations of single women also as queuers standing in line, waiting to enter matrimony. Observing and interpreting this social interaction as a queue offers multiple dimensions of analysis. For example, a temporal analysis of the queue as a social microsystem lends insight to how temporal norms and temporal mechanisms are established. From this perspective, the status of single women can be measured according to their location within and outside what I term as a *heteronormative queue*. In much the same way—and by extending Pierre Bourdieu's (2000) analysis of waiting—I examine how waiting is both an exercise and effect of power. I argue that these sets of images constitute compliant temporal subjectivities, which integrate them into an unquestioned heteronormative order.

Chapter 8: Time work: keeping up appearances

Continuing and extending my focus of the interactional aspects of single temporality, Chapter 8 develops these aspects further. In the texts analyzed in this chapter, single women reveal their hesitations about, and the obstacles of, being in public on their own. This chapter offers a temporal reading of everyday social interaction by employing a Goffmanian analysis of the ways in which single women prepare themselves for social interaction by taking into consideration temporal dimensions in an attempt to control their impression management. Concepts such as *participation units*, *loss of face*, *civil inattention*, and *impression management* are used to examine the temporal dimensions of the presentation of the single self in public. In this way, I draw attention to the temporal context within which social interaction takes place and demonstrate how time marking assumes overwhelming importance.

In this chapter, I also rely on Durkheim's (2008) and Zerubavel's (1981, 1985) works on temporal demarcations. By examining the social meanings attached to time units such as night and day, the week, and the weekend, every day and holidays, I argue that these time conventions have an important bearing on the single woman's opportunities for appearing and interacting in public. It is argued that the temporal interpretations of time during holidays like New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, and social occasions like dinner time have an important bearing on the single woman's visibility, and impact her ability to orient her appearance, and consequently her sense of self agency, in public settings.

Chapter 9: Discussion: another time

I conclude the book by analyzing possible alternatives to the hegemonic temporalities explored in the previous chapters. I argue that these accounts present us with alternative perceptions of temporality, through which women can articulate their own ideas about time and their single status. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in exploring how resistance to time norms is represented, and how women attempt to *reclaim their time* and destabilize common-sense life paths and schedules. In this way, their claim subsumes a sense of controlling time and a way of attaining *temporal autonomy and agency.* By exploring resistance by single women in Israel and elsewhere in the world, I seek to explore how a new agenda for singlehood studies can be formulated, and singlehood itself understood in broader political terms.

Notes

1   According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2015) which defines women as over 15 years old and according to the Office for National Statistics (2015) of the UK, which defines women as over 16 years old.
2   For an excellent review of Intersectional Feminist theory, see Oleksy (2011).
3   For an interesting discussion of religious singles in Israel, see Engelberg (2011, 2013).
4   See, for example, Byrne and Carr (2005); Budgeon (2008); Cobb (2012); Dales (2013, 2014); DePaulo (2006); Klinenberg (2012); Jamieson and Simpson (2013); MacVarish (2006); Nakano (2011, 2014); Reynolds (2008); Simpson (2006); Song (2014); Taylor (2012); Trimberger (2005); Wilkinson (2014).
5   See, for example, DePaulo (2006); Trimberger (2005).
6   To the best of my knowledge the only work that has pointed out the importance of a temporal reading of feminine singlehood is Negra (2009) in a short discussion of representations of single women in popular culture.
7   See, for example, Cobb (2012); Evertsson and Nyman (2013); Jamieson and Simpson (2013); Klinenberg (2012); MacVarish (2006); Nakano (2011); Reynolds (2008); Song (2014); Taylor (2011); Wilkinson (2014).
8   These observations also rely upon a rich and varied scholarship on popular culture, which views it as not only a key site for formation of identities and everyday realties, but also an arena in which consent and resistance are intertwined. For more, see Hall (2010); Illouz (2007).
9   While most sociological work on singlehood today focuses on in-depth interviews, the present study seeks to add to the existing literature on singlehood and social time, by incorporating these new global shifts and translating them to new research questions. For studies based on in-depth interviews, see, for example, Budgeon (2008); Byrne (2000); MacVarish (2006); Nakano (2011); Reynolds (2008); Simpson (2003, 2006); Trimberger (2005).
10   According to a recent survey (Goldenberg 2015), *Ynet* is the sixth most visited website in Israel (following the English and Hebrew versions of *Google*, *Youtube*, *Facebook*, and *Walla*).
11   For example Lorri Gottlieb's (2008) article published in the *Atlantic* was discussed in *Ynet* (Regev 2010). Or more recently Kate Bolick's (2015) book *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* was analyzed in *The Marker* (Shechter 2015). Her article published in the Atlantic (Bolick 2011) was also mentioned in the Israeli media (Sa'ar 2012). Likewise, Rachel Greenwald's (2004) book *Finding a Husband After Thirty-Five: Using what I Learned at Harvard Business School* was translated into Hebrew and widely discussed in the Israeli media. For more see Lahad (2007).