

“The MENA Gender Paradox” – The Case of Jordan:

Why Jordanian Women Study, but Do Not Work



Oda Camilla Arnestad Skålhegg

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Abstract

The phenomenon labelled the “MENA gender paradox” by the World Bank is a common dominator for the MENA region countries. Women are not entering paid employment in the number one would expect considering the high rate of female educational attainment in the region. This study aims to investigate women’s motivations to enter paid employment albeit the frail chances women face in the workforce in the context of Jordan. I shed light on Jordanian women’s experiences in school-to-work-transitions and further if their expectations of this transition live up to women’s expectations. Based on evidence analysed I argue that even though women are faced with obstacles firmly established in Jordanian culture and society they strive to find ways to create the futures they want for themselves.

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Oda Camilla Arnestad Skålhegg,
November 24, 2019

Notes on Arabic Transliterations

For the Arabic transliterations in this study I have used the guidelines provided by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) for Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.¹

Words or expressions cited from conversations and interviews in Arabic appearing in the text will be written in colloquial Arabic, while the remaining words appearing in the text will be written in formal Arabic.

Proper names will not be transcribed and will be written in accordance with common spelling conventions of given names.

¹ *IJMES Transliteration System for Arabic, Persian and Turkish*, International Journal of Middle East Studies, last modified April, 2014, accessed November 19, 2019.
<https://ijmes.ws.gc.cuny.edu/files/2014/04/TransChart.pdf>

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1

Introduction

My Diploma is my Gun!

“*My diploma is my gun!*”² Thus spoke the twenty-year-old university student Noura. Her words sparked a flow of enthusiasm as she eagerly talked about what her motivations for enrolling in higher education were. Noura believed that education was a safety net for women, a way for women to take care of themselves, in the case of a divorce or being widowed. Noura knew what that would entail because her mother was a remarried widow.

The metaphor of the university diploma as a gun, a means of protection, became a recurring image throughout my fieldwork in Amman, Jordan, in the fall of 2018. Although implied, the idea of education as a form of safety seemed to be always present.

The last decades have seen a rise in educational attainment among women in the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).³ The rise in education has not led to an increase in female labour force participation. The World Bank has labelled this paradox the “MENA Gender Paradox.”⁴ This paradox is also true for Jordan; higher educational levels among

² Interview with Noura, Amman October 2018.

³ Salam Al-Mahadin, “Jordanian Women in Education: Politics, Pedagogy and Gender Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 78 (2004): 23.

⁴ Ragui Assaad et al., “Explaining the MENA Paradox: Rising Educational Attainment, Yet Stagnant Female Labor Force Participation,” IZA Discussion Paper Series no. 11385, Institute of Labor Economics, Bonn, Germany, March 2018. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp11385.pdf>

The World Bank, “Missing Voices: Gender Equality in the Arab World,” published March 14, 2013, accessed November 23, 2019. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/03/14/missing-voices-gender-equality-in-the-arab-world>

females do not necessarily lead to higher economic participation among the country's women.⁵ In World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Jordan is ranked number 147 out of 149 countries concerning the gap between genders in labour force participation.⁶ In education, Jordan is rated at 45 out 149 countries.⁷ The numbers speak for themselves; the discrepancy between educational achievements and labour force participation is striking. The question that arises is; what motivates young women to pursue paid employment when their prospects on the labour market are sparse? And further: what barriers are hindering women from entering paid employment?

This matters because Jordan would benefit from having more women included in the country's workforce and thus it is important to recognise what barriers are in the way for increased female economic participation. Furthermore, young women say they want to work.⁸ To know what motivates women in the pursue of work may say something about what needs to be done in order to facilitate increased workforce participation among women in Jordan.

This study sheds light on young Jordanian women's motivations to pursue paid employment and how women experience the school-to-work-transition, or the lack of it. The study aims to explore how Jordanian women negotiate their futures on a micro level and whether the reality of life post graduation meets women's expectations. Finally, this study addresses how education is employed by young women as a stepping-stone and a starting point for the creation of their futures.

1.1 Former Research

Preceding research points to gender norms and social stereotypes of men and women to try to explain the lack of school-to-work-transition among Jordanian women.⁹ Traditional gender

⁵ Amal Al Kharouf and David Weir, "Women and Work in a Jordanian Context: Beyond Neo-Patriarchy," *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 4, no. 2/3 (2008): 311. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17422040810870060>

⁶ World Economic Forum, *Insight Report: The Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, October 2018. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf, 141.

⁷ World Economic Forum, 141.

⁸ The women I interviewed and conversed with for this study all expressed a wish to work or had previously had a wish to work.

⁹ Al Kharouf and Weir, "Women and Work." Assaad et al., "Explaining the MENA Paradox."

norms of males as breadwinners and women as tied to their roles as wives and mothers stand strong in the society and are reproduced in the family and at school.¹⁰ One example is Mayyada Abu Jaber's study on what textbooks and teacher's guides tell schoolgirls implicitly and explicitly about a woman's role in society. The study suggests that "the hidden curriculum underlying both the formal curriculum at school and the culture of the workplace makes female economic empowerment socially undesirable." Moreover: "it is more desirable for females to stay home," and "women who work outside the home will not be able to meet their family's demands and expectations and their family responsibilities."¹¹ When girls finish secondary school, this is what they take with them into adulthood. The textbooks are reinforcing traditional gender norms and are shaping boys' and girls' ideas about how to perform their respective gender roles.

Willy Jansen shows that even though women have greater educational results than males, this does not mean that women's position in the workforce has improved.¹² On the contrary, she argues that male kin and husbands prevent women from employment, a view which is supported by the study of Amal Al Kharouf and David Weir who propose that family strongly influences Jordanian women's employment.¹³ A husband may for example refuse his wife to work by law, and is thus, in many cases, one of the reasons for why women stay home rather than pursuing paid employment.¹⁴ According to Tamer Koburtay, Jawad Sayed and Radi Haloub this is because of a strong tribal tradition and "patriarchal interpretations of Islam" functioning as barriers for female employment among parts of the Jordanian

Mayyada Abu Jaber, "Breaking Through Glass Doors: A Gender Analysis of Womenomics in the Jordanian National Curriculum," Echinda Global Scholars Working Papers, Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Washington DC, December 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/EchidnaAbu-Jaber2014Web.pdf>

Mona Amer, "School-to-Work-Transition in Jordan, 2010-2016." Economic Research Forum Working Paper no. 1196, Economic Research Forum, Giza Egypt, 2018. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/erg/wpaper/1196.html>

Rebecca Miles, "Employment and Unemployment in Jordan: The Importance of the Gender System," *World Development* 30, no. 3 (2002): 413-427.

Willy Jansen, "Gender and the Expansion of University Education in Jordan," *Gender and Education* 18, no. 5 (2006): 473-490.

¹⁰ Anne Sofie Roald, "Islamists in Jordan: Promoters of Obstacles to Female Empowerment and Gender Equality," 40.

Mary Kawar, "Young, Single and Employed: Jordanian Women's Voices on Impact of Work," *Al-Raida* XXI-XXII, no. 106-107 (Summer/Fall 2004-2005): 51.

¹¹ Mayyada Abu Jaber, "Breaking through Glass Doors," 2, 3 and 46.

¹² Jansen, "Gender and the Expansion of University," 487.

¹³ Al Kharouf and Weir, "Women and Work," 315.

¹⁴ Roald, "Islamists in Jordan," 56.

population due to, among other things, complementary gender norms that keep women tied to the private sphere.¹⁵

Rebecca Miles suggests that the “gender system,” affects labour market outcomes for both male and female employment to great extents.¹⁶ This “gender system,” (the interaction and exchange between culture norms and family and the state and employers), shapes how women are searching for and finding employment.¹⁷ Miles points to how female mobility is restricted in Jordan and that women are urged to stay home. Miles further finds that, among other things, the lack of training concerning job search abilities and a shrinking public sector, as will be explained below, are causes to the lack of female employment in Jordan.¹⁸

Ragui Assaad, Rana Hendy and Shaimaa Yassin agrees to this interchange between household and society gender norms and “economic and policy related factors” as the shapers of female employment opportunities.¹⁹ Likewise, they put equal emphasis on a weakening public sector for blocking the “labour market opportunity structure for educated women.”²⁰

Marriage has traditionally been the marker of adulthood in Jordan, as well as in the MENA region countries.²¹ Marriage has been a hindrance for female employment because women who enter the labour market previous to marriage tend to leave paid employment upon marriage. Assaad, Caroline Krafft and Irene Selwaness investigate the impact of marriage on female employment in Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia. They find that “marriage by the median

¹⁵ Many Jordanians view man and woman as equal in the eyes of God, but men and women have different roles to fulfil in society. Gender roles are thus believed to be complementing each other. Roald, “Islamist in Jordan,” 46. Tamer Koburtay, Jawad Sayed and Radi Haloub, “Implications of Religion, Culture, and Legislation for Gender Equality at work: Qualitative Insights from Jordan,” *Journal of Business Ethics* (October 2018).

¹⁶ Miles, “Employment and unemployment in Jordan,” 425.

¹⁷ Miles, 425.

¹⁸ Miles, 425.

¹⁹ Ragui Assaad, Rana Hendy and Shaimaa Yassin, “Gender and the Jordanian Labor Market,” Economic Research Forum Working Paper Series no. 701, Economic Research Forum, Giza, Egypt, July 2012. <https://erf.org.eg/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/701.pdf>, 3.

²⁰ Assaad, Hendy and Yassin, 13.

²¹ Daniele Cantini, *Youth and Education in the Middle East: Shaping Identity and Politics in Jordan*, London/New York: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016.

Mary Kavar, “Transitions and Boundaries: Research into the Impact of Paid Work on Young Women’s Lives in Jordan,” *Gender and Development* 8, no. 2 (July 2000): 56-65.

Ragui Assaad, Caroline Krafft and Irene Selwaness, “The Impact of Early Marriage on Women’s Employment in The Middle East and North Africa,” GLO Discussion Paper, no. 66, Global Labor Organization, Maastricht 2017.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316526288_The_Impact_of_Early_Marriage_on_Women's_Employment_in_the_Middle_East_and_North_Africa

age reduces the probability of working for women by 47 percent in Jordan.”²² However, the marriage age in Jordan has increased and there is a widespread concern about a “marriage crisis.”²³ Furthermore, Michael Gebel and Stefanie Heyne note that educational participation among young women has influenced the delay of marriage.²⁴ Factors that may affect female employment.

Mary Kawar argues that female employment may change gender roles due to how it “affects” and are “affected by” familial relationships.²⁵ “Young single and employed” women in Jordan are creating a new “life-stage” in women’s lives.²⁶ She states that “although working women remain bound by the social contract of male guardianship and protection, they have expanded choices in education, employment and marriage options.”²⁷ Kawar suggests that female employment is starting to influence the “personal empowerment” of young Jordanian women.²⁸

Fida Adely is critical to the way education has become the solution to female empowerment and development. She further criticises big actors like the World Bank for not taking cultural and local aspects into consideration in their reports about the “Gender Paradox.”²⁹ In her study of girls from a high school in Jordan, she shows how a group of schoolgirls are reflecting on matters of faith, morality, education, love and marriage. To these girls, education seems to mean more than a means to enter paid employment.

Daniele Cantini explores how the Jordanian state is trying to bring their vision of a modern state to life through human capital educated at the country’s universities.³⁰ With a labour market in crisis and no guarantees for employment, the future of newly graduated students is uncertain. The situation is especially dire for female graduates who meet even higher

²² Assaad, Krafft and Selwaness, “The Impact of Early Marriage.”

²³ The economic difficulties many people is suffering from in Jordan and the fact that women tend to wait longer until they marry has led to a belief among the population that Jordan is suffering from a “marriage crisis.” Fida J. Adley, *Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Women in Nation, Faith and Progress* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 113.

²⁴ Michael Gebel and Stefanie Heyne, “Delayed Transitions in Times of Increasing Uncertainty: School-to-Work-Transition and the Delay of First Marriage in Jordan,” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 46 (2016): 70.

²⁵ Kawar, “Transitions and Boundaries,” 56.

²⁶ Kawar, 64.

²⁷ Mary Kawar, “Young, Single and Employed: Jordanian Women’s Voices on Impact of Work,” *Al-Raida* XXI-XXII, no. 106-107 (Summer/Fall 2004-2005): 5-55.

²⁸ Kawar, 54.

²⁹ Fida J. Adley, *Gendered Paradoxes*, 134.

³⁰ Cantini, *Youth and Education*.

unemployment rates than their male colleagues.³¹ And the situation for graduates seems to get worse. However, Adely et al finds, through a study among students at Jordan's Yarmouk University, that Jordanian youth is aware of the changing labour market opportunities and thus negotiate their education to try to achieve better employment aspects in a changing economy with very high rates of youth unemployment.³²

A continuous problem women face in the Jordanian labour market is the stagnation and deterioration of the public sector. Assaad argues that the regimes in the MENA region has made an "authoritarian bargain" with its population, meaning that the government has provided jobs for the citizens in the public sector as means to assure stability.³³ With the current stagnant and deteriorating public sector this "authoritarian bargain" is no longer working as it used to and has caused the "inefficient queuing by educated workers for government jobs."³⁴ This is hitting female employment hard because of women's preference of public sector employment, which I will return to later.³⁵

This study adds to the literature about women's school-to-work-transition and the notion of the "MENA gender paradox" by focusing on Jordanian women's own motivations in a the school-to-work-transition. This study differs from the preceding research due to its emphasis on fieldwork. Female students, working women, unemployed women and inactive women share their lived realities through conversations and interviews in an attempt to bring fourth their experiences of this process.

1.2 The General Outline of the Study

This study focuses on what factors prompt women's choices in and after educational attainment on the way to the work force and how women negotiate their futures in a changing economy with limited future prospects in employment. Following the introduction chapter I present the theoretical framework of this study in chapter two. I will address empowerment and the notion of freedom and what it may entail. In chapter three I will explain the

³¹ Cantini, 143.

³² Fida Adely et al., "Getting in and Getting Through: Navigating Higher Education in Jordan," *Comparative Education Review* 63, no. 1 (2018): 79-97.

³³ Ragui Assaad, "Making Sense of Arab Labor Markets: The Enduring Legacy of Dualism," *IZA Journal of Labor & Development* 3, no. 6 (2014): 2.

³⁴ Assaad, 22.

³⁵ Assaad, 22.

methodological approach this study is build upon. I will describe the fieldwork, the informants and interviews, and the ethical considerations I have taken. In chapter four I will start out by providing an overview of education in Jordan and then go on to discuss the admissions and educational trajectories and women's motivations in education. Chapter five will start out with an overview of the Jordanian labour market and further discuss female employment, cultural impediments, discrimination in the workplace and if education alone is enough to enter paid employment. In chapter six I attempt to see the bigger picture and how the state is partaking in the hindering of female employment followed by the conclusion.

2

Defining Empowerment: Notions of Freedom and Processes of Change

2.1 Empowerment and Notions of Freedom

Women often have an “inferior cultural or legal status relative to men.”³⁶ This has curtailed women’s economical participation and decision-making abilities and further lead to the idea that empowerment is necessary to elevate the status of women to give women agency and decision-making power. Empowerment has, as argued by Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock, become a “buzzword” in the development discourse, which raises the question if empowerment is leading to increased development or if it is just a word “that evoke, and come to carry, the cultural and political values of the time”?³⁷

Jason Hickel argues that the starting point of how empowerment is understood is based on “assumptions about ‘freedom’ that are inherent to the Western liberal tradition.”³⁸ In the Western liberal tradition the notion of being free is based on individuality, on “achieving individual authenticity and self-mastery.”³⁹ This way of viewing freedom, and thus empowerment, does not necessarily fit in a country in which kinship is fundamentally important, and the notion of group identity and solidarity weighs far more than any notion of

³⁶ Jawad Syed, “Reconstructing Gender Empowerment,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 33 (2010): 284.

³⁷ Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock, “What Do Buzzwords do for Development Policy? A Critical Look at ‘Participation,’ ‘Empowerment’ and ‘Poverty Reduction,’” *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 7 (2005): 1047.

³⁸ Jason Hickel, “The ‘Girl Effect’: Liberalism, Empowerment and the Contradictions of Development,” *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 8 (2014): 1356.

³⁹ Hickel, 1356.

the autonomous individual, and in which interpersonal dependency is perceived an ideal.⁴⁰ Thus, empowerment in this “Western”⁴¹ sense becomes a way to “free” the individual from the “constraints” of a kinship-based society in order to be able to among other things increase female economical participation and thus improve a country’s economy.

In Saba Mahmood’s discussion about freedom she aims to dismantle, or in her own words, “uncouple” the “notion of self-realization from that of the autonomous will,” and “agency from the progressive goal of emancipatory politics.”⁴² This leaves room for interpretations of the concept of freedom to be applied to contexts where the liberal tradition’s way of understanding the concept of freedom is insufficient. Furthermore, it allows new interpretations of what freedom is and what it can be, to be brought forward.

2.2 The Challenges of the Concept of Empowerment

When applied to a “non-Western” context, the concept of empowerment has been blamed for being a Western way to achieve gender equality and elevate women’s status. Marnia Lazreg stresses how “Western feminists have promoted conceptions of individual and institutional change modeled after their own societies.”⁴³ Jawad Syed blames the discourse on empowerment for making the same “mistake.”

Syed argues that the way we think about empowerment and development is “Eurocentric.”⁴⁴ The way the concept of empowerment is viewed and applied onto a society when modeled on a “Western” way of life it does not necessarily fit the gender norms of non-Western states.⁴⁵ “The dominant (Eurocentric) notion of women’s empowerment does not adequately take into account the diverse and complex nature of gender relations in various socio-political contexts. Such notion, involving an essential binary of woman and man, tends to portray all

⁴⁰ Hickel, 1359.

⁴¹ In this study the binary of the “West” and “East” is applied as generalized terms referring to Europe, Australasia and the Americas and countries in Asia located East of Europe, including the Middle East. It is important to recognize that the countries in these vast regions are not homogeneous and have unique cultures and histories.

⁴² Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 208.

⁴³ Marnia Lazreg, “The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism,” in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, ed. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 29.

⁴⁴ Syed, “Reconstructing Gender Empowerment,” 283.

⁴⁵ Syed, 283.

women as homogenous group, depriving non-Western women of their historical and political agency.”⁴⁶ Gender equality, which is often the goal of feminism and empowerment in the West, is not necessarily the goal in, for example the Middle East, where gender norms are rather regarded as complementary.⁴⁷

Fida Adely further argues that “Arab women are constructed as always in opposition to their families and communities. Their empowerment requires separation from their social networks; indeed these networks are typically framed as primary obstacles to their progress.”⁴⁸ Rather than separating women from their “social networks” in order to achieve empowerment, the empowerment process should be in liaison with a woman’s “social networks” and society at large. It may even be a premise for an empowerment process to happen in the first place considering the important role of the family in Jordan.

Moreover, Mahmood stresses that “the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in light of other desires, aspirations and capacities that inhere in culturally and, historically located subject.”⁴⁹ There is no such thing as “one-size-fits all” type of analytical model when it comes to understanding the lived realities of women, be it in the “West” or in the “East.” There is not one model that can be applied to every condition. It is necessary to recognize that the concept of empowerment needs to be interpreted and applied to the particular situation of Jordanian women in their particular contemporary contexts. Women carry out their “desires, aspirations and capacities” within the context of their sociocultural frame at one specific time in history.⁵⁰

2.3 Defining Empowerment: A Process of Change

Empowerment is often viewed as a dynamic process; it is “praxis” not just an outcome.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Syed, 283.

⁴⁷ Roald, “Islamist in Jordan,” 46.

⁴⁸ Adley, “*Gendered Paradoxes*,” 13.

⁴⁹ Mahmood, “Feminist Theory,” 223.

⁵⁰ Mahmood, 223.

⁵¹ E. Summerson Carr, “Rethinking Empowerment Theory Using a Feminist Lens: The Importance of Process,” *Affilia* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 8-20.

Julian Rappaport, “Terms of Empowerment/Exemplars of Prevention: Towards a Theory of Community Psychology,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 15, no. 2 (1987): 129.

This dynamic process is typically understood as a process of change eventually resulting in empowerment. Mary O'Brian and Elizabeth Whitmore define empowerment as "an interactive process through which less powerful people experience personal and social change, enabling them to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and communities in which they live."⁵²

Further, E. Summerson Carr sees the dynamic process of empowerment as a "cyclical process of collective dialogue and social action that is meant to effect positive change."⁵³ Carr argues that "individuals collectively define and activate strategies to gain access to knowledge and power." With "knowledge and power" individuals experience empowerment through a "social transformation."⁵⁴

Naila Kabeer places empowerment in contrast to disempowerment and the notion of being "able" to make choices; "One way of thinking about power is in terms of *ability to make choices*: to be disempowered, therefore, implies to be denied choice. The notion of empowerment is thus inescapably bound up with "disempowerment" and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change."⁵⁵

Empowerment enables people to obtain some sort of control over their lives and over their choices and by being empowered people are able to engage in the process of making changes in society. It enables people to actively make changes in their own life, in their communities or in society at large, even though they do not necessarily hold any authoritative or political power.⁵⁶ Knowledge and an understanding of the mechanisms in ones community or society are central to the empowering process and to make lasting change happen, which is best achieved if people work together in an "interpersonal process" as suggested by Carr.

Mary O'Brian and Elizabeth Whitmore, "Empowering Mature Women Students in Higher Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 305-320.

Naila Kabeer, "The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement on Women's Empowerment," *UNRISD Discussion Paper* no. 108 (August 1999): 1-64.

⁵² O'Brian and Whitmore, "Empowering Mature Women," 309.

⁵³ Carr, "Rethinking Empowerment," 18.

⁵⁴ Carr, 18.

⁵⁵ Kabeer, "The Conditions and Consequences of Choice," 2.

⁵⁶ Marc A. Zimmerman, "Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (1995): 583.

In this study I will apply the concept of empowerment as a process of change and a way for women to obtain the freedom to make choices and acquire agency, always keeping in mind the Western bias the concept is exposed. By coming together in an interactive process women may experience empowerment. Further, it may bring about an opportunity to fulfill their own desires and aspirations within their sociocultural contemporary context and without breaking out of the expected roles of women.

3

Methodology

This study builds on fieldwork conducted in Amman, Jordan, from September to October 2018. Additionally, it relies on observations made during two previous times spent in Amman in 2014 and in 2016. A qualitative research approach was chosen consisting of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I interviewed five Jordanian women in addition to gaining knowledge about my project from various interlocutors.

3.1 Case Selection

I lived and studied in Amman for four months in 2014, and again for six months in 2016. During these two stays, but in particularly during the stay in 2016, I came to know a group of young people quite well. The group consisting of roughly twenty people was a mix of Jordanian nationals and non-nationals from the United States and Canada and myself.⁵⁷ The age range of the people in the group was between the early twenties to mid-thirties with the majority being in their mid-twenties. I came close to these people as we went on trips and attended gatherings together. They became my friends, some closer than others.

The Jordanians were all university graduates and part of the middle class segment of society, some with jobs, others unemployed. What struck me after spending so much time with these young people was how many of them were on the look out for a job. Those who had jobs where more often than not working with something completely besides their educational

⁵⁷ What I would define as the core of this group was 20 individuals, myself included. There were always other people more loosely tied to the group as well, but they were more peripheral and would join the gatherings and trips now and then.

specifications. An engineer was working in a bar, an accountant in a coffee shop, and a girl with a degree in English literature was working in the reception of a medical clinic as a secretary. This left me wondering about this large pool of young people outside the work force and it would eventually lead me back to Amman to do fieldwork in 2018 for this study.

3.2 The Fieldwork

When I came back to Amman in 2018 the group of people I had spent time with had split up. Several of the people had moved abroad. Naturally, all the foreigners I had come to know had travelled on and found work elsewhere. Among the Jordanians, several had also moved abroad, four had married and moved away with their new spouses and three were studying abroad when I came back. The remaining people had made new groups of friends, but nevertheless, welcomed me with open arms.

3.2.1 A Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative approach is appropriate to understand women's motivational factors for entering the workforce or not, as it is based on Jordanian women's own experiences, feelings, and thoughts about this process. As pointed out by Rudestam "the qualitative researcher seeks a psychologically rich, in-depth understanding of the individual."⁵⁸ I spent time with Jordanian woman and learned about their personal journeys of transitioning from higher education to the workforce, in addition to listening to stories about and observing the daily life of my informants. The number of people I met, talked to and interviewed in Jordan will form the basis of this study. Moreover, I will discuss my findings in relation to other studies.

3.2.2 Gaining Access to the Field

During my fieldwork I lived in a family building close to *balad*, downtown Amman.⁵⁹ The building's caretaker and his wife were very welcoming and introduced me to the families living in the other apartments. The relationships I developed with my neighbours became

⁵⁸ Kjell Erik Rudestam, "Methods of Inquiry: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches," in *Surviving your Dissertation: a Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process* (California: Sage Publications, Inc. 1992), 31.

⁵⁹ A family building is a building reserved for families. As a woman living alone I was allowed to live there as well, but no single males were allowed to live there.

important for my understanding of gender dynamics. Further, I engaged in several interesting discussions about female workforce participation and women's responsibilities in the household.

At the time of the fieldwork I was pregnant, a state that proved to be an asset because the women took extra good care of me. As my partner had come with me when I was looking at the apartment they all believed I was married. Being married and pregnant proved valuable for bonding with the women, I was *like* them, and consequently I was allowed to be close. I was able to observe everyday interactions of family members and their guests. People would come and go. The women would gossip about their neighbours and colleagues, talk about their children's accomplishments and how exhausting it was taking care of the household. The observations I made while spending time with the families gave me important information about the lives of Jordanian women and how they experience life.

3.2.3 The Interviewees

The Interviewees were selected on the criteria that they were Jordanian women of working age.⁶⁰ Three of the women I interviewed had graduated from university: Nadine (thirty-four years old, married with three children), Hanan (twenty-six years old and single) and Yasmine (thirty-one years old, married, no children). While Nadine and Hanan were working, Yasmine were currently unemployed. Warda (forty-six years old, remarried widow with eight children) was retired and Noura (twenty years old and single) was a university student. Based on place of residence and/or lifestyle Warda and Noura were from the lower economic segments of society while Nadine, Hanan and Yasmine were from the middle economic segment. I consider it relevant to address the women's economical class because it may indicate if higher education is prioritized among Jordanians no matter economic means.

Initially I only wanted to interview women who had gone to university or were currently attending university. The interview with Warda became a valuable exception. She never went to university and she had never worked outside the household, but during her adult life she had run a small business from home knitting and sewing children's clothes. She sold the

⁶⁰ In accordance with the World Bank, working age in Jordan is when a person is between 15 and 64 years old. The World Bank, Labour Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15-64 (Modelled ILO Estimate) – Jordan. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.FE.ZS?locations=JO>

clothes to her neighbours. Her story adds value to the study because she represents many Jordanian women who contribute to the household by working from home.

3.2.4 The Interviews

I engaged my pre-existing network in the search for informants and women willing to be interviewed, which resulted in three interviews. The other two interviews were arranged with women I met through the caretaker of the building I was living in. Four out of five interviews were conducted at the women's homes and the last one took place in a public café.

The interviews I conducted in the women's homes turned out to be semi-group interviews. There were other family members present during the interviews and thus commenting and sharing personal opinions and stories throughout the interview sessions. At all semi-group interviews there were a mix of sons and daughters in their late teens and early twenties to mid-thirties and parents, uncles, and aunts in their fifties and sixties, present. The family members had different backgrounds concerning educational level and work experience. All males, seven in total, were employed or retired except one who did not currently have permanent employment and were therefore working odd jobs to make ends meet. None of the men had enrolled in higher education except one who had studied in the United States. Of the women, eleven in total, six had been or were enrolled in university and only three were working. One woman was retired and six were economically inactive.⁶¹

The group interviews proved fruitful and provided a generational perspective to the topic. The most pronounced difference between the older and the younger family members was that the young women was clearly pro workforce participation for women and the older family members, irrespective of gender, were more restricted to the idea of women working outside the home. Men were generally more restrictive concerning female workforce participation than women, irrespective of age.

As mentioned, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which means that I had prepared an interview guide with predefined questions divided into four different topics: education, work, discrimination, and family. The interview guide functioned as a way to "stay on topic." Yet,

⁶¹ The status of inactive entails not being economically active in either formal or informal work.

the form of the interview offered me the liberty to ask follow-up questions and let the interviewee take the lead in the conversation at times.⁶² This way the women I interviewed provided me with personal accounts and shared their experiences and often times the experiences of friends, family and acquaintances, in the pursue of education and work.

3.4 Challenges and Limitations

3.4.1 The Challenge of Recruiting Interviewees

I did not anticipate the magnitude of the interview process. Preparing the interviews and finding informants were time consuming work, which resulted in the interviews taking place relatively late in the research process. One of the main challenges turned out to be getting enough interviews. I attended many discussions and casual conversations about my topic, but women were reluctant to let me interview them, often blaming their husbands for not allowing them to be interviewed. The reason for the reluctance may be that the women were uncomfortable expressing their opinion individually. Being the centre of attention might be unfamiliar or awkward. Or maybe shyness was a reason. When being a part of a group it is easier to 'hide' among the other members of the group and thus less attention is directed towards each person. Hence, I made sure to ask questions from my interview guide during settings the women seemed comfortable as well, which were usually during casual conversations.

3.4.2 The Limitations of Conducting Interviews in a Group Setting

The interviews I conducted in a group setting with various family members present provided, as already mentioned, valuable insight and input, but were also limiting. I was there to interview women of a certain age about a certain topic. With other family members present, particular matters were left unsaid because it was not appropriate to discuss with, for example, male family members present. Personal feelings and sensitive topics, like romantic

⁶² Chauncey Wilson, "Semi-Structured Interviews," in *Interview Techniques for UX Practitioners* (San Francisco, California: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers Inc., 2013), 24.

feelings, were thus not discussed in interviews with family present. However, love, romance, marriage, and personal feelings were recurring themes when I spent time with women alone or in groups consisting of youth only. Many of the discussions and conversations I had during my fieldwork proved just as valuable as the interviews were.

3.4.3 Notes on Language and Field Notes

I conducted four interviews in English and one in Arabic. My daily interactions and conversations aside from the interviews were Arabic because the English of most of my interlocutors was poorly. Additionally, during my fieldwork, I usually found myself in settings where I was the only foreigner and thus people would speak Arabic.

All field notes were written down in Norwegian. The only exception was if I considered something to be of particular importance. Then I would write it down in the language spoken in order to get the information as accurate as possible. The reason for using Norwegian for the majority of the notes was because it was easier and quicker that way. In addition to the fact that it prevented other people from understanding what I was writing. When using a different language to take notes there is always a risk of important and valuable information being lost in translation. I thus made sure to be thorough when writing things down both during the interviews and when writing field notes. It became a habit to always write field notes straight after having had an interview or spent time with informants. Since I did not record any interviews due to the lack of willingness from my informants, I became dependent on my memory and field notes to be able to convey the accounts from the fieldwork.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

When undertaking the fieldwork and conducting interviews for this study I made sure to inform all informants of my research and its purpose. All persons contributing to the study are made anonymous due to ethical considerations and according to the lines of research ethics issued by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees.⁶³ During my

⁶³ The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology*. The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, June 2016. <https://www.etikkom.no/>

fieldwork I was present during intimate settings of family life and I witnessed scenes and was told stories of highly personal character and I therefore carry the responsibility to protect the integrity of all persons and safeguard the respect for privacy and human dignity.⁶⁴

Furthermore, I took great care in keeping all notes secure and anonymous and I have not kept any data registers of the persons mentioned in the study that may in any way expose their true identities. Since this study additionally draws upon observations made from previous times spent in Amman, where consent is hard to obtain from all persons contributing to the study posteriorly, I have been extra cautious to leave out any identity markers and personal details about the informants and their lives.

⁶⁴ NESH, 12.

4

Education in Jordan

The educational system in Jordan is generally considered a “success story” and has exceeded most of the other countries in the region in the field of education.⁶⁵ School is mandatory from first to tenth grade for both boys and girls. The literacy level in the country is consequently among the highest in the entire MENA region.⁶⁶ The country’s literacy level among youth, 15 to 24 years old, is at 99,2 % for males and 99,5 % for females.⁶⁷ Jordan has reached gender parity in schooling and education. Females are in fact enrolled in higher numbers than males in both secondary and tertiary education.⁶⁸ The enrolment rate in tertiary education in 2018 was 31,5 % for males and 37,3 % for females.⁶⁹

Education is seen as important to most Jordanians and it is held in high regard by the king and the government. The educational system is seen as an instrument of modernization and of “keeping the commercial balance.”⁷⁰ Simultaneously, the university may be a place for

⁶⁵ Cantini, *Youth and Education*.

⁶⁶ Al-Mahadin, “Jordanian Women in Education,” 24.

Education Encyclopaedia – StateUniversity, “Jordan: Educational System – Overview,” accessed October 20, 2019. <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/750/Jordan-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html>

⁶⁷ The World Bank, “Literacy Rate, Youth Male (% of Males Ages 15-24) – Jordan,” accessed October 20, 2019. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.MA.ZS?locations=JO>

The World Bank, “Literacy Rate, Youth Female (% of Females Ages 15-24) – Jordan,” accessed October 20, 2019.

⁶⁸ World Economic Forum, *Insight Report*, 141.

⁶⁹ The World Bank, “School Enrollment, Tertiary, Male (% Gross) – Jordan,” accessed October 20, 2019.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.MA?locations=JO>

The World Bank, “School Enrollment, Tertiary, Female (% Gross) – Jordan,” accessed October 20, 2019.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE?locations=JO>

⁷⁰ Daniele Cantini, “Discourse of Reform and Questions of Citizenship: The University in Jordan,” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 131 (June 2012): 148.

opposition to emerge. The regime has therefore an equivocal position and is encouraging educational development, but at the same time keeping it in a firm hand.⁷¹

The country's lack of natural resources makes investments in human capital important. This has been a motivation for the country to educate its youth to, among other things, attract foreign investments. This has led to an explosive growth in university enrolment in the course of only two decades.⁷² However, the higher education sector is in decline concerning its quality. The universities are not able to produce graduates with the skills to meet the country's needs.⁷³ This has led to an abundance of university graduates insufficiently skilled to become workers and technicians much needed in Jordan's workforce and industries.⁷⁴

The large numbers of students entering the universities in Jordan combined with a lack of economic resources has led to an unfortunate teacher/student ratio. There are too many students and too few teachers.⁷⁵ Teachers are not receiving adequate training, their workload is oversized, and the teaching methods are generally considered out-dated.⁷⁶ However, teachers who try to change the teaching methods encounter opposition from students who seem to prefer the teaching methods they are used to.⁷⁷ Students of higher education in Jordan are rarely encouraged to think for themselves, produce work of "critical thinking," and oral presentations are not common.⁷⁸ Instead, students are expected to memorize the curriculum and reproduce it.⁷⁹ The lack of encouragement of independence in the educational sector might be due to the regime's need to keep students from opposing and criticise the regime, both at the university campus, but also outside it.⁸⁰

⁷¹ Daniele Cantini, 148.

⁷² Al-Mahadin, "Jordanian Women in Education," 24. Cantini, "Discourse of Reform," 150.

⁷³ *Education for Prosperity: Delivering Results. A Natural Strategy for Human Resource and Development 2016-2025*, accessed January 15th 2019. <http://www.mohe.gov.jo/en/documents/national-hrd-strategy.pdf>, 42.

⁷⁴ *Education for Prosperity*, 42.

⁷⁵ *Education for Prosperity*, 42, 147.

⁷⁶ Cantini, *Youth and Education*, 52-58.

⁷⁷ Cantini, 54.

⁷⁸ Daniele Cantini, "Higher Education as Formation of the Self and Citizenship. An Ethnography of the University Students of Amman," EMIGRA Working Papers no. 6, University of Modena, Italy, September 2007, 181.

⁷⁹ Daniele Cantini, 181.

⁸⁰ Cantini, *Youth and Education*, 54.

4.1 Admissions and Educational Trajectories

What educational trajectory Jordanian youth end up taking depends on the average grade of the national *tawjihī* exams, which completes the last year of secondary school. The competition to get into the universities is high with over half of students failing the exams.⁸¹ All students continuing their educational path to university has to apply to the “unified admission commission”⁸² where they rank their choices of preference for which major they would like to study and which university they would like to attend.⁸³ The “Council of Higher Education,” that sets the minimum grades for the various fields of education, treats the applications.⁸⁴ Students with a high average have a greater degree of choice, but in reality the room for choice is small for most students. Noura, for example, explained that she ended up in accounting because of her *tawjihī* score. Accounting had not been her first choice and it was not a field she was interested in initially, but she had grown to like it.⁸⁵

The regular system (*al-barnāmaj al-‘ādī*) of admissions that is based on the results of the *tawjihī* exams, as described above, is not the only way to obtain admission to university. Students have the opportunity to enter through the parallel system (*al-barnāmaj al-muwāzī*), which accepts students who did not make admission through the regular system, at much higher tuition fees.⁸⁶ The parallel system was created in order to “generate revenue for under resourced universities,” however is criticised for causing “overcrowding,” “decrease [in] quality,” and for causing an unfair “advantage” for students who are of better means and can afford to pay the higher price.⁸⁷ Additionally, there are the exceptions admissions. Students may apply to the Royale Court (*al-dīwān al-malakī*), which each year appoints a number of students to be admitted to various faculties. There are the honoured of the army (*makramat al-jaysh*) and the honoured of the teachers (*makramat al-mu‘llimīn*) that are earmarked spots for children of citizens serving in the army and children of teachers and professors. Lastly, there is the admission for a small group of selected refugees (*makramat al-mukhayyamāt*).⁸⁸

⁸¹ Fida Adely et al., “Getting in and Getting Through,” 80.

⁸² Cantini, *Youth and Education*, 45.

⁸³ Adely et al., “Getting in and Getting Through,” 83.

⁸⁴ Adely et al., 83.

⁸⁵ Interview with Noura, Amman 2018.

⁸⁶ Adely et al., “Getting in and Getting Through,” 84.

⁸⁷ Adely, et al., 84.

⁸⁸ Adely, et al., 83.

4.2 Women's Motivations in Education

4.2.1 Creating A Room for Independence and Freedom

In Jordan education is highly valued by parents for boys and girls alike, but parents seem to have higher expectations for their daughters concerning results and grades than they have for their sons.⁸⁹ The anticipation of girls doing well in school may on one hand be a burden in the sense of too high expectation from parents and teachers, but on the other hand, it may also create a free space for girls and young women. The university may be a place where young women get the opportunity to figure out who they are and what their interests are without challenging the established gender roles.⁹⁰

Since most schools are gender segregated in Jordan many young women are not used to being in a mixed gender environment. When entering university it might be the first time navigating in such an environment. It presents a chance to get out of the family home to experience a different kind of life they would not have the opportunity to experience elsewhere.⁹¹

Mariam, a twenty-year-old university student, told me that she felt like she lived two separate lives (*ḥayātēn*), one at home and one at the university. At home, her mother made her crazy (*majnūne*) because she was always complaining about her daughter spending too much time away from home. Still, her parents would let her stay out as long as she spent her time at the university studying. What Mariam did not tell her parents was that she often spent her time at one of the cafés by the university campus, hanging out with a group of friends. Sometimes they would study and other times they were socializing.⁹²

As noted above, marriage is traditionally the marker of the transition to adulthood for women in Jordan. Pointed out by Kawar “Since the period between childhood and adulthood –youth itself – is traditionally ‘squeezed out’ of Arab women’s life courses, young women learn to suppress their personal hopes and aspirations.”⁹³ Kawar further argues that “young, single and

⁸⁹ Jansen, “Gender and the Expansion,” 480.

⁹⁰ Jansen, 480.

⁹¹ Fida Adely, “Becoming Breadwinners? The Mixed Effects of Women’s Labour Migration in Jordan” (lecture), University of Oslo, Eilert Sundts hus, October 10, 2018.

⁹² Conversation with Mariam, Amman 2018.

⁹³ Kawar, “Transitions and Boundaries,” 63

employed,” is a new stage in the life of many Jordanian women, as previously mentioned.⁹⁴ The status as ‘university student’ may also belong on this list. During the years in university a room to be young is created. Through this time young women may actually acknowledge their “personal hopes and aspirations” and maybe even dare to dream about shaping a future that belongs to them.

4.2.2 Family Prestige and Increased Marriage Prospects for Young Women

One of my interlocutors, Zain, was worried about his economic situation due to him paying for his sister’s tuition fee. This had caused him trouble with his bank. In reality, he could not afford to pay the fee, but had done it anyway because his sister really wanted to go to university. Now he was worried because, at the time, he was without permanent employment, taking odd jobs and was unable to pay off his loans to the bank. The reason for him to do that, he told me, was to make his sister happy (*mabsūṭa*) and his mother proud (*fakhūra*).⁹⁵ Zain considered his sister’s education to be important enough to be willing to pay for it even though he could not afford it. His determination to put his sister through education demonstrates how female education has become a sign of prestige and that it may be shameful if the family cannot afford it.

In Jordan an educated woman may be viewed as a symbol of wealth and may bring prestige upon her family.⁹⁶ “The fact that a girl’s education is not put to direct economic use increases its value as a symbol of wealth and prestige.”⁹⁷ For poor families, a girl’s education can lead to an elevated status for the entire family “and continues to be the only means to class advancement.”⁹⁸ Moreover, an education can make a woman more attractive to potential suitors because a girl who is educated is deemed more attractive in marriage.⁹⁹

Selma, a twenty-four year old engineering graduate, had been refused by her father to work after she graduated. Selma knew that her father was against women working when she started her degree, but she had hoped that her father would have a change of heart, but he did not.

⁹⁴ Kawar “Young, Single and Employed.”

⁹⁵ Conversation with Zain, Amman 2018.

⁹⁶ Jansen, “Gender and the Expansion,” 485.

⁹⁷ Jansen, 485.

⁹⁸ Adley, *Gendered Paradoxes*, 133.

⁹⁹ Adley, 134.

Selma was now engaged and hoped that maybe her soon-to-be husband would let her work.¹⁰⁰

The prestige aspect of female education may be a hindrance to a woman's workforce participation and also to female empowerment since the woman herself is not in control of her own achievements and may not be allowed to work even if she wants to. Furthermore a daughter's interests and wishes for her future are not necessarily taken into consideration.

4.2.3 Education; a Necessity for Employment?

Yasmine had experience from the fields of marketing and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). She was convinced that women need a university degree to be able to compete on the job market and to be considered for a job in most cases, a view that is supported by Jansen.¹⁰¹ She believed that it is easier for a man without education to get a job than a woman without an education, an opinion shared by Noura. Education may be the golden ticket that may allow women to try to enter the labour market, and according to Yasmine it does not matter what kind of degree you have as long as you have one: *“People study because they have to and a lot of people do not really like what they do. You only need a degree so you can apply for jobs. The employers only want a degree but do not care about which one.”*¹⁰²

The financial aspect of employment motivates many women in their studies. To be able to support family, parents in particular, or being able to have some kind of financial autonomy were considered important. Amina, an unmarried woman in her mid-thirties, had recently finished her degree in pharmacy at a university in London, England. At her return to Amman she had found employment quite quickly, and would start her new job in the beginning of 2019. Being a single woman she lived with her parents who were in their late seventies and retired. She felt economically responsible for them and was eager to start the job and be able to help her parents in their retirement.¹⁰³ Even though women are not expected to help out financially, in many families it is a necessity to make ends meet. In the case of Amina her

¹⁰⁰ Conversation with Selma, Amman 2018.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Yasmine, Amman 2018. Jansen, “Gender and the Expansion,” 481

¹⁰² Interview with Yasmine, Amman, 2018.

¹⁰³ Conversation with Amina, Amman 2018.

parents were supportive of her financial help, but in many Jordanian families having a female breadwinner is still taboo, even though it is becoming more common.¹⁰⁴

Young women enter the universities of Jordan with aspirations of having a job one day. However, education is more than just the pursue of a professional career. Education is a tool of understanding, reflection and the development of skills that, in many cases, can lead to independence and self-worth. The university “breaks the monotony of restricted lives” and creates an arena where desires and dreams about the future, what ever they might be, are almost tangible.¹⁰⁵ The university experience becomes a rite de passage where girls go from one status to another, from ‘girl’ to ‘educated young woman.’ The years at the university may be understood as a liminal phase where the rules are bent and boundaries are being pushed. The university is a place where the “normal” gender expectations are not as strict as on the outside of the university gates; carving out a space to be young and creating a room where young Jordanian women can be just that – young women.

¹⁰⁴ Adely, “Becoming Breadwinners?”

¹⁰⁵ Kawar, “Transitions and Boundaries,” 64.

5

The Jordanian Labour Force

Jordan is suffering from low rates of employment especially among its youth population and among women.¹⁰⁶ Among Jordanian women of working age, the labour force participation in formal work is at only 15 %.¹⁰⁷ Among young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years the level of formal participation is at approximately 9 % compared to 37,1 % of males in the same age cohort.¹⁰⁸ 2018 numbers estimate the Jordanian formal workforce participation rate to be 41,6 %, with the female to male ratio being 22,2 %.¹⁰⁹ Women have fewer opportunities than men and their choices are narrower, especially in the private sector.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ The World Bank, “Labor Force Participation Rate for Ages 15-24, Total (%) (Modeled ILO Estimate),” accessed October 19, 2019. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.1524.ZS?locations=JO>
The World Bank, “Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population ages 15+) (Modeled ILO Estimate),” accessed October 19, 2019.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=JO>

¹⁰⁷ Formal work entails that the worker has a legal contract and that the worker’s rights are protected.

¹⁰⁸ ILO, “Promoting Youth Employment and Empowerment of Young Women,” Impact Report series 9 (2017): 6.

The World Bank, “Labour Force Participation Rate for ages 15-24, Female (%) (Modelled ILO Estimate) – Jordan,” accessed October 19, 2019

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.1524.FE.ZS?locations=JO>

The World Bank, “Labour Force Participation Rate for ages 15-24, Male (%) (Modelled ILO Estimate) – Jordan,” accessed October 19, 2019.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.1524.MA.ZS?locations=JO>

¹⁰⁹ The World Bank, “Labor Force Participation Rate for Ages 15-24, Total (%) (modeled ILO estimate),” accessed October 19, 2019. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.1524.ZS?locations=JO>

World Bank, “Ratio of Female to Male Labor Force Participation Rate (%) (Modeled ILO Estimate) – Jordan,” accessed October 19, 2019.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FM.ZS?fbclid=IwAR0m2rYxlEOVnAbB5oLFNfIn24uuqXDK5BHDU9JOSeWrwZbLGULbGCK-Ls&locations=JO>

¹¹⁰ Kawar, “Transitions and Boundaries” 57.

Between the late 2000s and 2015 the creation of new net jobs in Jordan dropped from around 60,000 to 40,000.¹¹¹ The country saw economic growth at the end of the 2000s, but the global financial crisis in 2008, the aftermath of the Arab spring and the large influx of Syrian refugees has hit Jordan's economy hard and has affected the country's economic growth and employment rate.¹¹² Additionally, a "slowdown" in the Gulf States has led to fewer employment opportunities for Jordanian migrant workers and consequently a reduction in remittances.¹¹³

Furthermore, an increase in non-nationals seeking employment is affecting the employment opportunities of nationals.¹¹⁴ Non-nationals are estimated to take up more or less half of the net job growth.¹¹⁵ The informal segment of the Jordanian labour market, which constitute of approximately 10 % of Jordan's GDP,¹¹⁶ has seen an increase the last few years due to the increase in non-nationals where the majority are Egyptian migrant workers and Syrian refugees.¹¹⁷

The public sector has been the favoured employment choice for women in Jordan, but the sector is not providing enough jobs. Around 60 % of the country's newly educated population would be fed into the public sector in 1985, but the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms with investments in privatisation since the late 1980s has affected the public sector negatively.¹¹⁸ In 2016 the share of public sector employment was 39 %, a decrease from 40 % the year before.¹¹⁹ As the public sector is decreasing, the private sector is not growing fast enough to provide new jobs to fill the gap. There are not enough jobs on the market for the working age part of the Jordanian population.¹²⁰

¹¹¹ Ragui Assaad and Colette Salemi, "The Structure of Employment and Job Creation in Jordan: 2016-2010," Economic Research Forum Working Paper Series no 1259, Economic Research Forum, Giza, Egypt, November 2018, 5. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/erg/wpaper/1259.html>

¹¹² Assaad and Salemi, 3.

¹¹³ Amer, "School-to-Work-Transition."

¹¹⁴ Assaad and Salemi, "The Structure of Employment," 3 and 5.

¹¹⁵ Assaad and Salemi, 5.

¹¹⁶ Farhad Mirza, "The Impact of Crisis and Conflict on Informality in the MENA region," *Equal Times Special Report* 10 (2016): 45.

¹¹⁷ The majority of non-nationals working in Jordan is migrants from Egypt that make up about 54 %, Syrians that make up about 20 % and others of Arab origin that make up about 20 % Assaad and Salemi, "The Structure of Employment," 5-6.

¹¹⁸ Adely et al., "Getting in and getting through," 80.

International Labour Office, *Promoting Youth Employment and Empowerment of Young Women in Jordan: An Assessment of Active Labour Market Policies*, Impact Report Series 9. (Geneva 2017), 12.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_598671.pdf

¹¹⁹ Assaad and Salemi, "The Structure of Employment," 7.

¹²⁰ Assaad et al., "Explaining the MENA Paradox."

Furthermore, Jordan is suffering from both over-education and under-education, meaning that there are too many educated people and too few skilled workers at the same time.¹²¹ Studying a bachelor's degree does not make it easier to get a job; the unemployed numbers of university graduates are very high.¹²² The university is not producing graduates who can offer skills that the labour market is in demand of. Nooh Alshyab, Serena Sandri and Ziad Abu-lila, name this “a clear signal of the existence of skills mismatch in Jordan.”¹²³ Jordan needs technically skilled workers to its industries, but the vocational trajectories in education are looked down on and are thus not attracting enough students.¹²⁴

5.1 Female Employment

Even with the decrease over the last years the public sector is the sector hiring the most people in Jordan.¹²⁵ It is the sector preferred by women and their families due to the “family friendly” working hours that enable women to be home from work early to take care of family and household chores.¹²⁶ Nadine for example, had been employed in the public sector as a programmer for ten years. She experienced working in the public sector to be boring at times, but she appreciated the stability it created for her and her family. Even though she was married, she did not live with her husband, and was dependent on having her own income to take care of the children and her mother.¹²⁷

Social norms and the norms of “occupational segregation,”¹²⁸ usually push women to seek employment in the “women friendly” fields of education, health, social security and public administration.¹²⁹ But, as previously described, a person's educational trajectory may not always be of first choice. Noura, who was majoring in accounting, was worried about her

¹²¹ Nooh Alshyab, Serena Sandri and Ziad Abu-Lila, “Skills Mismatch and Returns to Education in Jordan,” EMNES Working Paper, no. 12, The Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies, April 2018. https://www.econostrum.info/Skills-mismatch-and-returns-to-education-in-Jordan_a24488.html

¹²² Alshyab, Sandri and Abu-Lila.

¹²³ Alshyab, Sandri and Abu-Lila.

¹²⁴ *Education for Prosperity*, 140-141.

¹²⁵ Assaad and Salemi, “The Structure of Employment,” 7.

¹²⁶ Assaad and Salemi, 7.

¹²⁷ Interview with Nadine, Amman 2018

¹²⁸ Women in Jordan are exposed to “occupational segregation.” That means that the work available for women is usually in education, health, social work, and public administration.

Al-Jidra Investment Service, “Lessons Learned for the Pay Equity & Child Care Facilities Initiative in Jordan,” International Labour Organization (February 2017), 4.

¹²⁹ Al-Jidra Investment Service, 4.

future job perspectives since her degree did not come with a public sector employment guarantee. With dreams of marriage and having kids it might cause problems in the future to combine a career and family life. She believed that accounting is more suitable for men due to men being “better” in business than women. Further she explained that men are flexible to deal with work related matters and have more flexible time to spend long hours at the office.¹³⁰ Noura thus points to some of the inhibitions women face in employment due to cultural impediments in the Jordanian society.

5.2 The Cultural Impediments to Female Employment

In Jordan men and women have different social roles and the separation between the public and the private sphere is clearly divided.¹³¹ Women are mainly considered to be a part of the private sphere, while men belongs to the public sphere. Religion has an important position in society, religious discourse is widespread and it affects the way gender roles are performed. The role of the family is fundamental in the Jordanian society and men and women have clearly defined obligations and responsibilities in the family unit. As mentioned, men are regarded as the breadwinners and responsible for the family financially while women are expected to meet the needs of care and household chores and fulfil the roles as wife and mother.¹³²

Unmarried youth live with their parents until marriage.¹³³ This is usually non-negotiable, except from a few exceptions to this rule. I talked to many young, unmarried people who told me about their intentions of moving to a flat with their friends or on their own because they wanted to be free from their parent’s constant interference in their lives, but usually it was only talk. The family functions as a protector of young people’s and especially young women’s sexual reputation. As noted by Kawar “it seems that young women’s need to protect their sexual reputation reinforces their economic and psychological dependence on their families.”¹³⁴ If a woman decides to live on her own it might, for instance, make her marriage prospects more difficult. Thus women need to be extra cautious to not engage in activities

¹³⁰ Interview with Noura, Amman 2018.

¹³¹ Roald, “Islamists in Jordan.”

¹³² Kawar, “Young, Single and Employed,” 51.

¹³³ Gebel and Heyne, “Delayed Transitions,” 61.

¹³⁴ Kawar, “Transitions and Boundaries,” 60.

where her reputation may be damaged. The implementation of gender segregation hence works as a protection of women's respectability.¹³⁵

There is a common belief that if a woman is given too much freedom, it will lead to disorder in society and destruction of the family unit which the society is built upon.¹³⁶ Consequently, men are granted more freedom and autonomy than women and women are restricted and subjected to the control and domination of her male relatives or, if she is married, the control and domination of her husband.¹³⁷ This subordinate role many women have may inflict with her opportunity to work outside the home because she may not be allowed to do so.

Warda, a 46-year-old housewife (*rabbat al-bayt*), had dreamed about becoming a nurse (*mumarrida*) when she was young, but her uncle had refused because he did not allow her to be close to male patients. After the death of her first husband she remarried and her new husband was supportive of her starting a sewing and knitting business. Warda started contributing to the family economy with the money she made, but from the safety of her home.

The law backs a husband if he refuses his wife to work.¹³⁸ Sexual harassment and the lack of safe public transportation are common reasons to why male kin will not let female family members work, both reasons would possibly threaten a woman's sexual reputation and possibly the reputation of the entire family.¹³⁹ Moreover, some women experience their salaries being taken from them by either a husband or a father. Furthermore, many Jordanian women do not have a personal bank account, which restricts a woman's decision-making abilities.¹⁴⁰ Cultural impediments work as a barrier for female mobilization and contribute to the lack of female workforce participation in Jordan.

¹³⁵ Adely, *Gendered Paradoxes*, 113.

¹³⁶ Roald, "Islamists in Jordan," 53-54.

¹³⁷ Roald, 53-54.

¹³⁸ Roald, 56.

¹³⁹ Maram Kayed, "Most Women's Desire to Work 'Impeded by Male Family Members,'" *Jordan Times*, published November 18, 2018, accessed November 29, 2018. <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/most-womens-desire-work-%E2%80%98impeded-male-family-members%E2%80%99>

¹⁴⁰ The Arab Woman Organization (AWO), *Substantive Equality and Non Discrimination in Jordan*, Shadow Report, (February 2012), 26. <https://www.awo.org.jo/2019/10/14/substantive-equality-and-non-discrimination-in-jordan-shadow-report-cedaw-2012-2/>

5.3 Discrimination in the Work Place

Unfortunately many women who manage to enter paid employment face discrimination in the workplace and they are deprived of labour rights. According to several of my informants stereotypes of women being weak and emotional affect female employment negatively. Further, Women's skills and abilities are often times undervalued by employers despite women's high educational levels. Additionally, men are preferred over women in employment due to convictions of men being more professional.¹⁴¹

Nadine explained how one of her newly engaged friends had been discriminated against because she was getting married: "*A friend of mine who was newly engaged went to a job interview and did not get the job because the employer was afraid she would get too busy with other things in the near future because she was getting married and then probably would have kids.*"¹⁴² Many women have similar stories to tell and these issues lead to early retirement of women. Women who leave the workforce after marriage or pregnancy seldom return.¹⁴³ As long as employers do not suffer any significant consequences this practice will likely continue.

5.4 Is Education Enough?

The people I met during my fieldwork in Amman believed that education was key to employment. There were two factors in particular that was mentioned in connection with increasing ones chances of employment. The first factor was having connections and the use of an intermediary, *wasta*,¹⁴⁴ to access employment and the second factor was to attend training courses, *dawrāt*.

¹⁴¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Jordan National Employment Strategy 2011-2020*, July, 2012, 54. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_313611.pdf

¹⁴² Interview with Nadine, Amman October 2018.

¹⁴³ Assaad, Hendy and Yassin, "Gender and the Jordanian Labor Market," 5.

¹⁴⁴ I have chosen not to transcribe the word "*wasta*" (a description of the word "*wasta*" is provided in footnote 145) due to the conventional way of spelling the word being "*wasta*."

5.4.1 The Big WOW: *Wasta*¹⁴⁵

Wasta, initially a tribal tradition, is a strongly established phenomenon in Jordan and is pervaded in society.¹⁴⁶ “The *wasta* system is generalised in the society and performs important functions within the family and clan as well as outside it.”¹⁴⁷ *Wasta* is used in politics, in bureaucratic processes, in finding work, and in finding a suitable spouse, to name a few of its functions.¹⁴⁸ *Wasta* is based in “friendship, kin, or patron-client relations...involving reciprocal and cooperative obligations”¹⁴⁹ *Wasta* is a part of everyday life and a practise it is hard to not be a part of.

All the women I interviewed without any exceptions mentioned *wasta* as the best way to get a job. In fact, the prevailing view among the people I conversed with was that *wasta* was necessary to find a job. As Noura put it: “*It helps if you have the big wow.*”¹⁵⁰ Hanan’s brother had a large network and he helped her when she was on the market for her first job.¹⁵¹ Yasmine claimed that only 20 % of the positions listed were free to apply for and that the rest was reserved for acquaintances recommended through informal, personal networks.¹⁵² Assaad et al argues that “Family background and social class” is more important in many cases than the skills obtained through a university degree or previous job experiences.¹⁵³

When I asked the women who gave them *wasta* the answer was usually a brother, a father or a male friend of the family. This prompts the question if one of the reasons why women have a hard time entering paid employment is due to the male dominance of the informal and personal networks one needs to be a part of to be able to access the labour market in the first place. The decision-making power lay in the hands of the male dominated networks who decide who are allowed to enter the job market and who is not. These patriarchal structures

¹⁴⁵ The word WOW is referring to the first letter in the Arabic word “*wāsiṭa*” which translates to “mediator, mediatress, intermediary; mediacy, agency, instrumentally, agent, device, means, medium; expedient; personal connection, intercession.” Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Arabic – English)*, edited by J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (The United States: Spoken Language Service, Inc., Urbana, IL, 1994), 1231.

¹⁴⁶ Aseel Al-Ramahi, “*Wasta* in Jordan: A Distinct Feature of (And a Benefit for) Middle Eastern Society.” *Arab Law Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2008): 38

¹⁴⁷ Al-Ramahi, 36.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Ramahi, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Ramahi, 49.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Noura, Amman, 2018

¹⁵¹ Interview with Hanan, Amman, 2018

¹⁵² Interview with Yasmine, Amman 2018

¹⁵³ Ragui Assad, Caroline Krafft and Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, “Does the Type of Higher Education Affect Labor Market Outcomes? Evidence from Egypt and Jordan,” *High Educ.* 75 (2018): 970.

embedded in society encumber women's partaking in the public life and further the workforce.

5.4.2 To Stand Out in the Crowd

Women put forward grievances concerning the quality of their education and blamed it for being part of why they were not able to get employment or employment in correlation to their educational specification. Nadine, for instance, explained that the skills she obtained through her education were insufficient: "*When I got the job I was sent off to a course by my employer so I could be able to do the tasks I was hired to do.*"¹⁵⁴ I asked her if she found her education relevant for her job, and she replied that she did not.¹⁵⁵ Nadine was far from the only one suffering because of the bad quality of her university education and many young women try to solve this problem by taking training courses (*dawrāt*) after they graduate.

Young women attend training courses in an attempt to stand out in the crowd in order to land a job. The poor quality of education and especially young people's lack of soft skills like customer service, teamwork, how to handle job interviews, and how to be professional at the work place, are making employers hesitant to hire newly graduated people.¹⁵⁶ Soft skills, for instance, are usually not taught in the universities and thus have been the focus of various training courses. Unfortunately, the soft skill training courses do "not have any significant employment impact."¹⁵⁷

Hanan had attended one training course after graduation, however her younger sister had attended as many as six courses in an attempt to find a better job. Without succeeding and only being able to get a job at a call centre, Hanan's sister had decided to leave the labour market and had entered the status as inactive at the age of twenty-three.¹⁵⁸

As for Hanan, who was currently working in the administration of a large international delivery service, the opportunity to go abroad and take a master in business and

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Nadine, Amman, October 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Nadine, Amman, October 2018.

¹⁵⁶ Matthew Groh et al., "The Impact of Soft Skills Training on Female Youth Employment: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Jordan," *IZA journal of Labor & Development* 5, no. 9 (2016): 1.

¹⁵⁷ Matthew Groh et al., "Soft Skills or Hard Cash? The Impact of Training and Wage Subsidy Programs on Female and Youth Employment in Jordan," *The World Bank Impact Evaluation Series* no. 62 (July 2012): 1-36.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Hanan and conversation with Hanan's sister, Raula. Amman 2018.

administration had presented itself. She had decided to go in hopes of advancing in her professional career when she finished. Her family had allowed her to go because she had a male cousin who was already studying at the same university. He had promised to “take care of her,” which means that the male cousin would protect Hanan’s reputation while she was living away from her family.¹⁵⁹ Three of the people I met during my stay in Jordan in 2016 were studying abroad when I returned. It seems to be a choice people make in order to try to become more attractive on the job market.

Yasmine had a very different experience after attending several training courses, also abroad. Coming together with people of different backgrounds educationally, work wise, and culturally had led to personal growth in her experience. Even if the courses she had taken did not directly lead to employment in itself, she believed the courses had been an asset to her work and meant that she could execute her work tasks even better.¹⁶⁰

Even though the training courses may “not have any significant employment impact” they may have an impact on young women’s lives either way, like in the case of Yasmine. The courses are not necessarily useless. The courses are providing young women with new skills and the opportunity to build a network with other young people in the same situation, which may prove valuable in the future. The courses may also have an empowering effect since young women gain awareness about the situation they are in. As Marc Zimmerman argues, to have an understanding “of one’s sociopolitical context” is central to the process of empowerment.¹⁶¹ Young women like Hanan and Yasmine are both very aware of their own situations and are taking action in their respective lives to do their best to create the future they want for themselves.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Hanan, Amman 2018

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Yasmine, Amman 2018

¹⁶¹ Zimmerman, “Psychological Empowerment,” 583.

5.5 Women's Motivation to Enter Employment

There is more to having a job than the financial aspect of employment. To fill up free time and to be with colleagues was frequent answers to the question of what was motivating women to pursue employment. To utilize the degree attained was also a significant motivational factor. It is natural to want to put all the years of hard work at the university to actual use.

Furthermore, women expressed the wish to *be* something. What that entailed was not necessarily clear. However, further conversation usually resulted in the wish of self-expression, a fact also highlighted by Kawar.¹⁶² In a conversation with Selma, she explained that she wanted to work and that she could “do anything” (“*baddī ‘a ‘mal ‘ayyā shī*”). She was longing back to her university days where she could be with her friends and take a break from her family’s interference in the things that she did.¹⁶³ It seems that, in the case of Selma, to have a job in itself was more important than having a job relevant to her educational specification. The little room of freedom was what mattered the most. Being allowed to be independent appears to be one of the most important motivational factors for young women. They want to be able to have some decision-making power over their lives and hope that paid employment may be a way to achieve it.

Yet, most of the women I met wanted to get married and have children, thus the traditional roles as wife and mother were additionally important. To create a room for personal choice within the restrictions inflicted upon women may be the space where women need to figure out how to generate freedom and decision-making power.

¹⁶² Kawar, “Young, Single and Employed,” 53.

¹⁶³ Conversation with Selma, Amman 2018.

6

Women as Symbols

6.1 Woman as Symbols of Progression - Women as Symbols of Tradition

From a young age girls are socialized through the school system to become the type of women the state shapes them to be. Adely argues that “the value of being educated has become as integral to local constructions of modernity and respectability as to a national narrative about progress and development.”¹⁶⁴ Women are symbols of development and progress in Jordan. This notion of women as symbols of progress and development of the country is apparent in the public debate and discourse and is supported by members of the Jordanian royal family, the media and even organizations fighting for women’s rights.¹⁶⁵ “Women and their bodies serve as both symbols and actors in the struggles for moral legitimacy and authority to define progress.”¹⁶⁶

The Jordanian state seems to use the notion of female empowerment as means of measuring the progress and development of the state. Furthermore, there is an ambiguity in this notion. It becomes a depiction of the role women play in the development of the country. This notion does not tell the whole story about gender roles and women’s rights. At the same time as the empowerment of women becomes a marker of how developed Jordan has become, women are also a symbol of tradition, nationality and religious modesty and there are several factors, for example in the county’s legislation and cultural stereotypes of women, that hinder

¹⁶⁴ Adely, *Gendered Paradoxes*, 134.

¹⁶⁵ Adley, 51-52 and 59.

¹⁶⁶ Adley, 59.

women's empowerment rather than urging it.¹⁶⁷ Women are faced with contradictory expectations in society and these contradictory expectations, among other things, hinder female employment.

During the fieldwork the ambiguity was noticeable among women I encountered. Noura was the prime example. She was enthusiastic when she talked about how she saw herself having a job after graduation. But at the same time she considered, as mentioned, her diploma as a means of protection in case of, for example, a divorce. This implies that she saw herself as depending on a husband financially in the future and only if she were to lose her husband would her diploma be of necessity. This places Noura in the tug of war between the notion of education and working women and their empowerment as means and measure of modernity and development and how women at the same time come to represent tradition and modesty.

The reality of women's wishes, desires, and expectations do not concur with the realities of what women face in the pursuit of participation in the workforce. The modernisation and development of the Jordanian state would benefit from more women joining the work force. However, it becomes difficult when the narrative of the workingwoman comes in conflict with the narrative of the housewife. And thus women's expectations of joining the work force after graduating are not met.

The Jordanian journalist Karmal Najjār suggests that women need to be liberated from the notion of “the empowerment of women” (“*tahrīr al-mar'a min ‘at-tamkīn.*”).¹⁶⁸ According to her the problem is that “the empowerment of women,” does not make women free or give women more choices; it gives a woman more obligations. Instead of only being a “prisoner of the house,” the woman becomes a “prisoner of the office” too (“*sijn al-manzil wa sijn al-maktab*”).¹⁶⁹ This does not mean that women should stay home and not keep pursuing paid employment. It rather means that women are struggling because society is not structured around facilitating the workforce participation of women, with the exception of the “female-friendly” occupations in the public sector.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Adley, *Gendered Paradoxes*, 52-53. Al-Mahadin, “Jordanian Women in Education,” 27.

¹⁶⁸ Karmal Najjār, “*tahrīr al-mar'a min ‘at-tamkīn.*” *7iber*, published April 6, 2017, accessed November 8, 2018. <https://www.7iber.com/society/liberating-women-of-empowerment/>

¹⁶⁹ Najjār, “*tahrīr al-mar'a min ‘at-tamkīn.*”

¹⁷⁰ Assaad, Hendy and Yassin, “Gender and the Jordanian Labor Market,” 13.

The roles women are expected to fill as wives and mothers do not seem to correspond with how the workforce is organized. The roles of wife and mother are inherently interlaced with the identity of womanhood. Thus, the roles of wife and mother may be a natural first choice for many Jordanian women, if they are required to or have the opportunity to, choose between staying home and pursuing work. Women end up being torn between expectations and aspirations. It is in the space between the expectations and aspirations they need to find the tools to make change happen in order to move in the direction they wish. Borrowing an expression from Asef Bayat, “the art of presence,” women need to find new ways to “make themselves be heard, seen, felt and realized” in order to induce the process of change and consequently be empowered.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 313.

Conclusion

The “MENA gender paradox” is clearly infused in the Jordanian society. Young women swarm to the universities and the universities’ role in the society is significant. It is forming young women’s lives, it creates a place where women can be young and have a sense of independence. The university years may be perceived as a rite de passage where a woman’s status changes. Even though marriage may still, in most cases, be the marker viewed as the transition to adulthood, a university education changes a girl. In gaining knowledge and skills a girl becomes elevated in her awareness about herself and the society and world around her. Girls bring with them the knowledge and the skills they gain in education when they become women and join the ranks of adulthood.

However, as discussed in this study, a university degree does not necessarily mean a professional career in paid employment. Women end up outside the workforce even if they want to or not. To gain access to paid employment women have to break down firmly established barriers in society. If ruling out the fact that the Jordanian economy does not provide enough jobs neither for women nor men, there is still a number of factors obstructing female employment. Cultural impediments and restrictive social norms, discrimination in the workplace, overcoming the preference for males in employment, and gaining entry to male dominated networks, stands out as pronounced hindrances to female employment in Jordan. Additionally, women are wedged between modernity and tradition and face contradictory expectations put forward by the Jordanian state and further imbibed and reproduced by society.

Structural barriers deeply established in society are standing in the way for female workforce participation. The way the workforce is currently organized does not make allowance for married women with children. Since the “family-friendly” public sector is not hiring as many people as it used to, many women do not have other options in paid employment.

Women are aware of the many barriers hindering them and despite the named barriers; many Jordanian women are determined to work. What motivates them in the search for

employment is financial security, freedom to make their own choices, the opportunity to utilize their education, and a chance to *be* something. By attending higher education, taking extra courses, using *wasta*, by postponing marriage, or moving abroad, women are taking matters into their own hands and may transform the role of woman in the process. By constantly pushing the boundaries of their expected role as woman and what womanhood entails, change may eventually happen. Through the continuous negotiating of the barriers standing in their way and pushing the barriers of expected gender norms, women may be empowered and be able to rearrange their boundaries and barriers of mobilization which are large contributors to the lack of female workforce participation in Jordan.

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