

Gender, Leadership and Empowerment: The Case of Jordanian Women

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ABSTRACT

Having women reach leadership positions and become influential members of society has long been a significant objective of development in Jordan. Despite efforts to empower women in the fields of economy, politics and society as a whole, the percentage of women in leadership roles remains very low. To investigate the various dimensions of women and leadership in Jordan, various Jordanian women leaders from different parts of the kingdom were interviewed. Their responses were analyzed by engaging with aspects of gender, feminist, and leadership theories. While all of the women interviewed hold leadership positions within their respective institutions or communities, the majority of women perceive holding a political position constitutes the highest form of leadership in Jordan. They discuss their experiences and ambitions of running for Parliament and thus perceive being in politics as not only the most visible form of leadership but also the most influential. Despite the predominance of patriarchal norms, feminist consciousness provided women with a sense of agency over their lives, thereby shifting common held beliefs about gender as static.

Keywords: Women, leadership, Jordan, gender, empowerment, agency.

Introduction

Throughout the past years, many efforts were geared towards developmental programs in Jordan. Whether it was through governmental initiatives or through foreign donors, the role of women in the process of development has been of paramount significance. Initiatives to bring about change in the status of women in Jordan was taken up by the government in what is commonly known as state feminism. The most visible national efforts were ones related to enhancing women's economic and political life. Moreover, Jordan's commitments to 'improving the status and opportunities available to women is the subject of government officials' remarks, national media coverage, and analysis by bilateral and international development agencies such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, and United Nations Development Programme' (Shirazi, 2016, p.89).

With reference to gender equality, the overall picture that is being promoted in gender policy documents, reports by government officials, NGOs and media outlets is that of 'progress, indicating that Jordan out performs its neighbors in several important arenas. For example, Jordan's rates of literacy and educational attainment among women are among the highest of Arab countries' (Shirazi, 2016, p.91). However, women's economic participation remains low (UNICEF, 2011; World Bank, 2015). Ongoing efforts are headway to place women in the labor market in jobs that are not limited to 'crafts or other traditionally feminized professions' (Shirazi, 2016, p.91).

Nonetheless, the most visible gap is the one in the political field where Jordan ranked 140 out of 145 countries on the political empowerment scale for the year 2015 (ARDD, 2016, p.3). Despite the introduction of the quota system in the year 2003, the number of women reaching Parliament through open competition remains very low. The percentage of women in Parliament is a staggering 12 %. With reference to female legislators, senior officials and managers, Jordan ranks 120th globally (Goryunova, Scribner, and Madsen, 2017).

Despite the usefulness of focusing on indicators and statistics to measure women's progress across the various

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fields and sectors, there are limitations to 'conceptualizing gender 'equality' as realizing parity of outcomes' (Shirazi, 2016, p.92).

First, while rates of school completion and post-graduate employment are vital reference points, these data points alone do not contribute to an understanding of how gender difference is produced in everyday sites and experiences. Second, if the aim is an increased understanding of social processes that produce gender difference, a narrow focus on parity and on the experiences and trajectories of women is not enough (Shirazi, 2016, p.92).

In Jordan, prevailing values, customs, norms, and cultural beliefs tend to formulate a stereotypical image of women as one who is confined to private sphere. In addition, 'gender culture and patriarchal dominance is supported by social and religious institutions, which reinforce the traditional role of women. This results in many decisive manifestations of political participation in favor of men and the marginalization of women.' (Nahar and Abu Humaidan, 2013, p. 90).

While the low percentage of women in politics is somewhat alarming considering this field as the most powerful in passing legislations that could have positive consequences on the lives of Jordanian women, the picture remains dim in other sectors. With the exception of primary and secondary education, women's appointment to leadership positions in other fields and sectors remains very low. Despite studies and national reports attesting to Jordanian women's competencies in education at the school and university level, their relative absence from leadership positions merits serious attention. As a feminist scholar, I was eager to explore how a number of affluent Jordanian women define leadership and how they challenge normative depictions of womanhood and social expectations in their journey to assert their productive role in society. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the main dynamics that are at play in women's access to leadership positions. I explore Jordanian women's notions of leadership. What does leadership mean to them? How do they perceive themselves as leaders? And most importantly the role that their gender had in their journey towards leadership.

Perspectives on women's empowerment

As leadership is closely related to empowerment, I start by briefly discussing how empowerment is defined. Developmental discourse in the global south has strongly been connected to the concept of empowerment. While empowerment entails helping and working with marginalized social groups in order to aide them in overcoming obstacles and in obtaining certain rights or resources, definitions of empowerment vary. These can be grouped in four categories. The first set focus on the significance of having support from the state in order for empowerment to occur. Amani Saleh (2002) contends that 'empowerment is a form of external support from enlightened authority in society which should look to its citizens with a spirit of responsibility in order to push forward advancements and developments in society' (p.232). The second perspective focuses on the role that empowerment plays in increasing influence and power. Al-Khalaf (2000) identifies empowerment as the 'procedure through which women are granted more power in order to have control and social responsibility over the work they perform to enhance it' (p.1). The third approach emphasized the role that empowerment has on increasing the level of participation. Al- Selmi (2005) identifies empowerment as granting individuals more power: 'meaning granting them more opportunities to participate and to move forward by making use of their full potential in solving work-related issues and in enhancing productivity' (p.254). The last category places more emphasis on the significance of empowerment in raising awareness and developing potential. Melhem (2006) defines empowerment as the freedom of the individual from constraints, encouraging women, motivating them and rewarding them for having initiative and innovation. (p.6). These definitions are useful in exploring how Jordanian women attribute leadership to empowerment. Moreover, they offer a useful starting point to discussions about the relation between empowerment and agency, particularly from a gender and a feminist lens.

Theoretical Framework:

Gender and leadership: Contested debates

Whether we wish to apply the metaphor of the glass ceiling or that of the labyrinth, both are commonly used to stress the manifold obstacles that women face in reaching a leadership positions (Hymowitz and Schellhardt, 1986; Eagly and Carli, 2007). However, while the glass ceiling metaphor implies one-dimensional obstacles that of the labyrinth indicates the various complex dimensions that hinder women's journey towards leadership. 'Within the leadership labyrinth, women encounter multifaceted barriers that not only result in lack of numerical parity between women and men in leadership, but also critical gender differences in the nature of leadership positions' (Ryan et al, 2016 in Goethals and Hoyt, 2017, p. xii.)

Earlier research into gender and leadership focused on essentialised notions of gender where women because of their social roles, physical attributes and negative stereotypes were deemed unfit to become leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002, Heilman, 2001). They did not have leadership qualities in their genes, it was presumed. Later theories discussed the prejudice that society hold against female leaders because of their gender. Their social role is deemed incompatible with the characteristics of leadership, which are male defined. This theoretical perspective was termed Role Congruity Theory (RCT) and was widely pervasive in the seventies. 'According to the role congruity theory and the lack of fit model, bias against female leaders emerges from the conflicting expectations between the female gender role and the leader role' (Eagly and Karau, 2002, Heilman, 2001 in Goethals and Hoyt, 2017, p. xiii.). Moreover, 'This bias results in less favorable attitudes toward female than male leaders and women experiencing greater difficulty than men in attaining top leadership roles and being viewed as effective in these roles (Goethals and Hoyt, 2017, p. xiii). As more research began to surface, focus was shifted to the obstacles that hinder women in reaching leadership positions. Eagly and Carli (2007) explain that 'Many obstacles that women encounter stem from often inequitable divisions of domestic labor and the structure and culture of contemporary organizations (quoted in Goethals and Hoyt, 2017, p. xiii). Goethals and Hoyt add that 'Domestic and child-rearing expectations impose an added burden on women climbing the leadership ladder (2017, p. xiii). Furthermore, according to (Koenig et al., 2011) 'Abundant research demonstrates that people's intuitive notions of leaders are culturally masculine'(quoted in Goethals and Hoyt, 2017, p. xiii).

With the increase in the number of women reaching leadership and top managerial position, much social research was dedicated to the topic of 'sex/gender and leadership' (Vecchio, 2002, p. 644). Questions such as 'Do males and females differ in the forms of leadership they exhibit? Do the two differ in effectiveness in managerial positions?' began to be raised to the surface. However, despite the wealth of research that delved into the relationship between leadership and gender, Robert Vecchio states that 'As in the case with superficial and simplistic approaches, the equating of major dimensions of leadership with gender and stereotypes has not demonstrably advanced understanding' (Vecchio, 2002, p. 644). Furthermore, he concludes that 'it has not been demonstrated that either sex is clearly advantaged with respect to operating as a leader. Strong claims of masculine or feminine advantage do not have the data to support them' (2002, p.655). Within the context of Jordan, perspectives on women and leadership tend to be confined within the parameters of biological determinism and role congruity theory that stress how women's biological and social characteristics do not make them fit to take on a leadership role.

Gender as doing: a viable conceptualization

Rather than viewing gender as an ascribed attribute, I propose using an ethnomethodologist view of gender as a conscious doing. I use gender as defined by Joan Scott as 'a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power' (Scott, 1986, p.1067). This shift is mainly intended in order to stress on agency as a significant factor in the construction of a gendered identity.

This particular notion of agency can best be understood by thinking about the social construction of gender via

engaging with feminist ethnomethodology. To clarify this, ethnomethodologists:

See individuals as ‘members’ (of society) whose everyday interpretive practices collaboratively constitute the social. Members are ‘practical methodologists’ engaged in active sense-making, but as competent members of society we share basic assumptions, common-sense ideas about how things are and how things are done. Our shared social knowledge makes daily life intelligible to us, and we expect people’s actions to be ‘accountable’, to be understandable in terms of accepted views of social reality (Rahman and Jackson, 2010, p.160)

Ethnomethodologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman, view gender as an ‘emergent feature of social situations’ (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126). They argue that, ‘doing gender means making it happen, “creating” differences between men and women that have nothing to do with biology. Yet, once created, these differences reinforce the “essentialness” of gender’. Within this theorizing, “A person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others’ (1987, p.140).

Moreover, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise argue that we become social through ‘the acquisition of a social self, which is reflexively constructed through everyday interactions with others. Rather than being socialized into predetermined norms and roles, self and social milieu are interdependent, both constructed through ongoing social interaction in which selves subtly evolve and change’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p.110). Gender is thus ‘situationally variable’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p.110). Where the vast majority might try to ‘do gender’ conventionally, that is, by acting and behaving according to social expectations of one’s gender, there are those who actively choose to defy such norms. According to West’s and Zimmerman’s argument ‘to *do* gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*’ (1987, p.136, emphasis in original).

Methodology:

In order to explore the gendered dimensions of leadership, a targeted sample of 30 Jordanian women leaders from different parts of the kingdom (Amman, Karak, and Irbid) were interviewed using qualitative research methods. Face-to-face interviews that lasted between 45-90 minutes were conducted. While leadership is a vastly loose term, I use it here to denote individuals who are employed in decision-making positions within their working environment. To be more specific I choose to borrow this precise definition of leadership, ‘the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members’ (House et al., 2004, p.56). All women hold leadership positions in their respective communities. Some are in education, politics, some are heads of associations, and others are members of city councils. More details on the positions they hold are provided in table (2) below. The reason why women were chosen from various parts of the kingdom was to explore the geographic factor on women reaching leadership positions in their respective communities. Verbal consent of all participants was first granted prior to the process of data collection. No direct reference to interviewees is made in this research as all real identities are protected.

The interviews centered on the following themes:

- *Main supporting factors*
- *Greatest challenges*
- *Available supporting resources*
- *Impact of surrounding environment*
- *Impact of social roles on the lives of women*

Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. They were then analyzed and grouped according to dominant and recurring themes. These themes were then read alongside feminist, gender and leadership theories in order to better understand the underlying reasons and obstacles that stand in the way of Jordanian women’s aspirations to leadership.

Table (1): Background information of participants

| Item | Amman | Karak | Irbid |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Number of women | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Age group | | | |
| 25-34 | 2 | - | 1 |
| 35-44 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 45-54 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 55- above | 1 | - | - |
| Educational status | | | |
| No education | | | |
| Secondary education | - | - | 4 |
| Diploma | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Bachelors | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| Higher education | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Social status | | | |
| Single | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Married | 7 | 7 | 9 |
| Widowed | - | 1 | - |
| Divorced | - | - | - |

Table (2): Participants by occupation

| Amman | Karak | Irbid |
|--|--|---|
| Head of charitable association/ social activist | Head of charitable association/ former school principal | Head of a cooperative association/ project director |
| Head of cooperative association | Former diplomatic attaché/ Jordanian Embassy/ Qatar | Manager of environmental awareness campaign |
| Member of city council | Head of cultural directorate | Director of a center for special needs |
| Lawyer and former member of city council | Head of Royal Jordanian airlines office | Head of cooperative association /head of women's union |
| Head of cooperative association and project coordinator | Head of Petra News Agency | Project owner |
| Head of charitable association | Head of delivery department/Karak Public Hospital | Former employee in Ministry of Council Affairs/ head of charitable association |
| School principal | Member of city council | Director of Princess Basma Center for Development |
| School principal and former Member of Parliament | Executive director of a youth institution for training | Head of charitable association/ member of charity union |
| Former member of city council, current Member of Parliament | Principal of a secondary school | Member of city council |
| Head of charitable association | Head of directorate of education/ head of elections committee | Director of a developmental center |

Main Findings:

Having analyzed the responses of the women under study, certain themes appear to the surface. These include the following: the challenges that patriarchal norms have on women's aspirations to lead and its impact on women's desire for independence, politics as the highest form of leadership and most importantly the significance of having a feminist consciousness as the driving force behind Jordanian women's ambitions for leadership. These themes were common

among most women regardless of which part of Jordan they came from. I shall discuss each theme in details.

Patriarchal norms remain significant barriers to women's aspirations to lead

'To start with, traditions, customs and patriarchal society are a huge obstacle, no matter how much we try to overcome this, and despite the change and development gradually things that were rejected became accepted.' (Tamara, a 45-year-old woman from Irbid)

Perhaps this quote can capture some of the struggles that women discuss in their journeys towards becoming leaders. The social division of labor that places women in charge of domestic duties and men in charge of public affairs is a characteristic of patriarchal societies. Although the participants discussed with fervor their journeys towards becoming leaders, the impact of patriarchy on the choices they made was evident. All participants are employees, independent and have great aspirations for a future where they can be more visible in decision-making positions whether it is through their jobs or through pursuing a career in politics. However, these women realize the implications of living in a patriarchal society where the demarcations between gender roles are highly ingrained. Eman, a 42-year-old woman from Amman exclaims:

The greatest obstacles that I struggle with is the multiple roles that I have to carry out. My role in the house, my responsibilities towards my children and those outside the house. I am in a constant struggle. What are my priorities? Do I leave this at the expense of that? Sometimes my children's delay in education or development makes me want to stop. I feel that I am building a future for myself at the expense of my children and my family. I am afraid that I will lose a great deal although I try to balance things and to teach my children to be more independent. This is something that I greatly struggle with.

Differences in gender roles are clearly defined in traditional societies and efforts to destabilize them are by no means an easy task. Nonetheless, these women refuse to be confined to the private sphere attending to their home and children while their husbands are enjoying the many privileges of employment and being exposed to the outside world. They are adamant on forging their own path and in developing their skills and becoming more dependent on their selves. However, they realize that their self-determination to development is going to be filled with many challenges.

Many of the participants discussed the tremendous pressure that they had to endure as working mothers. Having to comply with society's acceptable perceptions of motherhood, they knew that that they had to place their children and their domestic duties and responsibilities first. They try negotiating their place in the public sphere in a manner that does not conflict with their roles as mothers and wives. Hence, choosing to be in the public sphere entails great compromise and considerable negotiation skills. Sana, a 37 year-old project owner from Karakays:

The culture of shame and the attack on women in the rural area I live in is an issue I have to deal with. I face considerable criticism from society because of my work. 'This is the work of men,' I am often told. 'Does she not have men behind her?' I was able to overcome such obstacles by taking my children with me and through the support of my husband. Gradually with my persistence they started accepting me.

Tala, a 52-year-old woman from Irbid objects:

'A successful woman in society is always being attacked (what is she gaining, she has left her house, lost her children). The war is initiated because I am a woman.'

This sense of self-sacrifice that many women are having to undertake is best understood within the socio-cultural context of Arab societies at large. In the majority of cases, a person is seen as part of a family, a clan or a tribe, and is seldom viewed as an individual (Grafton, 2012; Barakat, 1993). The self thus becomes a collective one consisting of a multitude of components. Consequently, a person is required to be conscious of all the layers that make up his/her identity at all times. Clarifying this, Sharifa Zuhur explains that, 'the Arab states embody various patriarchal structures and Arab society clings to a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties toward the family precede their rights as individuals' (Zuhur, 2003, p.2).

In addition to the burdens that these women leaders are having to face due to the unequal division of social labor,

another dimension of their struggle is the perceptions that patriarchal societies espouse about leadership positions. Leadership is primarily perceived as gendered (Eagly and Carli, 2007, Goethals and Hoyt, 2017). It is a quality that is most often associated with being a man. The above rhetorical question that is often projected to women who choose to take on a public role, *'Does she not have men behind her?* delineates the divide that patriarchal societies place between public and private. While women's presence in public domain is generally welcomed, however, the moment they demand more by gaining leadership positions they are perceived to be stepping uncharted domains. They thus need to be cautioned. Frustrated by such social biases, Faten, a 32 year-old woman from Amman discussed the huge negative connotations that this question entails. She complains, "It is as if wanting to have a noticeable presence in society has become a marker of moral bankruptcy". Sandra Nasser El-Dine (2018) explains how "the participation of women in the public sphere is an issue which activates the oppositional category...: masculinity versus femininity" (p.22). Femininity has long been associated with the private sphere and masculinity with the public. Within patriarchal constructions of gender, active participation in public is seen as a threat to women's femininity. Nuha, a 38 year old woman from Amman complains: *'At times, I find the way societies perceives women leaders (she is masculine, rebellious and wants to take on the role of men) as a great barrier'*. Moreover, 44-year-old Rania from Karak adds: *'the way those in charge look at me as a woman: they see men as more leaders than women in the way they distribute roles and supervisory duties. Men tend to be given these roles regardless of their jobs and experiences.'*

Objecting to this notion of gendered leadership particularly in political posts, Samia, a 53 year old woman from Amman complains: *'I wasn't given the post, because I am a woman, had I been a man the situation would have been different since they do not have trust in women's abilities. There are some people who did not vote for me because I am a woman.'*

Despite the lack of research that indicates that men make better leaders than women, this common view remains dominant in many societies and in particular in traditional ones. Moreover, 'as they are defined as more emotional than rational, Arab women are sometimes considered to lack the capacity to act independently, which can be used as a justification for restricting their autonomy in public places' (El-Dine, 2018, p.23).

The narratives that these women paint of their struggles to lead are in line with Eagly and Carli's (2007) and Goethals and Hoyt (2017) theorization of women and leadership. Women are not highly visible in leadership positions not because of inherent features or characteristics. Rather, it is social structures and unequal division of labor that women have to endure because of their gender that place them at a disadvantage with their male counterparts (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Moreover, domestic and childrearing responsibilities are primary obstacles in women's ambitions to lead (Goethals and Hoyt, 2017).

In all these accounts, women are having to negotiate their social identities as women, their roles and responsibilities towards their families with their own desires for self-fulfillment through a career and a leadership position. Implicit within these negotiation processes is the notion that gender is an active "doing". It is not a mere attribute that is socially assigned to a particular sex. It involves considerable hard work. Aware of the labels and burdens that society places on women as mothers first most and second as individuals, the way these women navigate their way through these restrictions and limitations demonstrates that gender is dynamic. Through listening to their narratives, they did not present themselves as passive victims. Instead, they chose to look for alternative mechanisms of coping with societal restrictions that does not compromise their ambitions to lead.

Earning a career in politics is perceived as the highest form of leadership

"I want to win in the elections and become a representative for my community as it will provide me with more opportunities to accomplish the goals of the association that I have established." (Rawia, a 47-year-old woman from Karak)

While the majority of the women interviewed had ambitions to run for Parliament or to hold a political position, most of them viewed their civic involvement through their careers as a prerequisite for their involvement in politics.

These women have shown impressive networking and interpersonal skills in carrying out their tasks and responsibilities. Most importantly, they saw their leadership positions in the various domains of education, associations, and civil services as a step closer towards reaching parliament. Hence, many of the women perceive their current nonpolitical forms of leadership in their respective communities as a gatekeeping tool towards entering politics and thus being actively involved in the decision making process on a higher level (ARDD, 2016, p.4). Therefore, when it comes to leadership, there was an apparent form of hierarchy where political forms of leadership represented in the form of a Member of Parliament taking on a political post is perceived as a higher and a more significant form of leadership than ones in other fields. Twenty women out of thirty talked about their ambitions and experiences of running for a seat in Parliament. This is not to denigrate other forms of leadership as non-significant, rather their eagerness to enter the realm of politics could be seen as a tool to promote for a higher visibility for women in politics.

'My desire is to complete my higher education, and continue in participating in community based organizations and then run for the next parliamentary elections' (Basma, a 49 year-old woman from Irbid) declares.

For these women, securing a seat in Parliament is perceived as a form empowerment. The privileges that come with being an MP grants them more agency in becoming leaders and in executing their working plans and agendas. The majority of women conceptualize empowerment as a form of power and an opportunity to realize full potential. Their perceptions of empowerment are in line with Al Khalaf's (2000) definition where he sees it as 'granting women more power to have control and social responsibility' (p.1). They are also in line with Al-Selmi's (2005) definition who sees empowerment as 'having more opportunities to participate and to move forward by making use of the full potential... and in enhancing productivity' (p.254). For two thirds of the women this power or this form of empowerment is best gained through being in politics and all the material and social privileges that such a domain provides (high salaries and more social influence). Moreover, their eagerness to be elected as Members of Parliament is also indicative of the form of power that they wish to achieve. While all branches of government (legislative, executive and judicial) are equally significant, it is often the legislative branch that tends to be perceived as the most powerful.

'Vote for me and see how I will help you and make your voices heard', Hanan, a 45 year old woman from Karak states.

Nonetheless, the journeys of all the women interviewed was not devoid of obstacles. When discussing their experiences in running for a public office, tribalism features as a strong theme. Many of the women discussed the way tribalism played a significant role in either helping them reach a leadership position or in preventing them from doing so. Tribalism is a defining feature of Jordanian society. Despite the socioeconomic changes that have taken place in Jordan over the past several decades as a result of globalization and modernization, tribalism has remained a dominant characteristic and an important part of Jordanian identity (Pettygrove, 2006). While it may seem safe to argue that tribalism is characteristic of rural societies, in Jordan it extends to urban cities. However, it remains more dominant in the villages and cities that are located outside of the capital Amman. The dynamics and dimensions of tribalism are most visible in the political field (ARDD, 2016, p.3). During parliamentary elections, voting rather than being based on competence and qualifications becomes centered on the tribe that the candidate descends from. Members of the same tribe tend to vote for each other following the principle of tribal solidarity. Nonetheless, tribalism tends to favor men over women. As is the case with the majority of women who decided to be elected to public office.

While having women reach public office could serve as an accomplishment for Jordanian women, it is not necessarily a feminist gain. Here, one cannot help but ask the following: Does a higher proportion of women in public office guarantee a better future for the majority of women in Jordan? Does it serve the interests of female Members of Parliament to push forward a feminist agenda at the expense of a national one? These are all questions that require deep thought and evaluation. Furthermore, while Jordanian women are gradually becoming visible in the political field, their representations did not change the way they are perceived from the public. Nahar and Abu Humaidan for instance argue that 'although the quota system has brought women into Jordan's parliament, the presence of women there really only represents a façade of democracy and is purely cosmetic, as the majority of citizens do not believe in the

importance of the political role of women.’ (2013, p. 92).

Feminist consciousness is instrumental in women’s ambitions for leadership

‘I consider myself a leader through the way I can impact and change society’, Fadwa a 49 year old woman from Amman declares.

The vast majority of those interviewed represent striking examples of ambitious women who desire to leave their blueprints in their respective communities through the various leadership positions that they hold. Nonetheless, it is significant to understand the underlying reasons behind their motivation in wanting to do so. I find it very interesting that when discussing their current situations, their plans and the obstacles they encountered in their personal; and professional lives, most of the women mention feminist consciousness as a primary driving force in their lives. As feminism is perceived differently across societies and cultures, I choose to borrow from Mervat Hatem conceptualization of feminism as ‘a set of analytical and critical tools that can be used to enhance women’s understanding/consciousness of themselves, and their relations with other important national, regional, and international groups of men and women. Seen in this light, feminism can improve women’s agency and inform the definition of their strategies for change’ (Hatem, 2014, p.4). I find this definition useful as it stresses feminism as ‘a set of tools’ thus involving some sort of ‘action’ based on a certain ‘understanding of one’s position’. More importantly, it acknowledges the significations of locating ones consciousness within the national, regional and international context.

The majority of women stress their active role in bringing about change in their lives. Haya, a 35-year-old woman from Karak explains:

I was able to help many women in order to have a better social status after they were only doing domestic chores like maids and who did not know that they had more rights. I was able to hold their hands and show them the path to become leaders and trainers and to have a leadership role.

In their discussion of their ambitions to lead, social agency features a significant tool of empowerment. As opposed to a top-down approach that advocates for social change through institutions, and wider social structures, the majority of the participants discussed their agency as individuals in instigating the process of social change. Nadia, a 49-year-old woman from Amman states:

‘The most important thing is that a woman does not wait for anyone to help her reach where she wants to be or to become a leader. Nothing will make her become who she desires except her work and persistence.’

Speaking about the limitations that women face in striving to become leaders, Malak, a 50-year-old woman from Irbid asserts:

Surrendering to reality is the greatest problem that we have. Women surrender to surrounding circumstances and limit their role in labor force. They need to realize that they have a great role to play in the public sphere and in the success and development of society in their region. They should not limit their role to domestic sphere, rather it is work in the public sphere that will develop their capacities.

In all these accounts, feminist consciousness features as a strong drive behind women's bid for autonomy. Regardless of the many obstacles that the women face from biased social attitudes to the lack of material resources, they were determined to forge their own path. They challenged their current circumstances and were eager to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Through their resistance to common held views about women and their capabilities, and the mechanisms of coping with such obstacles they were indirectly reinforcing the interactive and dynamic notion of gender.

First, it is my desire to take on an active role in society to help out and have a positive impact on my society. Second of all, there is a lack of women leaders that work on activating women’s role in society and in establishing young women leaders or activating the role of social or political participation in a better manner Women truly need empowerment in various fields, Kifa, a 32-year-old woman from Karak passionately speaks about her motivation in being visible in the public sphere.

The women under study persist in their efforts and ambitions to lead and to be effective leaders in their respective communities. Strategically, they refuse the way society socializes them into submissive beings who are solely confined to private sphere overwhelmed by domestic duties and responsibilities. These women see agency represented in earning an education, reaching politics and accumulating economic wealth. Realizing that a political field means gaining tremendous visibility and power, they seek to have hold of the necessary resources to reach that goal. With overwhelming male representation in the political field, the majority of the women perceive entering this field is the ultimate way of being heard and most importantly of asserting their presence.

Conclusion:

In exploring the various agendas of Jordanian government in relation to the portfolio of women, it becomes clear that their primary focus remains on legislation, policy making and improving the materialistic conditions of Jordanian women. Their primary purposes thus revolve around notions of empowerment in the economic, political, legal and educational domains. Despite the numerous contributions of the Jordanian government and the various NGOs at raising a multitude of issues that are related to the lives of Jordanian women, they have either (un)intentionally ignored or neglected a wide array of feminist debates about the cultural and social dimension regarding women's access to leadership positions. Issues pertaining to women in Jordan are most commonly addressed through discussions of practical and short-term outcomes without a firm grounding in feminist research that delves into the root cause of the issue. Serious investment is thus needed in feminist sociological research that could identify and address the major obstacles that women face in society and in their ambitions to lead. This is why I chose to engage with feminist and gender theories in my analysis of the responses to Jordanian women in an attempt to destabilize common held biological determinist views about gender as static and unchanging.

In the exploration of the lives of thirty Jordanian women, it was revealed that they represent striking examples of intelligent women who possess considerable skills and experience and who are eager to take on a leadership role that fulfills their aspirations and realizes their potential. As opposed to the top-down approach that looks into the ways institutions and wider social structures bring about change in the lives of social members, I was eager to investigate how these women managed to forge their own path and secure a leadership post in their respective communities and in light of various challenges and circumstances. Having a sense of awareness about their gendered identities as women and the limitations that patriarchal Jordanian society imposes on them, the women under study were able to negotiate their roles and responsibilities as mothers and wives in turn for more autonomy and an opportunity to become leaders.

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النوع الاجتماعي، القيادة والتمكين: (حالة المرأة الأردنية)

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ملخص

لطالما كان وصول المرأة إلى المناصب القيادية، وأن تكون عنصراً فاعلاً في المجتمع هدفاً هاماً للتنمية في الأردن، وعلى الرغم من الجهود المبذولة لتمكين المرأة في مجالات الاقتصاد والسياسة والمجتمع ككل، فإن النسبة المئوية للنساء في الأدوار القيادية لا تزال منخفضة للغاية. للبحث في الأبعاد المختلفة للمرأة والقيادة في الأردن، وتمت مقابلة قيادات أردنيات من مختلف أنحاء المملكة. تم تحليل ردودهن من خلال الانخراط في جوانب من نظريات النوع الاجتماعي والنسوية والقيادة. بالرغم من أن جميع النساء اللاتي تمت مقابلتهن يشغلن مناصب قيادية داخل مؤسساتهن أو مجتمعاتهن المحلية إلا أن غالبية النساء ينظرن إلى المواقع السياسية على أنها أهم أشكال القيادة في الأردن، ناقشت السيدات تجاربهن وطموحاتهن في الترشح للبرلمان، وبالتالي كن ينظرن إلى أن السياسة ليس فقط الشكل الأكثر وضوحاً للقيادة ولكن أيضاً الأكثر تأثيراً، على الرغم من هيمنة المعايير الأبوية، فإن الوعي النسوي وفر للسيدات شعوراً بالتحكم في حياتهن، وبالتالي تحويل المعتقدات الشائعة حول النوع الاجتماعي كتكوين ثابت.

الكلمات الدالة: المرأة، القيادة، الأردن، النوع الاجتماعي، التمكين، الفاعلية الفردية.

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