

Obstacles to Women's Political Empowerment in Jordan: Family, Islam, and Patriarchal Gender Roles

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Abstract

Recent developments in women's legislative rights in Jordan, and rising interest in women's issues throughout the world, have sparked interest in women's political participation. The purpose of this study is to investigate why, despite numerous advancements for women in Jordanian society, women have not gained greater representation in political processes. This study is based primarily on interviews with 15 Jordanian women between the ages of 18 and 36, as well as interviews with 6 professionals in the field of women's studies in Jordan. The results of these interviews were analyzed within a theoretical framework provided by literary sources. Research was focused on four independent variables—family, Islam, women's civil society organizations, and the quota for women in Parliament introduced in 2003—and the ways in which they inhibit or assist women's political participation. Political participation in this study denotes participation, in roles of decision-making and leadership, in both civil society and political processes. The results of the research indicate that the family structure and the process of socialization within the family serve as obstacles to women's political empowerment, as does the system of Islamic values in Jordan. The activities of women's civil society organizations in Jordan hamper women's abilities to achieve empowerment because they do not facilitate women's participation in decision-making roles. The women's quota in Parliament facilitates—and is a necessary but imperfect first step to—women's political empowerment. Women are still widely perceived, by both men and women, as less-capable of serving in leadership roles. Analysis of the findings indicates that the barriers to women's empowerment lie in the social structure and value systems of Jordanian society—namely patriarchal gender roles. Patriarchal gender roles are perpetuated through socialization in the family—which is the central unit of Jordanian society—and are carried out by Islam and within other areas of society. Legislative and economical gains have not effectively improved women's political empowerment because they do not address gender roles or societal perceptions of women, and thus do not allow women to surmount the social barriers to equal participation.

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Introduction

Peek beneath the surface of the numerous conventions on women's rights adopted by the Jordanian government in recent years, and the activity of numerous women's civil society organizations in Jordan, and one will discover that not much has changed regarding social perceptions of women's abilities. The substantial influx into Jordan of financial aid from international donors and the activities of the women's organizations have not fully empowered women. Despite the apparent equality between men and women in Jordanian society, women remain noticeably inactive in the political sphere. With the establishment, in 2003, of a quota for women in Parliament, six women gained seats in Parliament; before the quota only one woman has ever been elected to Parliament. Women have succeeded in winning some seats at the level of local municipal councils, but women still comprise only a fraction of all elected government officials. There are many factors which suggest that women's participation in politics should be much higher than it is. Since 1989, Jordanian state and society have undergone rapid liberalization, democratization, and modernization. Civil society organizations dedicated to women's issues have blossomed in Jordan, and many legislative advances have been made regarding women's rights. The Jordanian constitution protects gender equality, and women have rights to suffrage and to run for election at all levels of the government. Women are increasingly active in most sectors of the workforce, and the number of university-educated women is at least as high as it is for men. Furthermore, large amounts of aid are being poured into women's organizations, campaigns for raising awareness of women's rights and abilities, and training programs to empower women in business and politics. However, the tribal and religious social structures—and the gender roles they endorse—have remained largely unchanged in spite of the advances in the area of gender issues over the past decade. Increasing women's political participation and empowerment in Jordan is an important aspect of social change and modernization, and requires an analysis of the underlying values that shape Jordanian society.

Scholars continue to question, but have yet to satisfactorily answer, why women's empowerment at the economic and educational levels has not translated into women's political empowerment. Social factors—tribalism, religion, family—and political factors play

an important role in shaping women's abilities to achieve total empowerment. The status of women within the Jordanian family and tribal structures shapes their status in the public sphere, and thus their abilities to succeed in politics. Emphasis needs to be placed on the distinction between social and practical barriers. Many practical barriers, which exist primarily in the legal and educational systems, have been reduced, while social barriers remain intact. Both types of barriers must be accounted for in order to completely understand women's political empowerment.

Educational and economic empowerment have not translated into political empowerment of women in Jordan. Women have not achieved political empowerment because of the persistence of social obstacles. Tribal and Islamic values, which are based inherently on patriarchal values, persist in Jordan and continue to limit women's political participation and empowerment. Improvements in women's practical rights have not changed gender roles, and thus have not eliminated the social barriers. The quota, as a legislative measure aimed to increase women's political participation and representation, is an interesting case to study. Although legislative reforms have been mostly insufficient to politically empower women because they address only practical inequalities, the quota may serve as a potential legislative mechanism for breaking down socially constructed gender roles and thus empowering women.

When discussing empowerment it is important to clearly define what is meant by 'empowerment.' Empowerment in this study is defined as gaining equal access to, and occupying, roles of decision-making and power. Whereas women who participate in an organization but do not have any say in decision-making are not empowered, women who are able to voice their own opinions and make decisions are empowered. Empowerment in the public sphere entails equal representation at the individual level—each individual's voice carries the same weight—and at the group level—the group is fully and fairly incorporated into decision-making processes. Decision-making roles are those in which the individual or group is able to exercise agency and power. Empowerment will also be defined as practical or strategic, where practical refers to economic, legislative, and educational; and strategic refers to social status and agency.

A second crucial definition is of the term ‘political participation.’ In order to fully understand women’s participation in decision-making processes, political participation will be used to denote participation in the public sphere. The public sphere encompasses government, political processes, and civil society. This is in contrast to the private sphere, which encompasses family, extended family, and tribe. Islamic values are also included in the private sphere, because as a value system they are initially established in the family or tribe. Women’s roles in the private sphere directly dictate their roles in the public sphere, and the structure of interactions in the private sphere affects the structure of interactions in the public sphere.

This study will analyze four factors—family, Islam, women’s civil society organizations, and the quota for women’s seats in Parliament—and their affects on women’s empowerment in the public sphere. By understanding the factors that perpetuate social values about the appropriate gender roles, I will attempt to clarify the reasons that development of practical rights has not improved women’s social status. These four factors impede women’s political participation and prevent the development of women’s strategic empowerment. Women’s participation in the public sphere continues to be limited to roles in which women are subordinate to men, because these factors perpetuate patriarchal gender roles. Women have achieved participation but not decision-making status, which means that they are not truly empowered. Furthermore, traditional gender roles continue to be reinforced because women do not have the power to create radical social change.

Theoretical Framework

Abla Amawi argues, in *Against All Odds* (2001) that democracy in Jordan is present in form but not in content, which is especially true for the specific conditions surrounding women’s political participation.¹ This distinction between form and content characterizes the nature of women’s participation in the public sphere—women have rights and agency in form, but not in content. Women have legal equality with men, they are active in the workforce and in education, and there is a large body of women’s civil society

¹ Abla Amawi, *Against All Odds: Jordanian Women, Elections, and Political Empowerment*, Amman: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2001.

organizations—these create the appearance of equality, freedom, and empowerment, but they are only a front. Beneath the surface of modernization, women in Jordan lack fundamental equality, primarily as a result of the persistence of patriarchal values and gender roles. Women are still widely absent from decision-making processes, and are still perceived as incapable of serving as leaders.

Ibtesam Al-Atiyat makes a similar distinction between form and content in her analysis of the Jordanian women's movement.² Al-Atiyat analyzes the success of the women's movement in the context of women's practical and strategic interests. Practical interests are those relating to financial and legal needs; practical rights ensure women's abilities to earn an income and to be protected under the law. Strategic interests relate to social values and perceptions of appropriate gender roles; strategic rights entail equal social status and the freedom to participate fully in decision-making processes. Al-Atiyat argues that, although women in Jordan have enjoyed significant improvements in some respects—improved legislation, increased awareness about violence against women—their progress in decision-making and participation in the public sphere has “remained limited.”³ Thus, although women have gained practical rights, they have not gained strategic rights. Al-Atiyat and other scholars in the field have identified this disparity between the increase in practical rights for women and the lack of change regarding social views of women. This distinction between practical and strategic rights provides a useful framework with which to explain the failure of legislative and economic advancements to politically empower women in Jordan. It is within this framework that I will analyze women's political participation in Jordan. Jordanian women's participation in the public sphere can be understood at the levels of practical or strategic rights. Although women in Jordan are voting and participating in women's organizations, at the level of strategic interests they have not succeeded in changing social values about the appropriate roles of women. Although it is now acceptable for women to become educated, to work, and to participate in voluntary organizations, both women and

² Ibtesam Al-Atiyat, *The Women's Movement in Jordan: Activism, Discourses, and Strategies*, Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003, 27.

³ Al-Atiyat, 78.

men continue to view women as incapable of or ill-suited to occupy decision-making positions.

Al-Atiyat's review of previous civil society theories is useful for understanding the inter-connected but distinct spheres of identity and action in Jordan, which are, in general, identified as public and private. Al-Atiyat refutes most of the previous civil society theories as inappropriate for analyzing Jordanian civil society because they cannot account for the particular confluence of social spheres that exists in Jordan.⁴ The underlying definitions of the spheres of society are nevertheless useful, and provide a framework for understanding the realms in which women act and develop as individuals. Al-Atiyat agrees with other scholars who argue that "the domain of kinship cannot be separated from the domain of politics" in Jordan.⁵ Al-Atiyat argues against definitions of Jordanian civil society that include only formal institutions, because in Jordan informal tribal, familial, and religious groups serve many of the same functions as formal civil society organizations.⁶ It is in this context that I will argue for the centrality of the family in establishing patriarchal gender roles. Al-Atiyat is correct when she argues that the private sphere in Jordanian society assumes a large role, and bears heavily on actions in the public sphere. The family or tribe in Jordan is an all-encompassing social structure which provides fully for the basic needs of its members, and thus negates the need for or ability to dissent.

In order to understand the values that underlie Jordan's social structure, it is necessary to understand patriarchy and its affects on gender roles and relationships. I will be working with Hisham Sharabi's analysis and definitions of patriarchy and neopatriarchy, found in *Neopatriarchy: A theory of distorted change in Arab society* (1988). Sharabi characterizes Jordan as a neopatriarchal society, which means that it is neither modern nor fully patriarchal, but bears characteristics of both.⁷ Many of the characteristics that Sharabi associates with patriarchal and neopatriarchal societies hold true in Jordan society. The neopatriarchal or patriarchal society is characterized by the dominance of the father, who is the center of the

⁴ Al-Atiyat, 43.

⁵ Al-Atiyat, 43.

⁶ Al-Atiyat, 43-4.

⁷ Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A theory of distorted change in Arab society*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

family the ultimate authority in everything.⁸ The relationship between the father and child or man and woman in patriarchal societies is vertical.⁹

The strength and breadth of patriarchal values in Jordanian society means that gender roles and a preoccupation with gender relations bear heavily on actions and behaviors in all spheres of society. Gender plays a large role in the construction and operation of the state in Jordanian society. Nadjie S. Al-Ali summarizes Connell (1990), who argues that the state, in the Arab world, embodies “gender regimes.” According to Connell, the state is “the central institutionalization of gendered power,” and “gender dynamics are a major force” in the construction of the state, both historically and in contemporary politics.¹⁰ In some respects this is true, as far as the Jordanian government perpetuates patriarchal gender roles. However, one can also argue that it is the family or tribe in Jordanian society which institutionalizes gender roles. This is particularly true given that the private sphere in Jordan, which is comprised primarily of family or tribe, is expansive and extends widely into the public sphere.

Sharabi’s analysis of the structure of the family and tribe in patriarchal and neopatriarchal societies is useful for understanding the process of socialization that takes place within the family. Sharabi argues that democratic relations tend to be associated with nuclear families, while controlling relations are associated with extended families and tribes.¹¹ Sharabi identifies the shift from tribal to nuclear family structures as the greatest threat to the persistence of patriarchy; where patriarchal relationships are characterized by subordination, relationships in the nuclear family are characterized as democratic.¹² However, in Jordan, the proliferation of nuclear families in urban areas has not reduced the strength of patriarchy in influencing social values and family relationships. Sharabi’s dichotomy between tribe and nuclear family is too simple. Dr. Amal Sabbagh, a former member of the JNCW, argues that nuclear families in Jordan are not inherently more democratic than tribes or extended

⁸ Sharabi, 7.

⁹ Sharabi, 7.

¹⁰ Robert Connell, “The State, Gender and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal,” *Theory and Society* 9 (5, 1990): 529-31, quoted by Nadjie S. Al-Ali, *Gender and Civil Society in the Middle East, International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5.2 (July 2003): 229.

¹¹ Sharabi, 49.

¹² Sharabi, 31.

families.¹³ Nuclear families in the neopatriarchal society are more democratic in appearance, but are still wholly structured by the patriarchal values of the tribal system of which the nuclear family is a subunit. In Jordan, even where tribes have disappeared, the extended family continues to play a major role in raising children, and socialization patterns within the nuclear family continue to reflect those of the tribe.¹⁴

Although my scope of analysis encompasses both government and civil society, theories of civil society that address women's movements are useful in contextualizing the way women participate in Jordanian civil society, which comprises one of the main realms of women's participation in the public sphere. Al-Atiyat reviews the main feminist critiques of the New Social Movement Theory, one of which is that it is problematic to consider women's movements as part of other new social movements.¹⁵ There are a number of reasons that feminist theories argue for considering women's movements as distinct from other social movements—for one, there are specific problems facing women based on socially constructed gender roles and hierarchies.¹⁶ The importance of this critique is that it stresses the need for considering the role of “gender hierarchies in the formation and the development, as well as in the praxis and discourse” of the women's movement.¹⁷ Another reason for considering women's movements as a distinct form of social movement is that analyses of most social movements are based on an assumption of “rational choice theory,” which ignores the role of power, social sacrifice, and structural conflicts in influencing an individual's actions.¹⁸ This critique is crucial in the context of Jordanian women's participation in the public sphere. As I will argue, the key factors that impede women's political participation are based on deeply ingrained social values that are internalized by the individual to the extent that she does not perceive a problem. Choices to participate or not participate are based for the most part on these values, and things like social sacrifice and the structure of power heavily influence the actions of individuals (especially women) in

¹³ Amal Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

¹⁴ Al-Atiyat, 75.

¹⁵ Al-Atiyat, 31.

¹⁶ Al-Atiyat, 33.

¹⁷ Regina Dackweiler, *Ausgegrenzt und Eingemeindet*, Munster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1995, 8, quoted by Al-Atiyat, 33.

¹⁸ Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin, eds., *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, 41, quoted by Al-Atiyat, 33-4.

Jordanian society. Women's participation in politics and civil society must be considered in light of the unique factors affecting women, which arise from the highly gendered nature of Jordanian society.

Methodology

This study is based primarily on interviews with Jordanian women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-six, as well as interviews with professionals in the field of women's studies and the women's movement in Jordan. Women for the *primary study sample*—fifteen women in all—were chosen at random from students at the University of Jordan campus and from women at Mecca Mall. The only parameters of the primary study sample were gender, age, and English language proficiency (because I did not have a translator). I aimed to interview Muslim women, although I interviewed both covered and uncovered women. I also interviewed one male university-student. In addition to this primary study sample, I interviewed the following professionals: a journalist at Al-Ghad Newspaper who writes frequently about the Jordanian women's movement, two professors in the women's studies department at the University of Jordan, the National Program Officer for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the president of the Human Forum for Women's Rights, and a former activist in the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW).

I utilized a questionnaire in my interviews with the primary study sample, which I altered before interviewing the professionals (Appendices 1.1 and 1.2). I shifted the ordering of questions depending on the responses of the interview subject, in order to facilitate the comfort of the subjects and to avoid interrupting the flow of responses. After conducting the first five interviews, I chose to reorder the sections on the questionnaire, because I became aware that subjects were more comfortable when I eased into the questions—subjects became somewhat flustered when I began by asking about Jordanian legislation. I originally developed my questionnaire based on four independent variables, but in the course of my research I decided to change the specific focus of one of these variables—all of the original questions were used, but information from interviews with professionals supplemented the research on this variable, because there were issues related to this variable that could not be easily answered through public opinion.

The biggest obstacle in conducting interviews with average Jordanian women was English-language proficiency. Most of my subjects spoke very good English, but in two cases I had a friend informally translate, and in two cases I skipped questions that the subject did not seem to understand. All interview subjects were informed of the nature of this study and the possibility that their responses would be published; all gave verbal consent. I transcribed all interviews within one day of having conducted the interviews.

Background and History

In order to understand women's current political participation, it is essential to understand the history of women's rights and women's political participation in Jordan. Many scholars have studied the development of the women's movement in Jordan, which began with the formation of a handful of women's charity organizations in the early twentieth century. I will provide a general timeline and overview of the major developments in the women's movement and in the surrounding political culture. An understanding of the general political situation in Jordan, and its history, is crucial to understanding the context in which Jordanian women act, and has indirectly shaped women's political participation. Many of the obstacles to women's political participation are symptomatic of the broader political atmosphere, and should not be identified as solely affecting women. Nevertheless, women have additional burdens, and Jordan's political situation weighs doubly on women as it does on men.

In 1957, in an attempt to control and stabilize the political situation in the country, the Jordanian regime banned political party activity. In 1967, Parliament was dissolved, and the regime instituted martial law.¹⁹ In 1974, just before the UN Decade for Women, Jordanian women gained suffrage. However, they had no opportunity to exercise this right because all political activity in the country was still suspended.²⁰ In 1979, the first female cabinet member was appointed and served as the Minister of social development.²¹ The result of this was the creation of the General Federation for Jordanian Women (GFJW), a government-

¹⁹ Al-Atiyat, 54.

²⁰ Al-Atiyat, 55.

²¹ Al-Atiyat, 56.

sponsored organization under which all women's organizations were registered. This marked the beginning of the state's attempted control of women's organizations and activities. In 1989, Parliamentary elections were held for the first time since 1957, and the government relaxed its control over political parties.²² The post-1989 period in Jordan has been marked by an increase in democratization and liberalization. In 1992, a new Electoral law was introduced, establishing the one-person, one-vote system. In the 1997 elections, there were 17 female candidates, although none were elected.

The women's movement in Jordan consists of civil society organizations run by women and dedicated to women's issues. The first women's organizations date back to the early twentieth century, when women in Jordan began to form social organizations to combat problems such as poverty and illiteracy. The first women's group, *Charity Homes*, was established in 1912, as an orthodox Muslim society. Scholars identify five distinct phases in the history of the women's movement in Jordan. In its 'establishment' stage, prior to 1937, the women's movement was oriented around individual sectors of society, including tribal, ethnic and religious sectors, and did not concentrate specifically on women's issues. In response to a perceived lack of social welfare, the movement was primarily focused on relieving poverty and illiteracy. The second stage in the women's movement, from 1937 to 1948, is characterized by a shift from sectarian to general interests. During this period there was increased dissatisfaction with the suppressed status of women, and a rise in political consciousness due to the Israeli war. During this stage women began to play an active role in demonstrations against the Arab-Israeli conflict. The third stage of the women's movement, from 1948 to 1969, saw the legitimization and proliferation of women's organizations. In the aftermath of the Israeli war, most of the work by women's organizations shifted to focus on relief of Palestinian refugees. The fourth stage, from 1967 to 1981, marks a shift from focusing entirely on social welfare to focusing on social development. The majority of work by the movement was still focused on political issues relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During this period, the women's department of the ministry of labor was established. The fifth stage, from 1981 to the present, marks a substantial increase in interest over

²² Amawi, 33-4.

women's issues, and a shift in focus from welfare and development to political issues. During the 1980s, many important women's organizations were created, and the debate surrounding women's rights rose to the national level in Jordan. The most significant change in the women's movement from its early stages to the present situation is the shift from working on issues non-specific to women to an agenda focused specifically on women's issues and rights.

Under Jordanian law, women's rights are well-defined. The Jordanian constitution and the National Charter stipulate that all citizens are equal under the law regardless of sex. There are still some discriminatory laws against women, but many improvements have been made. The Jordanian government has endorsed and ratified numerous recent international conventions regarding women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in 1992. In 1993, the state adopted the National Strategy for Women, which is aimed at improving women's social, economic, and political statuses.²³ Jordan's 2006 National Agenda also includes a section dedicated to the improvement of women's political participation and the elimination of all legal and social discrimination against women.²⁴

It is in the context of these historical and political developments that women's participation in the current political situation will be interpreted. An analysis and discussion of the primary research findings is presented in the following sections.

Analysis and Discussion

Women and Political Participation

Although there is a noted lack of political participation among all members of Jordanian society, levels of participation are particularly low among women. Women are virtually non-existent as participants in political parties—with the exception of the IAF—and approximately half of all women eligible to vote actually vote.²⁵ This lack of participation is evident in the findings of my research. Of the fifteen women comprising the primary study sample, thirteen have never voted, and eight of these thirteen have no intentions of voting in

²³ Al-Atiyat, 87.

²⁴ Jordan, *National Agenda 2006-2015*, 2006.

²⁵ UNIFEM, *Towards Political Empowerment of Jordanian Women*, Amman: UNIFEM, 2006, 22.

the future. The most frequently cited reasons for not voting are general apathy for the political process, and the feeling that the individual's vote will not have any impact. None of the women belong to or participate in social or political organizations. Based on these simple indicators, it is clear that women do not participate actively in the Jordanian political process. The analysis and discussion that follows will attempt to elucidate why women do not participate in the political process, focusing on the social and strategic obstacles.

Tribalism and the Family

Jordanian society is characterized as a tribal society. Tribal and family ties dictate all aspects of life, including relationships and political activity. Al-Atiyat argues that the tribal structure is evident in the Jordanian family structure, decision-making processes, and conflict-resolution mechanisms.²⁶ The tribal social structure has generally persisted despite socioeconomic changes and the emergence of nuclear families in Jordan. Although the process of urbanization has greatly reduced the existence of tribes in Jordan, the values of the tribal system continue to shape the social structure. In 2002, the average family size in Jordan had decreased to 5.7 persons; family size varies and is smaller than the average in large urban areas such as Amman.²⁷ Given this rise in the incidence of nuclear families and the decline in existence of tribes in Jordan, it is practically beneficial to analyze the tribal social structure at the level of the nuclear family, rather than at the level of the tribe. The nuclear family can be considered as a subunit of the tribe; it functions similarly, and “in its primordial form, the structure of the family is indistinguishable from that of the tribe.”²⁸ Furthermore, in order to fully understand the structure of the tribe, it is necessary to first understand the structure of family.²⁹ As the fundamental building block of the tribe, the critical aspects of tribal social structure that influence gender roles can be traced down to the family unit. Keeping in mind that there are some differences between tribe and family, and that many scholars identify the modern nuclear family as more democratic in nature than the traditional tribe, I will analyze the nuclear family structure in Jordan as fundamentally the same as the tribal structure, and

²⁶ Al-Atiyat, 172.

²⁷ UNIFEM, 14.

²⁸ Sharabi, 30.

²⁹ Sharabi, 30.

speak of them both as part of the phenomenon denoted 'tribalism.' The tribal social structure is based on relationships that are vertical and patriarchal in nature. Tribalism instills a system of values that shapes gender roles and patterns of social interaction; as such tribalism represents a primarily strategic barrier to women's political participation.

The persistence of tribalism is identified by several professionals in the field of women's studies as being one of the primary factors affecting women's political participation in Jordan. There is some variation in opinion on the degree of its affect on women's rights and activities, but all consider it a factor having at least some bearing on women's rights and participation in the public sphere. Tribalism affects women in both the private and public spheres, although it is in the family that tribal values are established. In the private sphere, tribal values and social structures affect the creation and maintenance of gender roles. In the public sphere, the tribal social structure affects political activity and women's abilities to participate in the political process. Tribalism also plays an important role in the interaction between the two spheres of society. Tribal or family allegiance dictates how women chose to participate in the public sphere. Underlying the tribal system in Jordan is a patriarchal system of values, which is the source of gender roles that dictate the appropriate behaviors and occupations of women and men.

Gender roles in Jordanian society are shaped through the process of socialization in the family, which, in following the tribal social structure, is built on vertical, patriarchal relationships. According to Sabbagh, there is a socialization process that perpetuates strict gender roles and limits the mobility of girls, while giving boys greater mobility. Within the family, women play service roles while men are the decision-makers. These ideas are deeply engrained in women, who then raise their own children in the same way, thus perpetuating the system of patriarchally differentiated gender roles.³⁰ It is evident that gender roles are internalized through socialization in the family, because all women in the primary study sample feel that their beliefs are identical to those of their family, and because the majority of women cited a family member as the primary role model. Out of the fifteen Jordanian female university students interviewed in the primary study sample, nine cited their parents as their

³⁰ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

most important role models, and seven of fifteen said that they get their ideas about appropriate behavior as a woman from their parents or family.

The deep-rooted and wide-reaching nature of the family structure in Jordanian society creates a significant social and strategic barrier to women's empowerment and participation as decision-makers in the public sphere. Even when women are aware of their rights and have access to adequate resources, the family structure prevents women from participating fully in society. Within the family, women generally are not involved in making decisions, as gender roles within the family are based on patriarchal values. All of the women in the primary study sample feel that the most appropriate things for a woman to do, according to their families, is to work and get an education. One woman specified that her family prefers her to become a teacher, and one woman said that although she has complete freedom in her life, she would prefer to stay at home. Other women expressed a similar opinion about the most appropriate roles for women in society; although they feel complete freedom in choosing a career, they also feel that family is important. Batoul, a third-year engineering student at the University of Jordan, explained that it is acceptable for a woman to have a career only if she can continue to take good care of her family while working.³¹

Once these gender roles are established by the family and internalized by the individual, the value placed on maintaining allegiance to the family or tribe creates a barrier to dissent that is very difficult to surmount. The strength of the family unit creates a structure that is self-contained and self-subsistent, serving as a complete community for its members. The family sphere contains all forms of social activity and serves the needs of its members to the extent that participation in the public sphere becomes almost unnecessary. Individuals feel complete within the family unit, and identity is built within the bounds of the family. What is more significant even than the specific values perpetuated through socialization within the family is the lack of room for dissent against these values. Allegiance to the family becomes engrained to the extent that the concept of dissent against the family becomes virtually incomprehensible. Out of the process of socialization within the family comes a

³¹ Batoul, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

homogeneity of beliefs, which in turn leads to homogeneity of political views.³² This is evident in the data collected from interviews with the primary study sample. Several of the women could not easily theorize about the possibility of dissenting against their families. Several of the women replied that they would never do something their families did not agree with, but then qualified this response by expressing that they also have no reasons to want to dissent. Three of the women feel that they can openly express their opinions within the family, and that issues are always discussed between the family members, while three others stated that their families' beliefs or wishes are exactly the same as their own. Although a few of the women stated that they could act against their families' wishes if they desired to, they also added that, ultimately, they prefer to please their families. Farah, a third-year architecture student at the University of Jordan explained, "I will disagree, but I cannot do something that they [my family] do not want me to do. My family's opinion is best, because they have more experience than me."³³ Thus, the majority of women do not feel bound or restricted by obedience to the family—allegiance is viewed as the natural choice. This reinforces the argument that family values and structures are deeply entrenched in Jordanian women. The woman does not question her allegiance to the family. The family unit is at the core of Jordanian society, and allegiance to the family is very important. In many cases, speaking out can be dishonorable and even 'unwomanly.'³⁴

The family or tribe in Jordanian society inhibits women's participation in the public sphere in large part because the family, as a distinct sphere of existence and activity, serves many of the functions that, in other societies, are served by government and civil society.

Sharabi argues that

the essence of tribal practice is expressed in the individual's identification with the tribe, and this is reciprocated in the tribe's collective responsibility for the individual's actions, which in turn constantly renews and reinforces a person's kinship identification and loyalty.³⁵

Thus, although allegiance to the family or tribe requires submission of the individual will to the group interest, the individual gains the benefit of complete protection and social

³² Amawi, 12.

³³ Farah, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

³⁴ Al-Atiyat, 174.

³⁵ Sharabi, 29.

fulfillment by remaining loyal to the group. The majority of women in the primary study sample feel that they can express their opinions within the family, and that the woman has a high status within the family. Submission to the family is beneficial and is not perceived as a sacrifice. The individual identity becomes homogenized with that of the family unit, but there is not a perceived loss because the individual operates entirely within the family (or extended family and tribe), and larger society becomes superfluous. Lara Sharriereh, a fourth-year university student and lawyer-in-training, believes that she has complete freedom in making decisions about her life, and that she should be an independent, career-oriented woman. Nevertheless, she also says that she would not consider doing something that her family does not approve of:

We [my family and I] all share the same needs and demands. Since we take everything from religion and tradition, our needs, wants, and ideas are the same. Even though I sometimes have my own ideas, we share the same [basic] beliefs.³⁶

Although the family structure may practically allow for the liberation and empowerment of women, it acts as a strategic obstacle to women's participation as decision-makers in the public sphere because it negates the need for political participation. The family unit provides fully for its members, and creates a wide sphere in which all social activities take place. This is true to some extent for both males and females within the family, but it is more pronounced for women, who are socialized within the patriarchal structure of the family to assume roles in which they do not make decisions or have full equality with men. Women do not have the same agency or mobility within the family, and women are not obligated to provide financially for the family, whereas men are. The default or preferred role for women is in the home, raising a family, and work outside the home is a privilege, not necessarily a right. Dr. Amal Al-Kharouf, of the Women's Studies Department at the University of Jordan, explains, "most Jordanian women think that motherhood is one of the most important things. Although we love work and motherhood, motherhood tends to take priority."³⁷

In the public sphere, the importance of tribal ties plays a major role in women's abilities to participate in decision-making and political processes. In elections, tribalism has

³⁶ Lara Sharriereh, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

³⁷ Amal Al-Kharouf, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

become the most important factor dictating the success of candidates, both male and female. The introduction of the one-person, one-vote electoral law, in 1992, made tribal support necessary for success in elections. According to Dana K. Malhas, National Programme Officer for the Arab Regional Office of UNIFEM, tribal or family ties were the number one factor influencing choice of political candidates in the 2003 elections. A candidate will only succeed if he or she has the support of a large constituency, and this tends to depend primarily on tribal ties.³⁸ The necessity of tribal backing has mostly hurt women's chances of winning election, because few tribes or political parties have been willing to endorse female candidates. Candidates—even male candidates—without the support of a tribally-based constituency are very unlikely to succeed in elections. A few women who were able to secure tribal endorsement enjoyed greater success in elections, but these women were nominated by conservative constituencies, primarily as a means to further the tribes' agendas. Hayat Massimi, an IAF-backed candidate in the district of Zarqa, received over 7000 votes in the 2003 elections, and lost the election by a very narrow margin.³⁹ Nevertheless, most tribes have avoided endorsing female candidates or promoting women's participation in tribal activities. The tribe is an inherently patriarchal organization, and as such women have virtually no access to tribally-based organizations or political parties.⁴⁰

Women in patriarchal or tribal societies inherently lack the ability to provide for the needs of the members of society the way that men can, and this means that women are much less likely to be accepted as government leaders.⁴¹ Relationships within the tribal structure are highly personalized, and based on social connections (*wasta*), which are used to acquire benefits. Men have an inherent advantage over women in that they can provide for community members based on these social connections, while women have relatively little power and must depend on the *wasta* of males.⁴² This imbalance creates a practical disincentive for supporting women in leadership positions, because men are better equipped

³⁸ Dana K. Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

³⁹ UNIFEM, 24.

⁴⁰ Al-Atiyat, 47.

⁴¹ Amawi, 20.

⁴² Amawi, 20.

than women to provide for the basic needs of individuals.⁴³ *Wasta* and the structure of social relationships are instilled, along with patriarchal gender roles, through socialization in the family.⁴⁴

Beyond the nuclear family, there are concentric levels of society which operate under the same tribal structure.⁴⁵ The nuclear family and larger society are highly continuous; the family unit is intertwined with all levels of society, including government and civil society. Patriarchal structures of domination and dependency become “deeply internalized” through the process of socialization in the family, and are reinforced through interaction in the larger society.⁴⁶ The socialization process, which happens first and most persistently through the family, shapes the individual’s perception of self and of others. Women’s self-perceptions and external societal perceptions work together to inhibit women’s political participation.⁴⁷ Most of the women in the primary study sample feel a high degree of personal freedom of choice about career, family, and self-expression, but nevertheless feel that there are some actions and roles that were either appropriate or inappropriate for women. Personal will is inseparable from the family will, and thus the individual lacks genuine personal freedom to disagree or dissent with the family. Women, according to the findings of this study, are most inhibited from participation in decision-making processes and the public sphere by their own beliefs about appropriate gender roles, which are internalized through socialization in the family. This system of socialization is self-reinforcing, because most of the women do not perceive that they are being ‘inhibited’ or restricted, and thus see little reason to challenge the established gender roles. A few of the women think that women could be better respected by society, or that women should have more rights, but these women still feel complete freedom and respect within their own families. None of the women are politically active, and thus there is little or no driving force for change.

Islam

⁴³ Amawi, 20.

⁴⁴ Amawi, 19.

⁴⁵ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁴⁶ Amawi, 142.

⁴⁷ Amawi, 142.

The role of Islam in dictating gender roles and impeding women's empowerment is in many ways similar to that of tribalism. Islamic values are a major component of traditional values in Jordanian society, and the structure of Islam today is highly patriarchal. In the private sphere, and at the level of the individual, Islam limits dictates gender roles and limits women's activities. Although Islam is frequently characterized as protecting women's rights and giving them complete freedom, in actuality women's freedom is limited in the context of patriarchal interpretations and applications of Islam. As Sabbagh argues, "patriarchy has co-opted Islam," making Islam a mechanism for the institutionalization of patriarchal values.⁴⁸ Similarly, other scholars argue that Islam is used as a front for the subordination and repression of women. In Jordan, this is noticeable in the private as well as the public spheres. The Islamic Action Front (IAF) has adopted a more progressive agenda which includes the promotion of women's rights, but many argue that this is merely a political move to improve the IAF's image, particularly in the eyes of the West.⁴⁹ The IAF has also endorsed a number of female candidates for Parliamentary elections, but some scholars have argued that the IAF is simply taking advantage of the Quota system to get members of its party into Parliament.⁵⁰ In Jordan, Islam remains, for the most part, a social and cultural barrier to women's empowerment in the public sphere, and any benefits it provides to women are in terms of practical rights.

When asked about the role of Islam in shaping their beliefs and actions, all women in the primary study sample answered that Islam is the most important value system in their lives, and that it dictates all aspects of behavior and thought. Islam is the source of morals and answers to questions about daily life, and Islam provides guidelines for behavior. When asked specifically about the role of religion in their lives, the majority of women cited Islam before family or tradition as a guiding source for behaviors and actions. Islam was also cited as a source of guidelines about appropriate behavior for a woman. All of the women see Islam as an extremely positive influence in their lives, and something from which to derive strength. Contrary to the popular stereotype of Islam as highly controlling or repressive to

⁴⁸ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁴⁹ Al-Atiyat, 183.

⁵⁰ Abeer Dababneh, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

women, all of the women expressed that Islam gives a women all of her rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, many of the women—ten of fifteen—were careful to add that there are some things under Islam that a woman should not do, particularly regarding relations with men, sexual behavior, and family. Even given these restrictions, all of the women clearly see Islam as a system of guidelines and not as a limitation.

The most significant distinction that Islam makes with regard to gender roles, according to many of the women in the primary study sample, is that women act based on emotion while men think and act from their minds. For this reason, women should not serve as judges or government leaders, and are most suited for taking care of a family. A Ph.D.-student at the University of Jordan said she believes that any country with a female president will fail, because women are too sensitive to lead well—“If a woman shares power with the man, she will sometimes succeed, [but] alone she will not succeed.”⁵¹ This subject believes very strongly that Islam is being misapplied in Jordan today, and that women are terribly mistreated by men, but she nevertheless believes men are better suited to be leaders than women. The majority of the women feel that they have a wide range of options in their lives, and that Islam supports women working and getting an education. However, most also feel that a woman should make room in her life to raise a family. This supports the argument, put forth by some of the professionals interviewed, that patriarchy has co-opted Islam. A particular interpretation of Islam has been internalized by Jordanian society that defines and supports patriarchal gender roles. All of the women in the primary study sample learned the values of Islam from their families and schools, with family—and in many cases, specifically the father—being the first source of education about religious values.

Women in Islam have a certain level of equity with men, in that they are encouraged to study, work, and read the *Qur'an*. They do not, however, have equality with men at the level of agency, power, and decision-making. Although all of the women in the primary study sample are unequivocally opposed to interpretations of Islam that deny women practical rights, most believe that there are differences between men and women that warrant differentiated gender roles. Under Islam, women are content to be respected and protected,

⁵¹ Anonymous, Personal Interview, 19 April 2006.

and do not seem extremely concerned with having a voice outside of the private sphere. They feel that Islam allows them to learn and to express themselves, but this does not extend to expression at the level of leadership. Caring for a family, developing an understanding of the world, and honoring God are the most important things. A few women in the primary study sample point to the *hadith*—a religious text of *Qur'anic* interpretations—as the source of their belief that women act based on emotion while men act based on rationality.

One of the points raised repeatedly by the women, when I asked what Islam says about the appropriate place of a woman in society, is that Islam is frequently misunderstood or misapplied. Most of the women firmly believe that women in Jordan have complete rights and freedoms, and all believe that Islam provides all of the rights for a woman. Those who perceived a lack somewhere in the rights or freedoms of women in Jordan attributed this mistreatment to society or tradition, and not to Islam. Many of the women identified some boundaries that Islam draws with regard to women's behavior, but did not link this to a misinterpretation or misapplication of Islam. The women in the study do not seem to think that Islam is being misinterpreted or misapplied in Jordanian society, but that there are societies elsewhere in the Muslim world where Islam is being used to deny women their rights, and that this it is from these societies that incorrect stereotypes of Islam—as oppressive to women—are derived.

Al-Kharouf argues—in agreement with Sabbagh and the women in the primary study sample—that culture is the problem, not Islam. “In Islam, a long time ago, women shared with men...women and men shared in politics. Islam definitely supports men and women sharing ideas,” explains Al-Kharouf.⁵² A specific interpretation of Islam, then, is utilized in Jordan as a front for the enforcement of traditional and patriarchal values. Sabbagh argues, “when Islamists argue against women's rights, it is from [a] patriarchal standpoint, although they claim it is because of Islam...they forget about religion and start talking about tradition...they play the patriarchal role.”⁵³ Malhas concurs that Islam has historically

⁵² Al-Kharouf, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁵³ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

supported women's active participation in society, and that the lack of support for women's rights currently has to do with Jordanian culture.⁵⁴

Much like the tribal or family social structures, Islam creates a structure of values in which the individual becomes secondary to the community. Ahmad S. Moussali argues that

in an Islamic system, the public will represents the divine will, and therefore the individual or groups as such cannot legitimately stand against it...the well-being of the individual is secondary to that of the community, in which a political contract creates a public will for the whole of society...the [individual] is always sacrificed, since it is conditioned by a controlled educational and social system whose violation becomes a violation of religion itself.⁵⁵

Moussali is arguing in the context of an Islamic fundamentalist state—Jordan is a secular state, so Islamic values are not dictated by a political contract but rather an ingrained system of cultural values. Nevertheless, there is a public will representing the divine will, which describes a set of social values that cannot be contested by the individual. These values derive legitimacy from Islam, and so violation of them becomes a violation of Islam. Thus, patriarchal gender roles are legitimized by being conjoined with Islamic proscriptions and values, and attempting to step outside of these gender roles becomes an attack on Islam, which is not acceptable. The women in the primary study sample accept Islam without question—the *Qur'an* is seen as the word of God, and as such is always right. As long as the belief that women should not serve in leadership roles is associated with Islamic values (or understood as derived from Islam) there is no room for this belief to be questioned. This is not to imply that Jordanian women accept Islamic values blindly—many of the women stated that their actions are dictated by religion and by logic—but the margin for questioning Islamic values is very narrow, and when Islamic values become intertwined with patriarchal values, it is unlikely that the patriarchal values will be fundamentally challenged.

In the public sphere, there has been an increase in women's participation in Islamist political factions in recent years. Working within the framework of mainstream Islamic discourses, some women have gained voice, as well as the support of Islamic parties.⁵⁶

However, women's participation has been, for the most part, supported only within the frame

⁵⁴ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁵⁵ Ahmad S. Moussali, "Modern Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses on Civil Society, Pluralism, and Democracy," *Civil Society in the Middle East*, ed. Augustus Richard Norton, 1995, 88-9.

⁵⁶ Al-Ali, 221.

of conservative Islamic discourses and patriarchal interpretations of Islam. Toujan Faisal, a Jordanian activist and politician, criticized Islamists for misapplying Islam to deny women rights, and was, as a result, harshly rebuked by the public for attacking Islam. Faisal's criticisms were clearly aimed at the particular interpretation of Islam employed by Jordanian Islamists, and she called only for a new understanding of Islam that would liberate women. Faisal was viewed negatively because she attempted to redefine gender roles in a progressive interpretation of Islam. The response to Faisal exemplifies the nature of the Islamic factions in Jordan, who support women's rights only within a conservative framework. According to Sabbagh, Islamists have been very vocal against changing legislation on women's rights in Jordan.⁵⁷ Manar Rashwani, Opinion Editor for Al-Ghad Newspaper in Amman, explains that Islamic factions "do not want to prevent women from working, but do want to confine them to certain jobs; they do not want women to work with men."⁵⁸ Beginning in 1991, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) began promoting conservative gender relations throughout the Arab world, calling for segregation of the sexes.⁵⁹ Islamist writings at this time blamed moral corruption on the degeneration of tradition and the immoral behavior of women.⁶⁰ Faced with women entering spheres of society that had previously only been occupied by men—such as the workforce—many Islamist leaders felt it necessary to create new limitations on women's freedoms.⁶¹ In 1993, however, The IAF adopted a new, less-conservative view of gender relations, and elected six women to its highest legislative council, the *Shoura* council.⁶² The emergence of a new Islamic feminist discourse—which calls for women's rights and participation in politics in the spirit of 'original' Islamic societies—supported by women and the IAF, further suggests that Islamists are beginning to support progressive views of women's empowerment.⁶³ However, based on my interviews with professionals, it is unclear whether these developments represent honest attempts by Islamist factions to empower women, or whether they are part of a political strategy aimed at adapting to Jordan's

⁵⁷ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁵⁸ Manar Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

⁵⁹ Al-Atiyat, 176.

⁶⁰ Al-Atiyat, 181.

⁶¹ Al-Atiyat, 172.

⁶² Al-Atiyat, 178-9.

⁶³ Al-Atiyat, 179.

increasingly democratic and liberal state. Evidence suggests that the main Jordanian Islamist factions support women's rights in form, but do not support women's equal participation as decision-makers, and they promote a fundamentally patriarchal understanding of women's rights.

Based on the views and beliefs of the women in the primary study sample and recent discourses of the IAF and other Jordanian Islamists, it seems that there is an interest in promoting women's rights and freedoms within an Islamic framework. Promoting women's liberation within an Islamic framework means giving women freedom to become educated and to enter the workforce, but restricting the kinds of occupations they can fill and establishing moral guidelines about gender relations. Women are given freedom as long as they do not cross these well-defined boundaries, and are generally restricted from occupying decision-making roles. Several of the women in the primary study sample expressed the belief that the best place for a woman is in the home because this is where she is honored and protected. Islam allows women freedom and voice, but only within the limitations of patriarchal gender roles, which are enforced by society and which women cannot easily challenge. As such, Islam in Jordan serves as a strategic obstacle to women's empowerment and equality in the public sphere.

Women's Civil Society Organizations

Scholars define the women's movement in Jordan as encompassing civil society organizations dedicated to women's issues. Al-Atiyat analyzes the success of the Jordanian women's movement as a social movement, which is generally defined as a mass movement in reaction to perceived injustices or problems in society, and is identified as a force for social change. Many scholars look to women's civil society organizations in Jordan as the primary mechanism for social change. In light of this, it makes sense to ask whether Jordanian women have achieved true political and social empowerment as a result of the activities of women's organizations, and whether the women's movement has created significant social change. Al-Atiyat distinguishes two types of obstacles to the success of the women's movement of Jordan—those based on the external social and political environment in which women's

organizations operate, and those related to the internal organization and capabilities of the women's movement. Based on my data, both kinds of obstacles impede the ability of the women's movement to create social change.

One of the problems internal to women's organizations in Jordan is the lack of democracy in the structure and operation of organizations. This is a problem that prevents the majority of participants in women's organizations from serving in decision-making roles, and thus prevents them from gaining empowerment. Most women's organizations in Jordan are headed by elites or government officials, many of whom do not represent popular interests.⁶⁴ This is a problem that is not unique to women's organizations, but is found among all Jordanian civil society organizations.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it creates an additional burden on women, who are already encumbered with combating the patriarchal social structure to create space for their participation in civil society.⁶⁶ Women's organizations, like most civil society organizations, are usually structured with a few elites or leaders, making most of the decisions, distanced from the rest of the members.⁶⁷ Some women leaders of women's organizations are appointed by the government rather than being elected by members of the organizations.⁶⁸ Decision-making processes within most women's organizations take place only at the executive board level, and most members do not take part in evaluating the successes of their organizations.⁶⁹ Most members of women's organizations participate because of the benefits and services provided by the organizations.⁷⁰ This is one of the most significant barriers to the ability of women's organizations to empower women as decision-makers, both because of the lack of ideological incentive to participate, and because women who do participate do not get to serve as decision-makers or exercise agency. As Sabbagh argues, women's organizations are still highly patriarchal in structure—due to their existence

⁶⁴ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

⁶⁵ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

⁶⁶ Laurie Brand, "In the Beginning was the State," *Civil Society in the Middle East*, ed. Augustus Richard Norton, 1995, 175-6.

⁶⁷ Al-Atiyat, 109-11.

⁶⁸ Al-Atiyat, 114.

⁶⁹ Al-Atiyat, 108.

⁷⁰ Al-Atiyat, 109.

in a patriarchal society.⁷¹ As a result, women's civil society organizations do not facilitate women's increased empowerment within civil society.

None of the Jordanian women in the primary study sample belong to social or political organizations, although most are aware of the existence of civil society and governmental organizations that provide resources for women. Al-Atiyat argues that the primary draw of women's organizations tends to be financial resources and training programs, while very few women join based on ideological interests.⁷² As a result, women's organizations in Jordan are primarily comprised of members who benefit from the organization but do not necessarily support its goals.⁷³ Thus, women who are not in need of services are more likely not to join than they are to join; this is corroborated by the lack of participation of the women in my study sample in women's organizations. The majority of these women expressed satisfaction with the status of women and women's rights in Jordanian society. In the absence of a perceived need for change, there is no strong impetus to participate in civil society organizations. Because women's organizations do not create a strong draw for membership based on ideology, women's organizations do not serve a large role in working for change at the level of social values. They provide services, but do not empower women to push for changes in the social structure.

In terms of the agendas and issues that women's organizations address, the majority of women's organizations do not focus on strategic gender issues. There is a lack of technical capacity for understanding the issues that most need work.⁷⁴ Here, again, the underlying values of patriarchy are evident. Sabbagh argues that many participants in women's organizations are instilled with an overly positive view of women's rights in Jordan, and are not fully aware of the need to improve or change the status of women in Jordanian society. This she attributes to the persistence of patriarchy and the general acceptance of the gender roles dictated by patriarchy.⁷⁵ There is also a lack of creativity in the activities of women's organizations, as a result of fidelity to financial donors and the lack of ideologically-

⁷¹ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁷² Al-Atiyat, 112.

⁷³ Al-Atiyat, 109.

⁷⁴ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006; Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁷⁵ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

motivated participants.⁷⁶ The lack of creativity is also a result of the absence of sufficient youth involvement in the women's movement in Jordan.⁷⁷

The GFJW was created by the government in 1981 to serve as an umbrella organization under which all women's organizations would operate. The establishment of the GFJW is widely regarded as an attempt by the state to establish control over the activities of women's organizations. State involvement in women's organizations and activities continues under the current regime, and has served primarily to weaken the power of the women's movement in Jordan.⁷⁸ Government control and international funding are, on one hand, positive forces on the women's movement because they provide women's organizations with the necessary financial resources. In most respects, however, government involvement and international funding negatively impact the power and efficacy of women's organizations. The presence of these external influences heavily directs the agendas of women's organizations, their internal efficacy, and their political legitimacy.

Women's organizations, like all other civil society organizations, are driven heavily by the interests of international donors, who provide the majority of funding for civil society organizations.⁷⁹ This means that there is further impetus against focusing on the issues that most need to be addressed. Women's organizations are bound by donor mandates, which tend to follow the international trends of 'hot-button' issues, rather than the specific needs and interests of women in Jordan.⁸⁰ The scarcity of funding for civil society organizations orients women's organizations towards the interests of donors and creates a high level of competition for funding between organizations.⁸¹ In addition, the efficiency and power of the women's movement is greatly impeded by the lack of coordination between women's organizations, which results primarily from competition for donor aid. Malhas cites the lack of coordination and cooperation among women's organizations as the greatest impediment to the success of the women's movement, because it creates a highly fragmented movement with a weakened

⁷⁶ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁷⁷ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006; Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁷⁸ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

⁷⁹ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁸⁰ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁸¹ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

ability to affect significant changes.⁸² Thus, the lack of funding, which then necessitates obedience to international aid donors, affects both the efficacy and the agenda of the women's movement in Jordan.

Government control of women's organizations is not entirely negative. Al-Atiyat points out many of the accomplishments made by women's organizations as a result of learning to work within the framework of government control.⁸³ However, most of these have been practical gains, such as legislative reforms and increased funding. Most of the state's support of women's empowerment is limited to giving "lip service" to women's issues, and the state has done relatively little to advance women's interests, given the level of lobbying for women's rights that has occurred.⁸⁴

Another issue that is raised with regard to women's civil society organizations in Jordan is the extent to which they address awareness of women's rights among society at large. Many argue that women's organizations do not address men's awareness of women's issues, and that the women's movement remains isolated from general society. With respect to the dichotomy between practical and strategic empowerment, the isolation of women's organizations from the rest of civil society prevents women's strategic empowerment, because women who participate in women's organizations do not gain increased access to participation and decision-making in the wider sphere of civil society. Women's organizations have improved women's rights under the law, and have created spaces for women to participate in civil society, but have not led to widespread acceptance of women as participants in the entire realm of public society. Women's participation in the whole of Jordanian civil society is still very low, and women are, for the most part, still not accepted as participants in tribally-based organizations or political parties.⁸⁵ Because women's organizations focus almost entirely on women's issues, women are impeded from being politically active in other areas. Through involvement in women's organizations women may gain access to participation with respect to women's issues, but they are not provided with the

⁸² Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁸³ Al-Atiyat, 126.

⁸⁴ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁸⁵ Al-Atiyat, 47.

means to become decision-makers in all of society. The absence of women in decision-making roles in society as a whole is maintained as long as women continue to operate in spheres distinct from and opposite to men. Women's lack of political empowerment can be attributed to social values about appropriate gender roles, which dictate that men should hold power while women serve supporting roles. Women's organizations need to address women's issues—this is an important step in the process towards changing social views about women; however, as long as women's organizations remain isolated in the sphere of women's issues, empowerment will be difficult.

Rashwani argues that one of the most significant weaknesses of the women's movement in Jordan is that it has isolated itself from other political and social movements; it is widely perceived as being in opposition to men, or sometimes in opposition to Islam, rather than in opposition to discrimination or injustice.⁸⁶ The state's control of women's activities has prevented women's organizations from taking action on issues other than those specific to women. Further, the women's movements isolation from broader civil society prevents real politicization of women's issues and hinders the political legitimacy of the women's movement. As a result of the state's control over and involvement in the women's movement, women's organizations remain largely un-critical of the government, which prevents the movement from being accepted as a legitimate political force. Furthermore, the movement's neutral stance towards the government may undermine its ability to question the discriminatory gender roles maintained by the state. In order to increase women's participation in decision-making processes, the women's movement needs to integrate itself with larger civil society and political movements, because decision-making processes fall primarily in the domain of male-dominated activities. Because the women's movement is perceived as being directly in opposition to males, it continues to face difficulty in achieving integration of women into decision-making processes.

Al-Atiyat argues that women's organizations do play a role in improving the self-confidence of female participants—they do produce some psychological empowerment, and

⁸⁶ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

they give women many of the resources necessary to achieve financial independence.⁸⁷ However, within the women's movement, most organizations only provide practical empowerment. Although women's organizations give women the tools for empowerment, they do not ensure the employment of these tools, because they do not sufficiently address women's strategic interests. Women's organizations have made significant advancements, and in this sense are playing a positive role in women's empowerment. The women's movement has increased public awareness of and interest in women's issues—this constitutes a strategic improvement. However, given that the primary role of women's organizations is that of providing services, and as they remain isolated in focusing solely on women's issues, women's organizations do not constitute a strong force for the strategic empowerment of women. Women's organizations suffer largely because they must operate and struggle to gain legitimacy in the context of a patriarchal society.⁸⁸ Rashwani argues that the women's movement could benefit from aligning itself with the larger movement for human rights.⁸⁹ The advancements of the women's movement are significant, especially given the nature of patriarchal society, but the movement has not yet reached the level of strategic improvements. Although women's organizations do not directly impede women's political empowerment, they are ineffective at increasing women's empowerment because they do not give women increased access to decision-making roles.

The Quota for Women's Seats in Parliament

Just before the 1993 Parliamentary elections, the Jordanian state began discussing the possibility of instituting a quota for women in Parliament.⁹⁰ Activists and women's organizations lobbied for a quota on the grounds that positive discrimination was needed to ensure women's equal representation in the government.⁹¹ In the 2003 elections, after several years of discussion, a temporary quota was established as an amendment to the 2001 Electoral Law, giving women six seats (out of 110 total seats) in Parliament. Under the quota

⁸⁷ Al-Atiyat, 110.

⁸⁸ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

⁸⁹ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

⁹⁰ Brand, 175.

⁹¹ Amawi, 180-1.

amendment, female candidates who receive the highest percentage of votes in their respective districts are selected to fill the quota seats.⁹² The exact number of seats was one of the main topics of discussion previous to the passing of the quota amendment, as many leaders of women's organizations lobbied for a greater number of seats.⁹³ All of the six seats are now filled. As a direct attempt on behalf of the state to increase women's political participation, the women's quota is an important factor affecting women's participation in the public sphere, and analyzing its success in Jordanian society is crucial. In line with the overall theoretical framework of this study, I will assess whether or not the quota has succeeded in changing social views about gender roles, and whether it serves as a realistic mechanism to facilitate women's strategic empowerment and participation in politics.

One of the important questions raised with respect to the women's temporary quota law is whether or not it has served to fully represent women's interests in Parliament. The success of the women's quota must be assessed by analyzing whether the women placed into Parliament through the quota advance their own agendas and issues, or whether they are merely a façade for women's participation in the government. In order for women to be fully empowered in politics, they must have agency equal to that of men, and must actually be capable of voicing their own interests in Parliament. The professionals interviewed argue that some parties and tribes have used the women's quota as a tool to advance their own agendas—tribes may nominate women because this increases their chances of getting one of their own members into Parliament.⁹⁴ Dr. Abeer Dababneh, of the Women's Studies Department at the University of Jordan, Rashwani, and Sabbagh argue that the women currently serving in Parliament do not represent the interests of the majority of Jordanian women. The women in Parliament tend to represent tribal ideologies, and the majority of them do not support the agendas of the women's movement. They support conservative, rather than progressive, views of women's rights.⁹⁵ Two of the six current female members of Parliament stood against proposed changes to legislation that would improve women's

⁹² UNIFEM, 24.

⁹³ Lamis Nasser, Personal Interview, 8 April 2006.

⁹⁴ Dababneh and Al-Kharouf, Personal Interviews, 20 April 2006.

⁹⁵ Dababneh, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

rights.⁹⁶ This is in large part attributed to socialization in Jordanian's patriarchal culture—the women “are raised to think in the traditional social structure, and will continue to push these values. They will reflect patriarchal and conservative values.”⁹⁷ Also, as all of the interviewed professionals argue, having the quota does not ensure that the women placed into Parliament through the quota are the best qualified, in terms of political experience and skills, to serve in the government. This is partially a problem of the format of the electoral law, which stipulates that election winners are chosen based on the percentage of votes received in each individual district—this means that the women selected to fill the quota seats are not necessarily the best representatives of the overall population. This, however, is an identified with the electoral law, and is not unique to the quota amendment.⁹⁸

It is also important to ask whether or not the quota is an effective mechanism for increasing women's political participation and changing the social perceptions surrounding their abilities to serve in Parliament. The fundamental goal of the quota for women in Parliament is to increase women's participation and representation in the Parliament. The quota law was added as a temporary amendment to the electoral law, with the intent to remove it once women's participation in politics becomes accepted and women can succeed in Parliamentary elections without the assistance of the quota. In this light, all of the professionals interviewed perceive the quota to be a positive development and a necessary first step to women's political participation. However, the emphasis is unanimously on the temporary nature of the quota law—it is a necessary first step, but its use should be limited to catalyzing the women's participation and not as a long-term solution. There are a number of problems identified with the use of quota to increase women's representation in Parliament. Some of the professionals interviewed and a few of the women in the primary study sample argue that the quota perpetuates the belief that women cannot succeed in politics without the assistance of the government. The existence of the quota may reinforce the widely-held belief that women are less capable of serving as government leaders than men. Two female students at the University of Jordan also expressed the worry that the implementation of the women's

⁹⁶ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

⁹⁷ Dababneh, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

⁹⁸ Rashwani, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

quota might actually limit women's participation in politics by confining them to the allotted seats.

Nevertheless, all professionals interviewed and the majority of women in the primary study sample stressed that women could not have entered Parliament without the assistance of the quota, primarily because of the social perceptions of women's inabilities to serve in positions of government leadership. Before the institution of the women's quota, the only woman to win election to Parliament was Toujan Faisal, in 1993. The majority of the women in the primary study sample hold the belief that women are less-suited to serve as government leaders than men. Seven of the fifteen women in the primary study sample approve of women serving as government leaders, three disapprove, and six are somewhere in between approval and disapproval. Uncertainty about the value of having women in government is generally due to the opinion that it is acceptable in some contexts but not in others. Two women feel it is acceptable in theory, but impractical given the nature of gender roles in Jordanian society today; others feel that it depends on the capacity of each individual woman; one thinks it is acceptable only if women share power with men. Many believe that women are less capable of leadership because they think and act with their emotions, while men think primarily with their minds. Three of the fifteen women expressed the belief that, although women are theoretically as capable as men of serving in government leadership positions, the nature of society today is such that women in government will be less effective than men. It is thus evident that even women do not believe in women or desire to have women in the government. In the 1997 and 2003 elections, most women voted for men.⁹⁹ Studies corroborate the findings from my primary study sample—public attitude towards women's political participation is heavily opposed to women serving in government roles. A 2003 UNIFEM study found that 72% of males and females surveyed would choose the male candidate when given the choice between a male and female candidate of equal qualification.¹⁰⁰ 67% of survey respondents (male and female) considered men more suited to serving as members of Parliament than women.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

¹⁰⁰ UNIFEM, 31.

¹⁰¹ UNIFEM, 31.

Popular opinion about the quota among Jordanian women varies greatly. Exactly half of the women were aware of the existence of the quota, while the other half had not heard of the quota. Of the fifteen women in the primary study sample, three think the quota is a good idea, three disapprove because they do not believe women should serve in the government, three think it is a necessary first step but that it is not ideal, three believe it is an ineffective or unsuccessful way to increase women's political participation (although they approve of its underlying goals), and one woman had no opinion. Opinion of the quota among the women in the primary study sample seemed to be most directly influenced by views of gender roles.

Public attitude towards women serving in Parliament or other government leadership roles stands as the greatest obstacle, within the public sphere, to women's political empowerment. The system of patriarchal values that underlies Jordan's social structure dictates gender roles in the private sphere, which are then transmitted into the public sphere, where there is a lack of support for women in decision-making roles. Malhas stresses that the key to women's political empowerment lies in raising awareness of both men and women about the abilities of women to serve as decision-makers, so that society in general can begin to see women as capable in their own rights.¹⁰² Public attitudes serve as a secondary barrier to women's political participation, so that even if a woman were to be socialized without the patriarchal gender values in the family, she would still find it difficult to practice progressive values in the public realm.¹⁰³

Thus, the existence of the quota is a positive step towards the development of women's strategic rights and towards changing socially accepted gender roles, because it allows women to surmount the initial obstacle to participation in government, gives them political experience, and gives women a chance to change social perceptions about the inability of women to serve in decision-making roles. Sabbagh argues that the quota "broke the psychological barrier" against women serving in the government simply because it allowed people to see women in Parliament.¹⁰⁴ The quota may serve as an obstacle to women's strategic empowerment, to the extent that it does not ensure that the women

¹⁰² Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

¹⁰³ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

entering Parliament will be qualified, representative of all women, or that they will advance their own agendas. If the women entering the government with the help of the quota continue to advance party or tribal agendas founded on patriarchal values, then the quota does not actually serve to increase women's political agency, and traditional social values may be perpetuated. Malhas is concerned that the quota may fail to change social perceptions of women's abilities to serve in government because it does not place the most qualified women into Parliament.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the quota provides women with a very low percentage of seats in Parliament, so there is no "critical mass" of women in Parliament, which would be necessary to create significant change and advance women's issues.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the role of the women's quota in breaking down the large barrier that has existed in Jordan against women winning seats in Parliament may outweigh the negative aspects of the quota. As Dababneh says, the quota is a "double-edged sword."¹⁰⁷ It is a necessary first step, and it does provide a space for women to serve in decision-making roles, even if they do not always advance progressive views of women's rights. In accordance with the distinction between practical and strategic empowerment, the quota provides women with strategic empowerment, because it is the act of participating in roles of decision-making that is most important. The quota is making available to women roles that were, before, only accessible to men. Although the quota in itself does not provide adequate opportunity or mechanisms for major advancement of women's issues, it allows women a way into Parliament, and has the potential to change public attitudes about gender roles simply by forcing society to observe women in leadership roles. The quota as of now may not have given women an equal stance to men or empowered them with voice free of male influence, but it has allowed women to overstep one of the initial hurdles to political participation in decision-making roles.

Connell's conceptualization of the state as the main institution of gendered power and politics accounts for the ability of the state to change socially established gender roles. Al-Ali summarizes Connell's argument: "The state's power to regulate and shape gender relations

¹⁰⁵ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Dababneh, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

can work towards the consolidation of existing gender relations, but it also has the potential to unsettle the existing gender order through reforms.”¹⁰⁸ The quota has the potential to radically change gender roles because it creates a venue at the level of government policy for women to exhibit their abilities and influence social perceptions. The biggest obstacles to women’s political empowerment are social, and the quota serves as a mechanism to artificially break down one of these barriers. There is no guarantee that social perceptions will change, but the opportunity is there, and the role of the state in providing this opportunity is critical.

Conclusion

Family, Islam, women’s civil society organizations, and the women’s quota in Parliament all play a role in either assisting or inhibiting women’s participation in the public sphere of Jordanian society. Family and Islam are direct impediments to women’s empowerment. Women’s civil society organizations attempt to empower women, but are ineffective at doing so. The women’s quota, on the other hand, assists women’s strategic empowerment. Overall, it is the persistence of patriarchal values and gender roles in all aspects of Jordanian society that consistently hinders women’s participation in the public sphere. Women have not gained strategic rights or complete political empowerment because patriarchal values continue to influence social perceptions of women’s abilities to serve as leaders and to participate in decision-making processes.

The family, as the most basic source of the inculcation of patriarchal gender roles, is a major obstacle to women’s empowerment in the public sphere. Women within the family are raised to occupy non-decision-making roles and to value family above everything else. Women in Jordanian society play a dual role—they must balance between the traditional role of wife and mother while also contending with the newly available option of working. This creates a double burden on women and a disincentive for their equal participation in the public sphere. As many of the female subjects explained, when there is a conflict between the two roles, or when circumstances dictate that a woman choose between the two roles, the woman will invariably chose to stay at home and raise a family. Opting out of the family life

¹⁰⁸ Connell, 529-31, quoted by Al-Ali, 229.

or putting career before family are not viable options given the patriarchal nature of Jordanian society. Even those in the primary study sample who have full support from their families to pursue an education and a career feel that they must also place a priority on raising a family. The biggest obstacle to women's empowerment in the public sphere is the socialization process within the family resulting in the internalization of patriarchal values.

In the public sphere, tribalism is a significant barrier to women's political empowerment, because tribal-support is necessary for success in elections. Most tribally-based organizations do not support women's participation as equals, and those who do generally only support women in order to advance their own agendas. Within the structure of tribalism, males have a distinct advantage over females in the ability to provide for community members, and thus males are favored over females for positions of political leadership.

Like the family structure, Islam stands as a large obstacle to women's strategic empowerment, because it serves to institutionalize and legitimize patriarchal gender roles. Religion plays a central role in shaping the beliefs and actions of Jordanian women, and there is a lack of true questioning of the values prescribed through Islam in Jordan. Islam in Jordan has been co-opted by patriarchy, and supports women in roles of subordination to men. The system of Islamic values creates a realm within which women are protected but not allowed to exercise complete power or agency. Much like the family structure, this means that most women feel content with the established gender roles, and do not feel that they are being deprived of anything. Islamist political factions have supported women's rights, but only within the framework of conservative Islamic interpretations, and thus there is little space within Islam for women to achieve strategic empowerment.

Women's organizations, although they do not directly inhibit women's political empowerment, do not adequately enable women to take decision-making roles. Women's civil society organizations deny women opportunities for participation in decision-making processes because most organizations are lead by elite power-holders, and members are uninvolved in making decisions about the organization. Women join women's organizations primarily for the practical benefits, and most are not ideologically motivated or interested in

promoting women's issues. This means that women's organizations constitute an insufficient force for addressing women's strategic interests in larger society. Furthermore, the agendas of women's civil society organizations are guided by donor interest more than by the specific needs of Jordanian women. The women's movement remains fragmented and uncoordinated, as a result of competition for financial aid, and this undermines the strength of the movement to create change. Although women's civil society organizations in Jordan have made many practical advancements, they have not strategically empowered women.

There are many factors that affect women's political empowerment, but it is the system of patriarchal values underlying all aspects of Jordanian society that persistently prevents women from occupying decision-making roles. Based on the data gathered from the primary study sample, it is not conscious obedience of the female to the male but allegiance to the family and to religion—which are inherently patriarchal—that dictates and perpetuates the woman's role in Jordanian society. Patriarchy dictates relationships of domination of the man and subordination of the woman—thus it is the system of patriarchal values which ultimately inhibits women's participation as decision-makers equal to men. Patriarchy underlies all institutions and spheres of existence in Jordanian society, including the family or tribe, Islam, and the political system. Sharabi argues,

patriarchal society, in its traditional as well as its modern form, derives its strength from its ability to satisfy *basic* needs...a person is lost when cut off from the family, the clan, or the religious group. The state cannot replace these protective primary structures. Indeed, the state is an alien force that oppresses one, as is equally civil society, a jungle where only the rich and powerful are respected and recognized.¹⁰⁹

Thus, it is the internalization of patriarchy and its influence on all spheres of Jordanian society—both public and private—that most inhibits women's political participation and restricts widespread social change. One of the most overwhelming obstacles to women's political participation is the perceived lack of need for change, which seems to stem from the completeness of the internalization of values. Most women are satisfied within the boundaries of the family and the guidelines of Islam, where they are protected and respected. As long as the private sphere of society—particularly the family, but also religion—provides sufficiently for the basic needs of women, there is an absence of incentive for women to enter the public

¹⁰⁹ Sharabi, 35.

sphere. Women will have gained practical rights in the public sphere, where the public sphere has filled in for the private sphere in providing practical needs—financial assistance and education—but gender roles will not have been changed, and thus women will not have gained strategic empowerment in the public sphere. Dissenting against the patriarchal values of the family leaves the individual highly vulnerable—as long as there is no perceived need, individuals will not test the boundaries. This has serious consequences for the status of women, who remain entrenched in patriarchal gender roles despite gaining legal rights and increased financial independence. Women will not gain empowerment in the public sphere—which entails participation in decision-making processes—as long as patriarchal gender roles remain unchallenged. The system of patriarchal values remains unchallenged as long as the existing social structure provides completely for the practical needs of each individual, and as long as allegiance to the group is valued over the individual.

Furthermore, as Sharabi argues, in a patriarchal society, the government is incapable of breaking down the social values that dictate gender roles. In Jordan in particular, where there is a high level of distrust in the efficiency and transparency of the government, change does not happen through the political system. Women in the primary study sample do not believe that participating in the political process will change anything. Those in the sample who perceive problems with the status or treatment of women cite society or culture as the source of discrimination, and the burden of change is placed unanimously on society. Most legislative improvements have been unsuccessful at strategically empowering women because the government is incapable of sufficiently replacing the private sector as the provider of basic needs and moral values.

It is surprising then that the one factor which may present the most significant challenge to social perceptions of women in Jordan is a legislative measure—the women’s quota in Parliament. Contrary to my initial hypothesis, the women’s quota in Parliament is an important factor in breaking down initial social barriers to women’s participation in decision-making processes. The women’s quota has undermined socially-defined gender roles, and as such presents a significant challenge to the existing absence of women in decision-making roles. In elections, women do not succeed because most Jordanians believe that women are

less capable of serving in the government than men. Even when individuals vote based strictly on the skills and capabilities of the candidates, women lose to men, because there is a lack of faith in women as political leaders, and very few past experiences with which to judge the capabilities of women as political leaders. In this social context, the quota for women's seats in Parliament is a reasonable mechanism for overcoming the strategic obstacles to women's participation in the political system, because it provides the opportunity for women to change social perceptions about the capabilities of women in the government in their own right. By using the quota to surmount the initial social barriers, women are given the chance to prove their own abilities.

There are clearly problems with the women's quota, and questions have been raised as to whether the women in Parliament are truly able to advance their own interests. There is not widespread public approval of the women's quota, and this may undermine its efficacy. Ultimately, however, the quota has placed women into decision-making roles, which they had been previously unable to access on their own. The quota is a mechanism for artificially lowering the social barriers to women's political participation, and as such it fundamentally facilitates women's strategic empowerment. The ability of the quota to permanently change social values and gender roles remains to be evaluated, as the quota is still in its incipient phase. However, the quota is a promising development because it does not simply provide for the practical needs of women, as other legislative reforms have. Rather, the quota increases women's access to decision-making processes, and as such creates a space for women to achieve empowerment.

Women in Jordan are perceived as less capable than men of serving in positions of leadership. This perception is internalized in all members of society—men and women—and prevents women from taking leadership positions in the public sphere; women lack the self-confidence or even desire to be politically active, and even if they decide to try to enter positions of power, they are prevented by the wider societal perception that women cannot serve as leaders. Women face barriers to political empowerment on two levels: first, at the level of self-identity; second, at the level of broad social values and external societal perceptions. These two levels are mutually-reinforcing—individual perceptions about proper

gender roles are established through socialization, and once they are internalized they create a massive social will that makes dissent very difficult. Views are homogenized, and there is little room for even imagining that things could be different. Gender roles are established in the private sphere and are transferred to the public sphere, creating a comprehensive society in which there is no space for women to occupy different gender roles. The strength and centrality of the family in Jordanian society creates a public sphere that is heavily entwined with the values established at the family level. All areas of Jordanian society are influenced by patriarchy, which creates a lack of “enabling spaces” for women’s participation as decision-makers.¹¹⁰

One issue which has not been fully addressed in this study is the role of apathy towards politics and the level of distrust in the government. These factors affect women’s political participation, but they are not in any means unique to women. Women’s levels of political participation are significantly lower than men’s, but this is merely an indicator of the additional obstacles that women face with respect to political participation. The lack of interest in political participation among women—even at the level of voting—is not just a about general apathy, but is accompanied by a sense of the permanence of social and political structures in Jordan. Several of the women in the primary study sample do not vote because they are convinced that the influence of tribal ties makes voting ineffective. When asked about the potential of having women in Parliament, and the value thereof, some of the women expressed the belief that it would never happen in today’s society, because “you can’t change the society [or] your family.”¹¹¹

The majority of women in the primary study sample do not perceive *any* problem with the status of women’s rights and liberties in Jordanian society, and thus feel no need to participate in politics. The feeling that the position of women in Jordanian society is satisfactory stems from the process of socialization which takes place first in the private sphere and is then reinforced by interactions in the public sphere. The gender roles which the individual internalizes are based on patriarchal values, which are inherent to tribal and

¹¹⁰ Malhas, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

¹¹¹ Noor Alostaz, Personal Interview, 17 April 2006.

Islamic social structures in Jordan. Women's lack of participation and empowerment in the public sphere is largely a symptom of their accepted roles in the private sphere. The family and Islamic culture are mechanisms by which patriarchal gender roles are institutionalized. Thus, changes at the level of practical rights are unlikely to change women's political empowerment because women themselves are raised to believe that women are less-capable of taking leadership and decision-making roles in society. Some of the women in the primary study sample expressed that there are some things a woman cannot or should not do, but then later said that they believe men and women in Jordan have all the same rights. Gender roles in Jordanian society have been internalized and adopted as appropriate behaviors, and thus are not seen as restrictions. Most women believe that, theoretically, they can do anything, but feel content to act within the boundaries established by society.

Sabbagh stresses that it is important to ask not only whether women have the tools for empowerment, but whether they have the ability and opportunity to use these tools.¹¹² Most of the professionals interviewed agree that Jordanian women are well aware of their rights, but that they do not necessarily practice them. Without attainment of strategic rights, women have not been able to fully utilize practical rights, because they continue to be held back by social discrimination. Women have gained many tools, in the form of economic and legislative improvements, but the persistence of patriarchal values in Jordanian society prevents them from using these tools to achieve political empowerment.

Dababneh argues that the political situation in the region—liberalization, increased democratization, and the struggle for human rights—is a facilitator of the women's movement.¹¹³ What is needed for women in Jordan to gain strategic empowerment is for women to challenge the existing social values and patriarchal gender roles. Working within the framework of traditional and patriarchal values hampers social change and prevents women's political empowerment. Only measures which challenge the fundamental Jordanian social values will be able to give women access to complete empowerment in all spheres of society.

¹¹² Sabbagh, Personal Interview, 26 April 2006.

¹¹³ Dababneh, Personal Interview, 20 April 2006.

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Appendix 1.1 – Primary Study Sample Questionnaire

1. Age_____ Occupation/Position_____
2. How many years of school have you finished?
3. How do you identify religiously?

Education/Resources (A)

1. What rights do women have, according to Jordanian law?
2. What would you do if you wanted to change something in your school/community/workplace that you did not agree with (such as a rule, or problem)?
3. What kinds of financial or educational resources are available for women in Amman? How accessible are these resources?

Tribal/Traditional Values (B)

1. Who are your most important role models?
2. From where do you get your ideas about appropriate behavior as a woman?
3. What does your family say about the ideal place/role of women in society?
4. Have you/would you ever consider going against the wishes/values of your family? What would happen if you did so?

Religion and Self-Image (C)

1. What role does religion/faith play in shaping your beliefs?
2. What role does religion/faith play in guiding your actions?
3. How closely do you abide by the prescriptions/ideas presented in holy texts/scriptures/sayings?
4. To what extent does the religious identity of a political candidate affect your opinion of him or her?
5. In what ways (if at all) do you question the values/rules given by your religion?
6. What does your religion say (if anything) about the ideal place/role for a woman in society? (at home, working, both, or other)
7. Where/How/From whom did you learn the rules/values of your religion?
8. What has been the effect of the rise in Political Islam/Islamic fundamentalism on the women's movement (or on women's participation in political organizations)?

Politics Participation (D)

1. Do you belong to any social or political organizations?
2. Have you voted in past elections, and do you plan to vote in the next election?
 - 2a. If no, why not?
 - 2b. If yes, what most influenced your choice of candidates?
 - political experience of the candidate
 - the candidate was someone I knew well/my family knew well
 - the candidate was a member of my tribe
 - the candidate's platform
 - my family/friends recommended the candidate
 - the candidate belonged to a political party/group I support
 - the personal qualities/background of the candidate
 - other

3. How do you feel about having female leaders in the government (elected or appointed)?
 4. What do you think about the current Quota Law for women in parliament?
 5. How often do you encounter discrimination against women, whether directed towards you personally or towards others?
 6. How do you feel women's rights/political empowerment in Jordan could be improved?
1. Do you view the government's involvement in women's organizations/the women's movement as positive, negative, or both?
 2. What do you think of the Quota for women in Parliament? Is it effective and beneficial?
 3. What are the general strengths and weaknesses of the women's movement in Jordan?
 4. What has been the effect of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism/Political Islam on women's political participation?
 5. How well-informed do you think most Jordanian women are of their rights?
 6. What role does the religiosity of a political candidate play in his/her success?
 7. Why do you think Hayat Massimi was the most successful of all the female candidates in the 2003 elections? How did IAF-endorsement affect her success?
 8. What do you think about the internal cohesion of the women's movement—i.e. cooperation between women's organizations?
 9. What affect does tribalism have on women's abilities to win election?
 10. What are the most important factors that prevent changing social views of women in Jordanian society?
 11. Do you think that there are adequate resources available for women to enter politics in Jordan? Are they adequately accessible to all?
 12. What is the role of the family in perpetuating women's beliefs about the appropriate roles of women in society? What is the role of religion?
 13. How do you think that women's rights in Jordan could or should be improved?

In all interviews, additional questions were introduced where necessary to elaborate on specific issues as raised by the interview subject.

All interview subjects were informed of the nature of this study, and gave verbal consent for their responses to be used and published.

