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# The Evolution of Female Labour Force Participation in Jordan

Alma Boustati\*

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the evolution of female labour force participation in Jordan vis-à-vis institutional and economic development. When it comes to institutions, the primary focus will be on family law and labour law. Within the economic development framework, the focus will be on how the social contract motivated the structuring of the economy, labour market, and approach to welfare during three stages of Jordan's economic development, namely the industrialisation period (1967-1982), the economic bust period (1983-1992), and the economic adjustment period (post-1993). Within each period, the implications of these factors on the composition and size of the female labour force participation is discussed. The findings indicate that a patriarchal approach to welfare, and consequently the low female labour force participation, was sustainable through economic policy which relied on high male wages and high non-wage income achieved through a combination of aid, remittances, and cheap foreign labour.

**Keywords:** Labour; Women; Jordan.

**JEL classification:** J16, J21, N35.

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## **1. Introduction**

As of 2016, Jordan had the third lowest female labour force participation rate in the world (WDI, 2019). This becomes puzzling when we look at women's educational attainment, health, and fertility rate. Gender educational parity has been achieved in the country and women have some of the highest educational attainments in the region; the fertility rate has been on a trajectory of decline for the past 30 years; and women's life expectancy is high and rising. Economic growth in Jordan has been healthy, averaging 5% per year since 2000 (WDI, 2019), and urbanisation and industrialisation have been in full swing since the 1970s.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the history of female labour force participation in Jordan and to infer from it the different factors that may have affected its evolution. It also serves to point out exactly when this 'gender paradox' became salient in the country and to provide a contextual understanding of the issue at hand. This exploration concludes that the combination of economic and institutional developments in Jordan repeatedly 'sheltered' women from the need to become wage earners, especially women who did not progress beyond secondary education. Whenever demand opportunities arose, women were unable to take advantage of them because of various economic policies that substituted them for other workers. More importantly, a government desire to maintain its end of a social contract that was rapidly becoming unfeasible resulted in a distorted labour market and welfare system which relied on high male wage and non-wage income. This is all underpinned by patriarchal institutions and labour laws and regulations that motivated these economic policies, creating a cycle of reinforcement.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first will describe the framework for the analysis. The second will illustrate the 'gender paradox' in Jordan and situate it in

comparison with MENA and other regions in the world. The third will discuss the gendered institutions in Jordan, namely family law and labour law. Finally, the evolution of female labour force participation vis-à-vis the political economy will be discussed in each of three periods: the import substitution industrialisation policy era (1967-1982); the economic bust period (1983-1992); and, the economic adjustment period (post-1993).

## **2. Framework**

Mainstream economic theories have been unsuccessful in explaining the low female labour force participation in MENA and in Jordan. Becker's (1981) prediction that women's economic activity would increase with the rise in education and decline in fertility rates did not describe the reality of the MENA region. Neither did the U-shaped hypothesis (Goldin, 1994), which asserts that once industrialisation and urbanisation is in full swing, and women catch up to men in educational attainment, female labour force participation will rise after a period of decline.

The anomaly that the MENA region presented prompted researchers to invoke patriarchal culture as the reason for the persistently low female labour force participation. This either took the form of looking at Islam as an inhibitor of women's work or, when that explanation failed in cross-country studies, claiming that there is an abstract 'Arab' or 'Middle Eastern' culture that refuses to accept the presence of women outside of the household. These studies tend to be conceptually weak; they merely repeat an obvious truth and claim it is explanatory. There is no discussion in the economic literature of the origin of this 'culture', how it translates to lower participation, or why it persisted in MENA alone when in other countries it transformed. According to Karshenas (1997, p. 8):

Since the transformation of patriarchal family structures and the emergence of double wage-earning families are only very recent phenomena (a post-World

War II development in Western Europe, somewhat earlier in Soviet Russia) it is almost tautologically true that traditional cultures tend to preserve the patriarchal family structures in all societies.

Recently, there has been speculation whether the participation of women in the labour force and, therefore, the emergence of two-earner families is indeed as new as previously suggested. Humphries & Sarasúa (2012), for example, revisit the data that gave rise to this misconception and conclude that, for the most part, women did work but their work went unrecognised for various reasons, including the definition of what constitutes work as well as the preconceived notions of officials collecting data, business owners, and workers themselves. Whether this is also true for the case of Jordan is unclear and will be discussed in section 5. Nevertheless, the spirit of the argument remains correct; it is not enough to argue that conservative social norms are the sole reason for inhibiting women from working without also discussing the mechanisms through which they constrain work and the reasons that they are reproduced and remain sustainable.

The critique of the 'cultural' argument prompted researchers to look at the role of economic policy and structural adjustment in female employment in MENA as this has been salient in explaining the experience of women in other parts of the world such as Latin America and East Asia. Moghadam (2005) takes a feminist political economy perspective where she looks at the gendered outcomes of state policy and redistribution and their implications on women's work. Ross (2008), on the other hand, suggests that revenue from oil prices is presented as the reason behind the low female labour force participation in MENA, since it encouraged a model of growth that relied on the non-traded sector which, unlike the traded-sector, is not 'female intensive'.

Karshenas (1997) takes a developmental approach to understand the structures of the labour market given modes of production and the gender system. He finds that high

wages in the labour market, made feasible by oil rents, allowed the sustainability of the one breadwinner family model. Finally, Assaad (2014a) takes an institutional approach to the low female labour force participation and explains it by invoking the dual labour market in the region that promotes the interest of 'insiders' at the expense of 'outsiders' who tend to be women and young workers.

In this paper, similar to the structural adjustment literature, I will undertake a development political economy approach where I will analyse the interaction between changes in economic policy and institutions and their effects on female labour force participation. When it comes to institutions, I will primarily explore the role of family law and labour law in solidifying the role of women as homemakers or, at best, secondary wage earners. As I will explain, this type of patriarchal institutions is not unique to Jordan or to MENA so the existence of these institutions alone cannot explain the exceptionally low participation. However, with the 'correct' economic and political environment the patriarchal form of the family was preserved and, as a result, inhibited women's work. Within the political economy framework, I will look at how the desire to uphold the social contract over time motivated the structuring of the economy and, in turn, the labour market as well as how it defined the approach to welfare. I will attempt to bring these two aspects together to illustrate how the economic environment inhibited the need for a secondary wage earner and did not provide enough incentive to break away from the institutionalised gender roles.

More precisely, I will begin by exploring how the patriarchal institutions in Jordan are manifested in family and labour law. I will argue that they do not severely inhibit the mobility of women nor restrict their presence in the public sphere. On the other hand, these institutions go a long way in defining gender roles, especially in the husband/wife relationship; they ensure that the primary wage earner in the family is the male and

that, if the woman chooses to work, her role will be marginalised to that of secondary wage earner.

I will then explore how the social contract on which Jordan was established motivated economic policies. This political economy analysis will be divided into three parts, based on three distinct phases of the Jordanian economy. The first is the oil-boom era from 1967 to 1982 when the Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) strategy envisioned by the Jordanian government was at its strongest. The second is the oil-crash era from 1983 to 1992 characterised by an end to economic growth and heavy state borrowing. The third is the structural adjustment period, post-1993, and an attempt to move towards export-oriented growth. In each time period, the main motivation for economic policy will be discussed along with macroeconomic indicators including GDP and industry-specific growth; government spending and revenue; and, poverty and inequality. The effect on the labour market at the time is then showcased, including consideration of the employment and unemployment rate, number of foreign workers, and the distribution of the labour force across different sectors.

Finally, the evolution of female labour force participation will be analysed at each time period through the lens of the economic and labour market environment of the time, keeping in mind women's institutionalised role under the labour and family laws. Since the role of women as secondary wage earners is of singular relevance, there is a special focus on the welfare situation of households in each time period. Additionally, since the structure and the size of the demand for labour has been shown to be of distinct relevance by the literature, it will also be explored.

The main setback pertaining to this analysis is the scarcity of historical data. Even when it is available, the data is sometimes incompatible (depending on the source) or incomparable across time. This is especially relevant when it comes to female labour

force participation since the definition of what constitutes work can be ambiguous. Other indicators where no data exists or is very weak include that on poverty, inequality, wages, and the number of foreign workers. Moreover, having only aggregate data means it is not possible to disentangle the various forces at play. For example, we may observe an increase in the female labour force participation rate, but we cannot tell if it is due to an increase in unemployment, an increase in the number of foreign female workers, or a 'real' increase in the economic activity of Jordanian women. As a result, this paper will not only employ aggregate data but also reports conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, and the Jordanian government as well as on academic research that was undertaken at the time.

Lack of historical data is also one of the reasons that this analysis can only go as far back as the late 1960s. Jordan has a complex demographic and geographic history; for example, due to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank the borders that constitute present-day Jordan have only been defined since 1967 (Piro, 1998). Additionally, the Palestinians who sought refuge in Jordan in 1948 and 1967 now constitute the majority of the Jordanian population (Gandolfo, 2012). As a result, the current Jordanian geography and demography goes only as far back as 1967; analyses undertaken before that year will require the examination of two or three populations, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **3. Gender Paradox in Jordan**

Female labour force participation in Jordan started off at a very low rate. The earliest available statistic on women's work is from 1952 and it shows the percentage of economically active women to be 3.1% (Shakhatreh, 1995). There are plenty of reasons why this might have been the case. The MENA region, and particularly Jordan

at that time, had one of the lowest female literacy rates in the world and one of the highest fertility rates (Moghadam, 2005). Additionally, the limitations of household surveys at that time (and indeed even today) in capturing women's economic activity and the changing definition of what constitutes work may have resulted in an underestimation of the female labour force participation rate (Moghadam, 2005; Mujahid, 1982)<sup>1</sup>.

Decades later, and despite efforts to improve data collection (which will be discussed later on), Jordan still has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates, even within the MENA region; as of 2016, it was the third-lowest in the world after Syria and Yemen (WDI, 2019), two countries characterised by conflict and lack of security. The stubbornly low female labour force participation rate becomes much more puzzling when we look at the improvements in socioeconomic indicators in the past three decades which include an improvement in women's educational attainment and health as well as a decline in fertility rates.

Figures 1 and 2 show the Gender Parity Index (GPI)<sup>2</sup> of gross enrolment in primary and secondary, and tertiary education respectively for Jordan and comparable sets of countries – MENA, lower middle-income countries and upper middle-income countries<sup>3</sup>. The gender gap has completely closed for primary and secondary enrolment and reversed for tertiary education, although completion of tertiary education remains lower for Jordanian women than men (World Bank, 2013). All in all, the achievements in educational parity have undeniably been quick and strong,

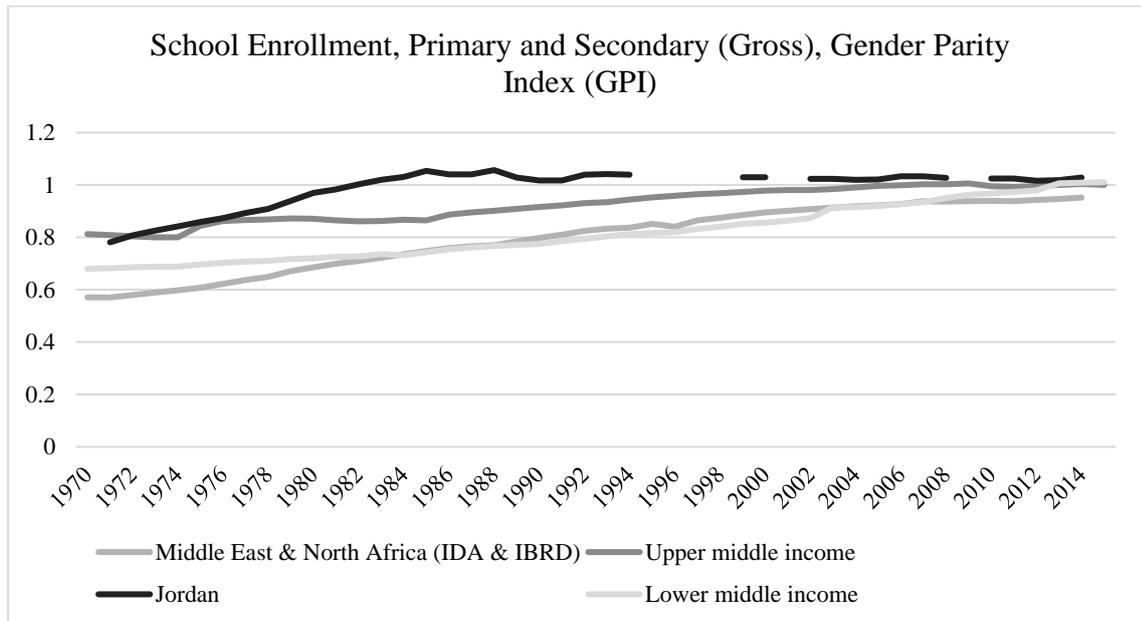
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<sup>1</sup> Women worldwide tend to be over-represented in non-standard employment that are difficult to capture in surveys, such as informal, seasonal, temporary, unpaid, or casual work. For more details see ILO (2016).

<sup>2</sup> The GPI of gross enrolment is calculated by dividing the percentage of enrolled girls over the percentage of enrolled boys in each educational category.

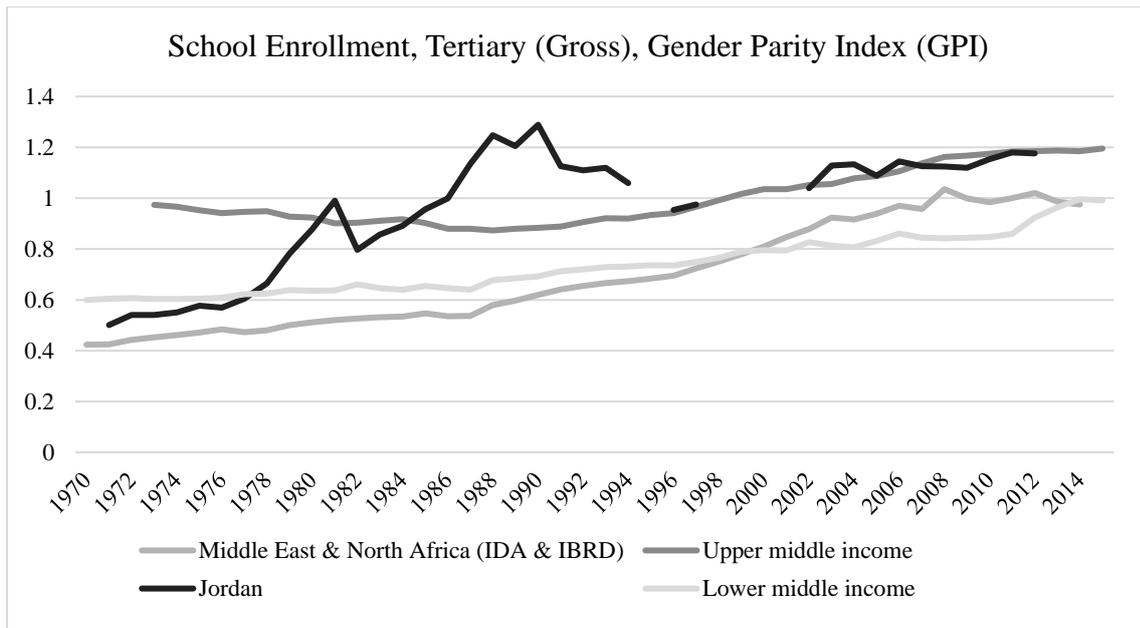
<sup>3</sup> Jordan fluctuates between lower middle-income and upper middle-income from year to year. Therefore, both sets of countries are included.

especially when compared to the other set of countries. It is also important to note that education in Jordan has improved not just for women but for the population as a whole – primary education is almost universal and so is the transition to secondary education. Jordan’s gross tertiary enrolment is also among the highest in MENA (Galal, 2008) having increased by 80% from 1993 to 2016 (WDI, 2019).



**Figure 1 School Enrolment, Primary and Secondary (Gross), Gender Parity Index (GPI)**

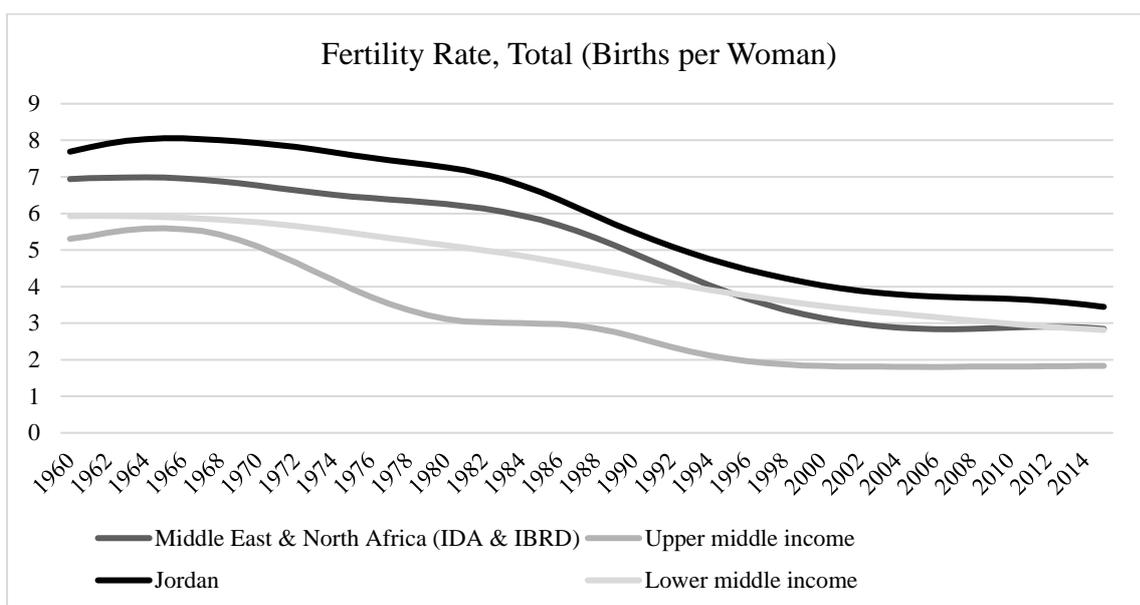
Created from statistics in WDI (2019)



**Figure 2 School Enrolment, Tertiary (Gross), Gender Parity Index (GPI)**

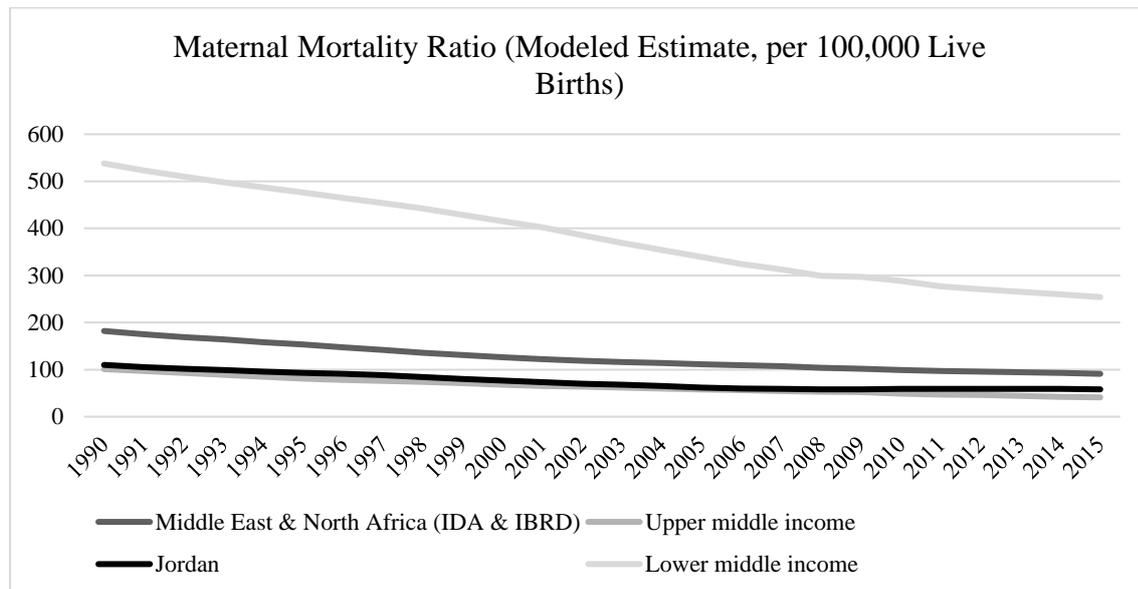
Created using data from WDI (2019)

Fertility rates in Jordan have been declining steadily and women’s health steadily improving. Figure 3 shows the fertility rate in Jordan since the 1960s compared with MENA and lower middle-income countries. While Jordan still has higher fertility rates than the other three sets of countries shown, the decline has been steady and steep. The maternal mortality ratio is low and also declining (Figure 4) and life expectancy for women is higher than that of men and has been increasing (World Bank, 2013).



**Figure 3 Fertility Rates (Births per Woman)**

Created using data from WDI (2019)

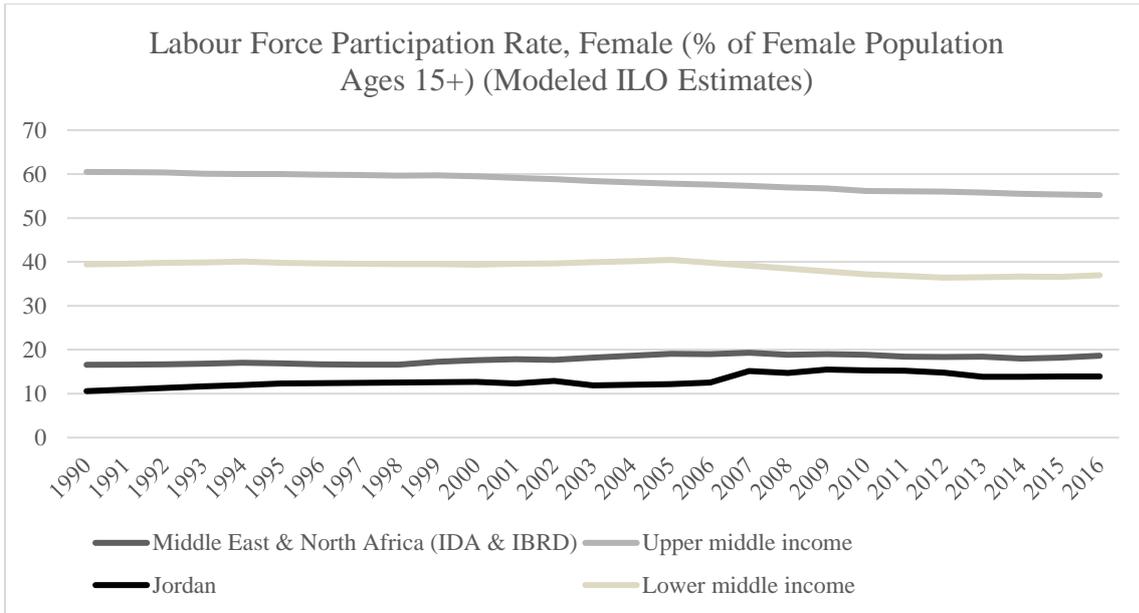


**Figure 4 Maternal Mortality Ratio (Modelled Estimate, per 100,000 Live Births)**

Created using data from WDI (2019)

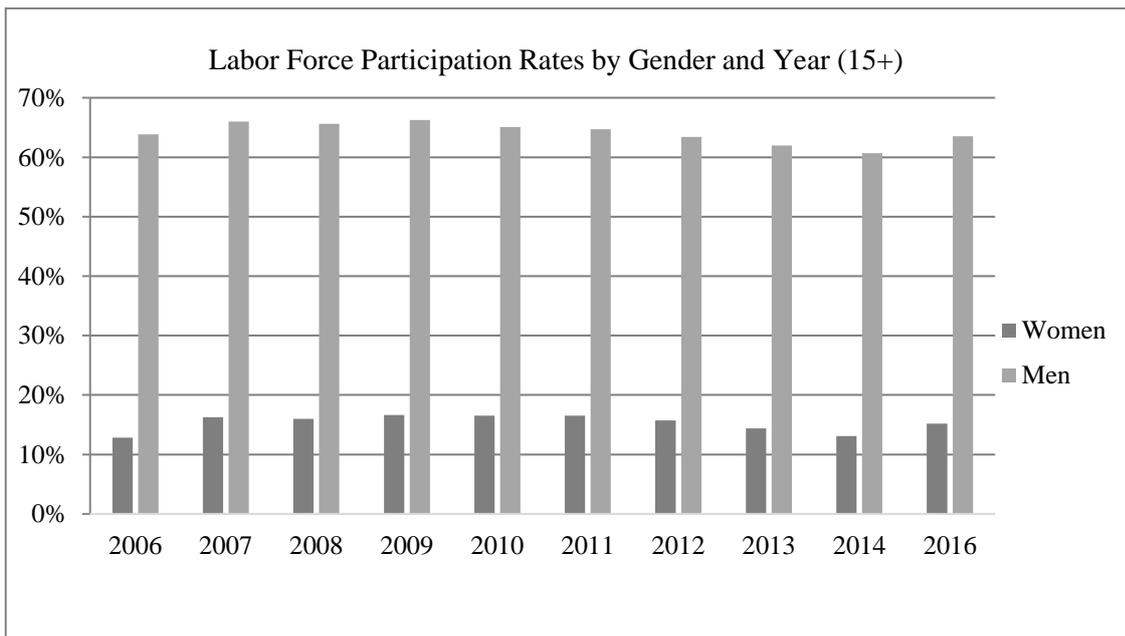
On the other hand, the female labour force participation rate in 2016 was 15%. Figure 5 shows the evolution of female labour force participation since 1990 along with that of comparable sets of countries. The rate in Jordan appears to have increased from 9% in 1990 to 15% in 2016 but it should be noted that the sharp rise shown in 2007 is probably due to a break in the series that happened in correlation with a new sampling frame (using the 2004 population census). This suggests that the female labour force participation rate has remained stagnant (Assaad et al., 2014). In fact, using data from the Jordanian Employment and Unemployment Survey (OAMDI, 2017) Figure 6 indicates a decline in female labour force participation in 2013<sup>4</sup>, with a small recovery in 2016.

<sup>4</sup> The decline remains present even after excluding students and pensioners from the sample as well as non-citizens (in this case the presence of female Syrian refugees is increasing the pool of inactive women).



**Figure 5 Labour Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) (Modelled ILO Estimates)**

Created using data from WDI (2019)



**Figure 6 Labour Force Participation Rate by Gender and Year (15+)**

Created using data from OAMDI (2017)

Even if we were to endorse the idea that conservative social norms are the main culprit for the low female labour force participation, the data does not support that very well. For example, questions on attitudes towards women's work were asked during the Jordanian Labour Market Panel Survey (OAMDI, 2018) in 2010 and 2016 and the answers are illustrated in Table 1. The most important aspect to note is that, all in all,

the majority of the Jordanian population holds egalitarian views regarding women's work. While the percentage of those who do not hold such views is not negligible, it is still surprisingly small given the very low female labour force participation rate. In other words, if social norms alone could explain women's inactivity in Jordan, we would see much less favourable opinions regarding women's work. It is important to note that subjective questions are not always reliable due to various biases regarding the consistency of the answers given and the way questions are posed. Culture, insofar as it translates to family and labour institutions, will be discussed in a more nuanced way in the section 4. However, the table does give an idea of the general views of the Jordanian population, which are surprisingly egalitarian regarding women's work.

**Table 1 Opinions Regarding Women's Work, JLMPS 2010 and 2016**

<b>Opinions Regarding Women's Work, JLMPS 2010 and 2016</b>				
<b>Women should be allowed to work</b>	Women	Men	Women	Men
Year	<b>2010</b>		<b>2016</b>	
Agree	90.4%	Not Surveyed	71.2%	86.1%
Indifferent	2.6%		14.6%	9.6%
Disagree	7.0%		14.2%	4.4%
<b>Women must work for financial autonomy</b>	Women	Men	Women	Men
Year	<b>2010</b>		<b>2016</b>	
Agree	57.4%	Not Surveyed	78.3%	60.4%
Indifferent	11.3%		22.8%	13.8%
Disagree	31.3%		7.8%	16.9%

Created using data from OAMDI (2018)

#### **4. Institutions**

As mentioned, the way in which the economic literature has tackled culture in the MENA region has been very reductive. It interprets culture as individual perceptions rather than a system that motivates the institutions and economic agenda of a country and is, in turn, affected by them. In this section, I aim to give a more nuanced picture

of the gendered aspects of personal status law and labour law. I also argue that the patriarchal institutions present in MENA in general and in Jordan in particular, restrict women's work not because of a rejection of the presence of women in the public sphere, but as a result of creating a source of income for women that is independent of waged labour. In other words, labour law and family law do little to restrict women's mobility or access to jobs but they do ensure that the male breadwinner family model is sanctioned. The other side of this coin is, of course, defining women's primary role as housewife and/or mother. This means that the law ensures that marriage provides a source of income security for women without the need for them to take part in economic activity and it also defines their main role as taking place outside of the labour market. While the first part is present in any relationship outside of marriage between men and women (e.g., father/daughter) – which will be elucidated in the coming section – the role of women is only defined when they become wives.

It is important to note that this feature of family law is not exclusive to Jordan nor MENA. Indeed, it is not even exclusive to Muslim countries. Therefore, while the existence of these institutions undoubtedly dis-incentivise women from taking part in economic activity, they are unable to explain the uniqueness of the Jordanian case within MENA or the global context.

#### *4.1 Family Law*

Family law in Jordan was enacted in 1951 and is derived from Sharia (Amawi, 2000). It governs issues of marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance, and support (Cherland, 2014). The law undoubtedly does not treat men and women equally, although several amendments have been made that have closed some of the gap between the genders, the last of which was in 2010 (Prettitore, 2015). According to the law, the economic wellbeing of the family is solely the responsibility of the husband. This is explicitly

stated in Clause 59, whereby the expenses of the wife are borne by the husband regardless of her wealth (WANA Institute, 2014). These expenses include food, clothing, housing and medicine as well as domestic help. In return, it defines the woman's responsibility to be 'obedient' to her husband at the risk of losing his financial support if she is not. Women will still receive this financial support even if they work as long as the work is legitimate. However, the wife must have her husband's implicit or explicit permission to take up paid employment. Once given, the husband is not allowed to withdraw his permission without a legitimate reason (WANA Institute, 2014).

Family law also treats men and women unequally when it comes to other facets of family life. For example, mothers are not allowed to have guardianship over their children as only the father is allowed that right (Almala, 2014). Inheritance is unequal with a daughter getting only half the share that her brother does. Polygamy is legal (men can have up to four wives at the same time) but not common; only 1.6% of households reported the presence of two or more wives in 2006, 1% in 2010 and a mere 0.3% in 2016 (OAMDI, 2017).

The amendments in 2010 gave women some rights regarding divorce and say in some household matters and also increased the minimum age for marriage to 18 (Prettitore, 2015). However, the essence of the law regarding the role of the genders changed very little. Men remain the legal heads of households and women are still perceived as economically dependent, in need of guardianship, obligated to be obedient, and overall secondary citizens to men (Amawi, 2000). This is contradictory to the stance of Jordanian government since, at least on paper, it appears to be committed to including women in economic and political life. This can be seen as early as 1992 through its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (with some reservations)<sup>5</sup> and the establishment of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) in the same year. Finally, as discussed in the previous section and as will be discussed in Section 5.2, the Jordanian government has actively implemented policies that have resulted in improvements in women's health and education. Amawi (2000, p. 158) explains this inconsistent stance when it comes to gender:

On the one hand are the forces of rapid socioeconomic and political change that modernization has been causing with its concomitant impact on modes of societal interaction and structures and, on the other hand, the desire to preserve traditions and maintain the status quo of the social order and, by extension, the basis of state cohesion.

From the previous discussion, we can conclude that the most important right that a woman has is the explicit financial responsibility her husband has towards her. This financial responsibility forms the basis for the justification of other inequalities between the genders stipulated by law including unequal inheritance as well as women's potentially restricted right to work. As long as women are perceived to be economically dependent on men, discrimination against them can be vindicated by invoking the financial burden that men have to support their families.

As mentioned, it is important to note that the institutionalisation of gender roles is not unique to Jordan. It is not unique to the MENA region either nor to countries that adhere to Sharia when it comes to civil code. For example, the Philippines – a Catholic majority country – has articles in its civil law that define the gender division of labour between husband and wife along similar lines. The variation in female labour force participation across non-MENA, non-Sharia countries imply that this alone cannot justify the low levels of female labour force participation in Jordan. The existence of

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<sup>5</sup> These reservations include the term “sex” in Article 9 in the constitution which states “Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion”.

the right economic conditions which will be described in the next section, created an environment in which the state-sanctioned gender division of labour remained sustainable. In other words, there was not enough incentive to challenge the status quo given the overarching economic situation. However, this is not to say that *ceteris paribus*, the existence of such laws does not dampen women's labour force participation.

#### *4.2 Labour Law*

Upon its formation, the Jordanian government was clearly concerned with income inequality and poverty. Redistributive policies and 'Right to Work' laws during the ISI period illustrated this concern. Article 23(i) in the Jordanian Labour Law of 1952 reads "Work is the right of every citizen, and the State shall provide opportunities for work to all citizens by directing the national economy and raising its standards" (World Bank, 2004, p. 32).

The right of work appeared to be universal, including both men and women. In addition, there were provisions in labour law that directly acknowledged a woman's right to work and the need for it to be reconcilable with her reproductive role through paid maternity leave and day care centre policies. In fact, it has been argued that these provisions were added as a reaction to the labour shortage after the surge of male emigration to pull women into work during the mid-1970s (Miles, 2002).

The clauses that were added to ensure women's right to work have evolved since the 1970s and generally in the direction of more favourable conditions for women. For example, paid maternity leave has increased from six to ten weeks (Hijab, 1988) and can reach up to 12 weeks in the public sector (ILO, 2007), paid for by social security funding (ILO, 2014). Additionally, a workplace must have a day care centre if it employs 20 or more women, the cost of which is divided between the government and

the workplace (Hijab, 1988). Finally, employers are not allowed to terminate a woman's employment if she is pregnant (Hijab, 1988). These laws are neither exceptionally generous nor meagre when compared to those of other developing countries. For example, Egypt and Lebanon have a similar length of maternity leave (12 weeks and 10 weeks respectively)<sup>6</sup> while Syria is much more generous (17 weeks) and Tunisia more parsimonious (6 weeks) (ILO, 2014, p. 54).

The labour law, however, did impose some restrictions on women's employment and mobility. Among these restrictions are some exclusions from nightshifts as well as certain sectors. These limitations undoubtedly contribute to some extent to the low female labour force participation given that they make it more difficult for women to compete with men for available jobs. All in all, however, the restrictions are not exceptionally confining. For example, the exclusion from nightshifts does not hold for sectors that typically employ women, such as nursing, tourism, restaurants, and retail (ILO, 2014). As for the restriction from certain sectors, women are mainly prohibited from working in quarrying, mining, and some manufacturing industries, most of which occupy a negligible percentage of Jordanian labour (ILO, 2014). This is, of course, not to downplay the sexist nature of these laws or the regressive notions of gender roles on which they are based, but to note that they are not restrictive enough to translate into such low female labour force participation.

However, labour law does reinforce the patriarchal social contract by ensuring that the main source of income for a woman is from her male next-of-kin rather than paid employment and underpinning a woman's status as a secondary wage earner if she does work. For example, labour law stipulates that a deceased man's son will receive survivor benefits until the age of 17 while his daughter will receive it as long as she is

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<sup>6</sup> Maternity leave in Lebanon was extended from 7 weeks to 10 weeks in 2014 (Dawlati, 2014)

single (Dahhan, 1980; Olmsted, 2005). In the same spirit, potential beneficiaries of a deceased woman may only receive her 'bequeathed pension salary' if they can prove she was the main breadwinner of the family, which is nearly impossible in practice. The civil service distributes a family allowance to men, but the same courtesy is not extended to women except in a few cases (for example, if the husband is deceased) (Civil Service Bureau, 2007). Additionally, women are encouraged to retire early through several clauses, one of which allows brides an end-of-service bonus and another which permits women full access to their retirement funds if they retire early (Moghadam, 1998). A side effect of the low female participation and the male breadwinner family model is that women are excluded from social safety nets and access to welfare except through their male next-of-kin (Olmsted, 2005).

The general implications of labour law and family law were summarised by (Olmsted, 2005):

These laws were thus contradictory and illustrated how in SWANA [South West Asia and North Africa], as in the Anglo-American tradition, certain economic rights were understood to be male and the economic needs of women (as well as children and the elderly) would be addressed not by the state but within the context of the family. (p. 120)

In that sense, labour law, like family law, reinforces the notion of marriage as a path to income security and access to welfare. It also implicitly reinforces gender roles by designating the default breadwinner of the family to be the husband and, as a result, implicitly relegating household duties to the wife. However, all the explicitly stated clauses in the law only marginally restrict a woman's ability to work. This explains the generally favourable replies to the question "should women be allowed to work" despite the prevalent cultural or social norms that view gender roles through a conventional lens. This reinforces the point made in the framework; it is important to understand the role that culture plays in inhibiting women from working but it is also

important to understand the mechanisms and policies through which it is reinforced and perpetuated. From this analysis, we can conclude that the social norm keeping female labour force participation low is not necessarily the rejection of the notion of women working but rather the downplaying of the role of women as wage earners and the creation and development of a welfare system that makes it unnecessary for them to do so. This is perpetuated by economic factors that allowed this system to remain feasible, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

## **5. Evolution of Female Labour Force Participation**

### *5.1 Background*

As mentioned in the section 2, the current geographic and demographic definition of Jordan has only existed since 1967. Prior to urbanisation, the inhabitants of Jordan were largely Bedouin nomads and the land, for the most part, was unsettled and uncultivated (Patai, 1958). The Palestinians that arrived in 1948 and 1967 after the wars with Israel, however, were different; the former were mostly from urbanised areas while the latter were farmers from villages in the West Bank (Piro, 1998). Therefore, the current Jordanian demographic is comprised of two or three different groups that had completely different development trajectories and labour histories up to 1967. Insofar as the history of work is relevant in determining Jordan's current economic and social structures (Boserup, 1970), we would have to study these groups separately to understand the current form of female labour force participation in Jordan. Given the difficulty of this task, this paper will only discuss the evolution of women's work from 1967 onwards. The little information we have on women's work in Jordan prior to that will be discussed in this section.

According to Boserup (1970), rural women in Arab societies – similar to their Latin American counterparts – did not take part in farm work. She gave three reasons; the first is the presence of a large number of landless workers, an agricultural system

dependent on animal power, and a traditional culture that advocates for confining women to the domestic sphere. She also observes that, while in Latin America, urban women make up a non-negligible part of the labour force, the same is not true for Arab urban women, few of whom take part in economic activity. Recent developments in the definition of work and a better understanding of women's work in farm communities have cast doubt on the first claim, at least in the Arab context. For example, later work on Egypt shows that rural women did, and still do, play a significant role in farming, especially in unpaid family work, a lot of which is not captured by surveys, especially if they take place in the 'wrong' agricultural season (Langsten & Salen, 2008; Tucker, 1976).

It is unclear if what is true for Egypt is also true for Jordan. Patai (1958) observes that while the bulk of the labour force in Jordan is male, women do take a significant part in agricultural activities, especially at harvest time, as well as light industry. Additionally, according to Mujahid (1982), some household surveys undertaken between 1961 and 1976 underestimate the female labour force by about 60% because women who are temporary or unpaid workers tend to not report any economic activity. Therefore, it is safe to assume that there is some degree of underestimation of the role of women in agricultural work. However, more recent efforts to capture 'hidden' female workers in Jordan have shown that it increases the participation rate by very little (Flynn, 1999; Moghadam, 2005). In general, given the limited role that agriculture plays in the Jordanian economy when compared to the Egyptian economy (WDI, 2019), it could very well be the case that agriculture did not contribute as much to the female labour force participation rate. This is the definitely the case today; around 40% of working women in Egypt are employed in the agricultural sector as opposed to at most 6% in Jordan (OAMDI, 2018; WDI, 2019).

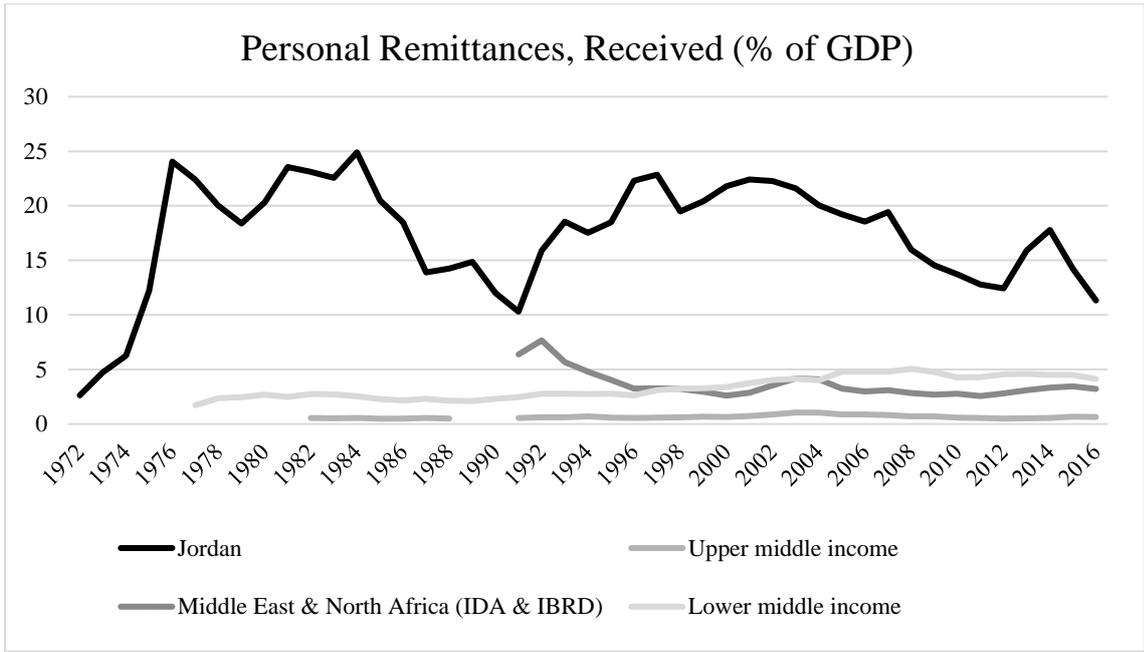
As mentioned in the Gender Paradox section, Jordan is an extreme case even within the MENA region. Therefore, any explanation for the low female labour force participation in Jordan must be rooted in the experience of MENA at large, but should also showcase the uniqueness of the Jordanian circumstances. In general, many of the characteristics of the MENA region are strongly present in Jordan; while not oil-rich, Jordan's economic fate is tied to oil prices through remittances from Jordanian emigrants in oil-rich Gulf States and other forms of capital flow. Additionally, just like most countries in the region, Jordan followed an authoritarian bargaining social contract. The country also followed an Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) policy and consequently adopted an economic liberalisation program sponsored by the IMF and the World Bank. Saying that, there are still some unique aspects that distinguish Jordan from other countries in the region, most notably the fact that it is both agriculturally poor and resource poor as well as simultaneously labour-sending and labour-receiving. These factors have important implications for female labour force participation that will be explored in the upcoming sections.

### *5.2 Import Substitution Industrialisation Period 1967-1982*

Upon its formation, Jordan followed the rest of the MENA region by establishing the so-called authoritarian bargain social contract, that is the state gains legitimacy by offering economic security in exchange for political rights. The economic security was ensured through redistribution and equity in economic and social policy, provision of welfare and social services, and guaranteed working opportunities in the public sector (World Bank, 2004). Economic policy, the constitution and labour law as well as family law were developed to reinforce this social contract. The state had to maintain a standard of living for its people or lose political legitimacy and face dissent. Indeed, this has been observed multiple times in Jordan where attempts at austerity were met

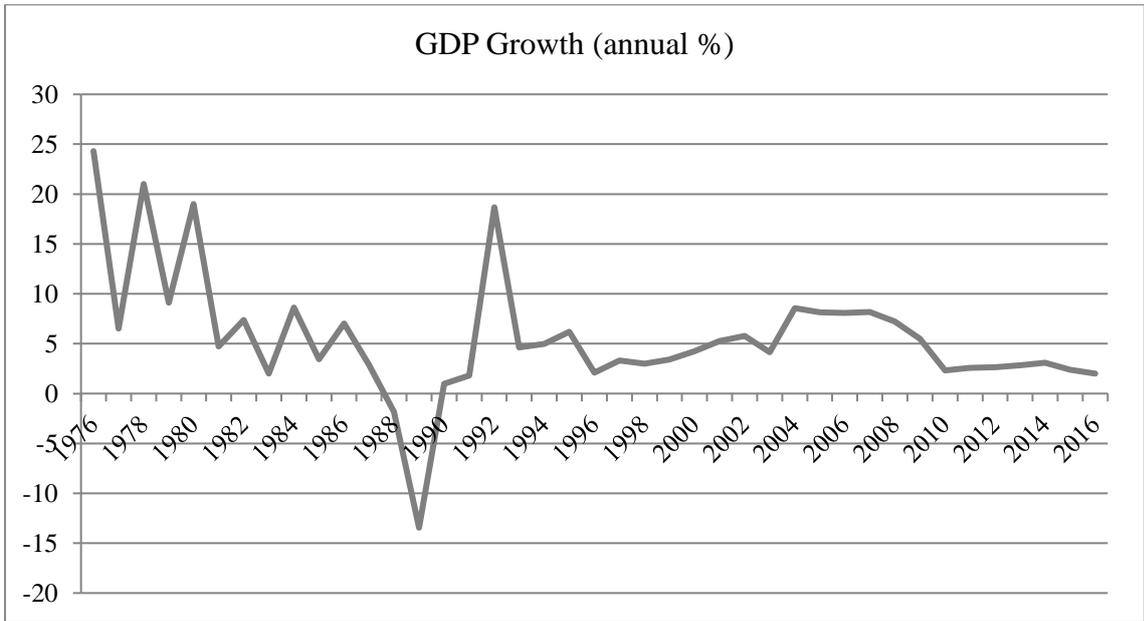
by widespread political protest. The social contract and its evolution have implications for the relationship between the genders and on the role of women in both private and public life.

During the 1970s, large waves of overwhelmingly male Jordanians left the country to find jobs in the oil-rich Arab states (Chatelard, 2010). The increase in oil prices and ambitious development plans of the labour-poor Gulf increased the demand for labour and by the early 1980s, almost one-third of the Jordanian labour force was working in the Gulf, with remittances amounting to more than 21% of GDP (Figure 7) (Harrigan et al., 2006). These remittances along with foreign aid helped strengthen the import substitution industrialisation policy envisioned by the government (Harrigan et al., 2006). According to a 1983 article in the New York Times, 51% of Jordan's budget expenditure was financed by foreign sources, most of which went to economic development projects (Friedman, 1983). Some of the financial aid came from Arab countries and the rest from the United States (Harrigan et al., 2006; USAID, 1973). The aim of the economic policy was to diversify the industrial base of the country and follow a protectionist strategy to encourage local production. Two-thirds of investments made in manufacturing and mining were in capital-intensive industries, mainly fertilisers, potash and cement (World Bank, 1983). Some investments also went to agricultural technology in the Jordan Valley. Additionally, programmes for state provision of social services were implemented including education, housing, healthcare, food subsidies and other benefits (Kanaan & Kardoosh, 2002; World Bank, 2004). Between 1974 and 1982 GDP growth in Jordan was one of the highest in the world at an average of 11.6% (Kanaan & Kardoosh, 2002) (Figure 8).



**Figure 1 Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP)**

Created using data from WDI (2019)



**Figure 2 GDP Growth (annual %)**

Created using data from WDI (2019)

The high emigration and high growth led to an increase in labour demand relative to supply. As a result, in the late 1970s the government opened the door to unskilled workers, thus making the country both labour sending and labour receiving (Chatelard, 2010). Additionally, clauses were added to labour law (see section 4.2) to help women

reconcile work with their role as mothers (Miles, 2002). Policy intervention segmented the labour market into two sectors: one for nationals consisting of mostly public sector jobs and some private sector jobs that provided high wages and stability, and the other for foreign workers, mostly in agriculture, construction, and domestic service characterised by low wages and no legal protections. Most of the foreign workers were Egyptian or Syrian men working in construction and agriculture or East Asian women working in personal services, particularly domestic work<sup>7</sup> (Chatelard, 2010). According to Bel-Air (2016), this low-skilled immigration improved the economic situation for nationals through the 'job-ladder effect' whereby the national labour force mobilises upwards due to the influx of rent into the economy that raises wage expectations. Beyond the high wages, unearned income was also high; revenues incurred by non-productive activities (remittances as well as aid) amounted to 50% of Jordan's GDP.

At the beginning of this period, the female labour force participation rate showed a significant increase, from 3.1% in 1952 to 8.4% in 1976 (Mujahid, 1982; Shakhathreh, 1995). The breakdown of female participation by educational attainment shows that the reason for the increase is probably due to the investment in education. Most women with post-secondary education or higher participated in the labour force, while just under half of those with secondary education were working (Mujahid, 1982). Investments in health as well as changes in labour law may also have contributed to driving women to work. However, this increase did not last; by the early 1980s, women's participation in the labour force had stagnated. The breakdown of participation by educational attainment shows a decline in the participation rate of all

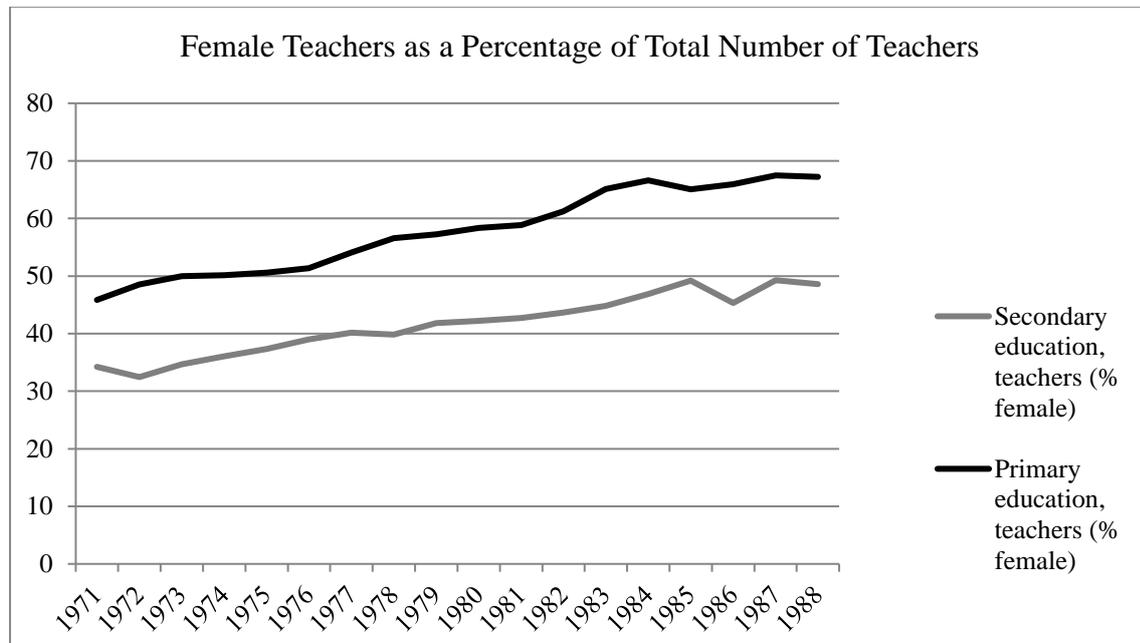
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<sup>7</sup> According to Humphrey (1990) this role was previously taken by rural Jordanian women or Palestinian refugee women. According to Frantz (2008, p. 612) this is due to fewer Jordanian/Palestinian women being willing to engage in domestic work (probably because of improving economic conditions) and that once foreign workers were available, employers preferred them because they are "easier to control".

women, but most notably those with only secondary education; their participation went from 46% in 1976 to 26% in 1982 (Mujahid, 1982; Shakhathreh, 1995). There were several reasons for this; first, as education expands, more women with secondary education likely chose to continue their studies as opposed to joining the labour force. Second, although fertility rates were declining, they were still comparatively high. Third, and perhaps most important, and unique to Jordan, were the high wages relative to labour productivity and to other countries – even in regions such as Lebanon and Egypt (World Bank, 1983). This was in addition to a steady flow of consumption remittances and food and energy subsidies which meant there was a level of consumption that was not matched by productivity (Piro, 1998). It also meant that there was no need for a secondary wage earner in the family, reinforcing the model of the male breadwinner and female homemaker.

The changing industrial structure as well as the educational composition of the female labour force also meant a change in the type of jobs that women occupied. For example, in 1961, 37.4% of working women outside of agriculture were in the manufacturing sector (as opposed to 5% of the non-agricultural male labour force) and 58% were in services (Mujahid, 1982). By 1976, however, only 10.2% of female labourers were in the manufacturing sector (equal to the share of men in the sector), and 80.6% were in services (Mujahid, 1982). The reason behind this could be the expansion of capital-intensive industry which decreased the demand for labour in manufacturing, with the scarce jobs going to men, as is observed elsewhere in the world (Safa, 1977). Other non-manufacturing blue-collar occupations also exhibited a decline in the share of women, speculatively because they were taken up by low-skilled Syrian and Egyptian workers who were willing to accept lower wages than Jordanians and work for longer hours. The largest share of women in any sector

relative to men was in professional jobs, namely public administration and community services, and clerical work (International Labour Office, 1985; Mujahid, 1982). The share of female teachers in primary and secondary education increased substantially relative to men's (Figure 9).



**Figure 3 Female Teachers as a Percentage of Total Number of Teachers**

Created using data from WDI (2019)

Even in this period, improvement in the educational attainment of women in Jordan was described as 'remarkable' and educated women participated in the labour force in large numbers (World Bank, 1983). In 1982, 75% of women with 13+ years of education were employed, mainly occupying jobs in the public sector (Shakhatreh, 1995) and there was an expectation that the expansion in education would eventually lead to even higher female labour force participation (Susser, 1990). After all, in 1982 83% of the female population had less than nine years of education and half of these were illiterate (Shakhatreh, 1995). Therefore, despite the high participation rate of educated women, it is not surprising that female labour force participation was so low.

To sum up, at the end of the ISI period, female labour force participation in Jordan was stagnant but projected to grow. Given the increasing educational attainment of women, the high participation rate of educated women, and their concentration in professional services, it seemed as if it was only a matter of time until the female labour force participation rate in Jordan caught up with that of the rest of the world. Indeed, the 1981-1985 Development Plan projected a rise in female labour force participation given the accelerated enrolment in education. The only exception was women with only secondary education, whose participation rate was declining. This was summed up by Shami & Taminian, (1990, p. 68):

In the urban case study, the rapid rise of income levels during the oil boom era resulted in the withdrawal of many women from the labour force, especially poorer unskilled and uneducated women whose employment potential could not promise an economic return that made their work outside the home a worthwhile endeavour. For skilled or educated women, however, the oil boom has led to increased opportunities due to the expansion of the local labour market through the growth of the state bureaucracy and the private sector.

The characteristics that the Jordanian economy gained at this crucial stage of economic development remain very relevant to the present day. Among these is the top-heavy female labour force, comprised mostly of educated women working in professional occupations. However, before 1982, it is safe to say that Jordan did not exhibit any unusual patterns. Starting from a very low rate of female labour force participation, Jordan managed to increase the presence of women in the work force by investing in social services, especially education. The stagnation in female labour force participation caused by an expansion in capital-intensive industries is also not unusual as it mirrors the experience of other parts of the developing world, especially Latin America and Southeast Asia (Moghadam, 1995; Safa, 1977).

### *5.3 Economic Bust Period 1983-1992*

After the crash in oil prices in 1983, Jordan's high growth period began to slow down. Spending curtailment in the oil-rich Gulf meant that there was lower demand for

Jordanian labour leading to unstable remittances (Figure 7) and aid flow from the Gulf also dried up. The Jordanian government reacted to this downturn by following expansionary policies funded by external borrowing and reserves. By 1989, however, public debt had soared, and the government was no longer able to service foreign debt obligations. As a result, Jordan sought IMF and World Bank financial support with promises of economic reform (Harrigan et al., 2006). However, the onset of the Gulf War in 1990 created severe social and political disturbances, interrupting the economic adjustments. Jordanians and Palestinians living in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were expelled, increasing the Jordanian population by 10% practically overnight (Chatelard, 2010). This exacerbated the economic crisis even further as pressure on government spending increased. During the early 1990s, living standards declined (Harrigan et al., 2006) with per capita income falling by 39%, from JOD 62.5 monthly to about JOD 38 monthly in 1991 (in real 1985 prices) (Abdul Rahim, 1994) and unemployment reaching 17.5% by 1992 (Figure 10).



**Figure 4 Male and Female Unemployment Rate**

While some changes to the economic structure occurred between 1983 and 1989, the aim of the reforms was not directed towards economic stabilisation or increasing productivity: the few austerity measures undertaken were directed towards planned development investments as opposed to current expenditure such as public administration or social welfare (Peters & Moore, 2009). Instead, welfare services were expanded to counteract the recession and the National Aid Fund was established. This was seen as essential to maintain political stability in a time of deteriorating economic conditions (Brynen, 1992). The number of households that received monthly cash assistance (a government welfare payment) increased from 8,000 in 1987 to 22,000 in 1992, mainly vulnerable households, including those headed by females. By 1991, roughly two-thirds of Jordanian households were also receiving food coupons (Shaban et al., 2001).

During this period, overall employment in industry and manufacturing stagnated at 10-12% and the strongest increase was in public administration and services. The main reason for this public sector enlargement was to absorb the large number of job seekers who found themselves unemployed. Because of the labour demand curtailment in the Gulf as well as the recession in Jordan, the unemployment rate became a severe problem, reaching 8% by 1984 and 14-16% by 1989 (Pissarides, 1993). Despite this, by the mid-1980s, 20-30% of the labour force in Jordan was foreign. With rising unemployment and macroeconomic difficulties post oil-price crash, the government introduced policies to limit foreign employment. This, however, did not succeed in decreasing unemployment among Jordanians; this was partially due to the free movement of labour with Syria and Egypt which allowed immigrant workers in Jordan to take up employment without work permits, meaning official data understated

the number of foreign employees by about half (Zaqqa, 2006). Mainly, however, the blame was on the mismatch between the qualifications of the unemployed and the types of jobs available and/or the types of jobs that foreigners did (Pissarides, 1993; World Bank, 1994). High unemployment was an issue faced by educated Jordanian workers as evidenced by 25,000 surplus applications sent to the civil service, most of which were from doctors, engineers, and other university graduates (Susser, 1990). On the other hand, the jobs that foreigners occupied were mostly in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture and construction (Pissarides, 1993; Susser, 1990; World Bank, 1994).

It is difficult to follow the change in women's economic activity with precision during this period for several reasons. The first is the lack of available data, even when compared to earlier periods. The second reason is that the lack of disaggregation means it is not possible to tell whether an increase in female labour force participation reflects an actual increase in women's economic activities or an increase in the unemployment rate, especially given the deteriorating job opportunities in the labour market at the time. Finally, unlike the previous time period, there is no breakdown in female labour force participation by educational attainment or by sector/occupation.

However, while we may be unable to give exact numbers, reports generally conveyed that female labour force participation increased during that period, at least until the late 1980s (Abu Jaber, 1990; Pissarides, 1993; World Bank, 1989). The increase could be due to several reasons: the steadily increasing rate of educational attainment, a response to economic need which pushed for a secondary-wage earner, or the growing opportunities in the public sector with the number of appointed civil servants peaking between 1984 and 1987 (Pissarides, 1993). However, the return of Jordanian expats and the subsequent high male unemployment rate coupled with deteriorating

economic conditions resulted in the stagnation in female employment during the late 1980s and early 1990s and increasing female unemployment, reaching twice the unemployment rate of men (Figure 10).

Because of the pressure on labour demand, the general rhetoric of policymakers was against women's labour force participation or, at best, indifferent. According to Shami & Taminian (1990, p. 69), "[s]ince then, opinions in the policy-making centres have been voiced for the withdrawal of women from the formal labour force as a solution for the rapidly intensifying unemployment problem in the country". Additionally, Amawi (2000) and Moghadam (1998, 2005) spoke of indirect policies introduced to discourage women from working, such as early retirement in the public sector and end-of-service bonuses for brides. Finally, while some policies were put in place to limit the number of foreign workers from Egypt and Syria, the same was not true for domestic workers from Asia, as they were seen as "not threatening the local labour markets" as they occupied jobs that Jordanian women did not want (Bergem, 2014, paras. 16, 21).

To sum up, the period between 1983 and 1992 was characterised by an economic recession that reached severe proportions in 1989. The policy reaction to this recession was mainly an increase in expenditure, especially in the public sector in order to absorb some of the rising numbers of unemployed. Women's employment in this period showed an increase for various reasons among which were the expansion in the public sector, continuous increase in educational attainment, and a decline in income. Soon, however, the rising unemployment rate and curtailment of public sector hiring meant that opportunities in the labour market became scarce; women's employment faltered as a result and their unemployment shot up. The high unemployment rate for both men and women that occurred during this period remains

a feature of the Jordanian labour market today and has led some researchers to theorise that the low female labour force participation in Jordan is a demand-side issue.

#### *5.4 Economic Adjustment Period Post 1993*

Following the end of the Gulf War in 1992, the implementation of reform policies backed by the IMF and World Bank was initiated. The aim was to reduce the budget deficit, privatise state-owned enterprises, and move Jordan towards export-led growth. Budget deficit related reforms included freezing employment and salaries in the public sector along with reducing food and energy subsidies. In trade, import restrictions were removed and in 1997 qualified industrial zones (QIZ) were established in which manufactured products had duty-free access to the US market. QIZs started operating in the late 1990s and were mostly occupied by garment production companies<sup>8</sup> (Harrigan et al., 2006; Kanaan & Kardoosh, 2002).

Despite the almost full implementation of reforms required by the IMF by 1996, some welfare programmes were difficult to reform because of their political popularity, the most important of which were the food and energy subsidies (Andoni & Schwedler, 1996; Martinez, 2018). For example, when wheat subsidies were cancelled in 1996, 'bread riots' erupted and were violently suppressed by the government, finally leading to the resignation of the Prime Minister in 1997 (Andoni & Schwedler, 1996). To compensate the poor for the rising prices of food, cash transfer programmes were implemented and by 2000, the government 'succeeded' in eliminating food subsidies and replacing them with cash transfers (Shaban et al., 2001). However, according to Kawamura (2015), there is mixed evidence as to whether the government ever fully

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<sup>8</sup> The QIZs were initiated by the US to encourage relations between Jordan and Israel through economic ties. The programme provides access to the US market on condition that at least 35% of value added originates in Jordan, West Bank and Gaza, and Israel (Harrigan et al., 2006).

abandoned food price control and, finally, in 2004, with the international increase in food prices, funding for food subsidies was reinstated and government expenditure on food subsidies has been increasing ever since (Kawamura, 2015).

Another effort to remove subsidies was made in 2008 as the government attempted to liberalise energy prices and phase out subsidies by 2010 (El-Katiri & Fattouh, 2017). The reform was, however, hindered in 2011 at the onset of the Arab Spring and the government discontinued price liberalisation and reintroduced petroleum subsidies. The attempt to once again reinforce the energy subsidy cuts in 2012 was accompanied by cash transfer programmes that effectively went to 70% of the Jordanian population (Araar et al., 2013; El-Katiri & Fattouh, 2017).

What these reforms meant for poverty and inequality is unclear; while World Bank and IMF measures show an improvement in these socio-economic indicators, government data shows otherwise (Harrigan et al., 2006). Therefore, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding changes in living standards in Jordan during the period of post-subsidy reform. This is especially true given the lack of any information regarding wages and salaries in the labour market. However, the trend in the gross national income per capita in constant JOD does depict an overall improvement (Baylouny, 2008).

While GDP growth in Jordan averaged 6% between 2000 and 2009, unemployment remained high. This gave rise to another labour market 'paradox' whereby strong growth did not reduce unemployment (Harrigan et al., 2006). Despite the focus on job creation, the new jobs were low-skilled and low-wage, mostly in apparel manufacturing and construction, and were consequently occupied by migrant workers (Rad, 2011). All in all, the question of whether Jordan was successful in restructuring its economy to export-led growth is debatable. According to Harrigan et al. (2006, p. 278),

Hence, we can conclude that growth in the mid-1990s was largely concentrated in the non-tradable construction sector whilst growth since 2000 has been both in construction and in the QIZs. The significance of growth that is created in the non-tradable and the enclave export sector is that the former does not generate foreign exchange and the latter does little to help mobilize domestic savings, hence neither are self-sustaining in the sense of eliminating aid dependency.

With the restoration of the relationship with the oil-rich Arab countries and the recovery in oil prices, immigration of young men from Jordan to the Gulf somewhat recovered (Chatelard, 2010). This meant a return of the steady flow of remittances from Jordanian workers. However, the unemployment rate remained high and the presence of foreign workers was as pronounced as ever (Chatelard, 2010). 'Queuing' for public sector jobs became apparent despite the freezes on salaries and employment (Harrigan et al., 2006); this was probably due to the benefits that government jobs provide especially compared to the recently liberalised private sector. All in all, while other aspects of the economy showed an overall positive response to the adjustment programme, the labour market was the exception as it remained segmented across various dimensions and marked by a persistently high unemployment rate. According to Baylouny (2008, p. 303),

Thanks in part to US aid along with greatly increased business in Jordan as the gateway to Iraq, Jordan's per capital income has rebounded to around \$2,000, but unemployment remains around 30%. The country is still reliant on worker remittance income, and the domestic attempts to generate employment have not been fruitful.

The failure of the labour market to adjust even after the expats returned to the Gulf hinted that a more severe structural problem was at hand than skill mismatch (Pissarides, 1993).

Insofar as the movement to export-led growth implies the mobilisation of women into the labour force (Standing, 1999; Wood, 1991), Jordan was unsuccessful. The female labour force participation rate stubbornly stagnated. The growth in the export sector,

garments manufactured in QIZ, led to creation of job opportunities that predominantly went to East Asian women (Better Work Jordan, 2010). Educated women remained concentrated in education and health, their participation rate declining, unemployment rate high, and retention in the labour market low. A comparison of female labour force participation rates by educational attainment between 1983 and 1995 shows that women with post-secondary education or higher maintained their participation rate at about 70%. However, the sharpest decline in participation is again observed for women with only secondary education, falling from 26% in 1983 to 10-12% in 1995 and stagnating at this level (Assaad & Amer, 2008). The most puzzling aspect of this decline is the fact that the economic adjustment period was characterised by growth of labour-intensive industry, mainly garment manufacturing, which is generally associated with higher economic activity especially for less-educated women.

To summarise, the economic adjustment period of Jordan was marked by contradictory accounts. While GDP growth was undoubtedly strong, unemployment remained high and socioeconomic indicators showed a mixed picture. Some of the characteristics that came to define the Jordanian economy, however, did not change. The shaky political legitimacy that was conditional on the state provision of economic benefits meant that any reform that directly impacted living standards could not be fully implemented. This was especially true given the entrenched structure of the patriarchal family with one male breadwinner. From the demand-side, Jordan's labour market became even more segmented as it solidified the divide between foreign and national workers and so although there was rapid job growth in the formal private sector (Assaad, 2014b) – in fields that typically employ women such as export-oriented garment manufacturing – female labour force participation of less-educated Jordanian women declined sharply.

## **6. Conclusions**

In this paper, the evolution of female labour force participation was explored vis-à-vis the changing economic conditions of the country and the patriarchal institutions defined by family law and labour law. The main conclusion drawn is that female labour force participation failed to increase because women were 'shielded' from becoming wage earners as a result of economic policies undertaken by the Jordanian government to ensure a level of welfare that subdued any political unrest. Women were unable to take advantage of any growth in labour demand because they were substituted by exploited migrant workers or men. This reinforced a patriarchal social contract, whereby the role of women is relegated to – at best – secondary wage earners. In particular, these set of conditions worked to inhibit the participation rate of women who did not progress beyond secondary education; they witnessed the steepest decline in their economic activity since 1976.

While the institutional environment of Jordan is not unusual, it did face a set of economic conditions that makes it stand out even when compared to the rest of the MENA region. This set of conditions resulted in an exceptionally low female labour force participation rate. During the ISI period, the combination of capital-intensive growth, remittance, aid, and migration allowed a conservative structure of the family to remain unchallenged, inhibiting the incentive for women to participate. After the oil price crash of the 1980s, deteriorating economic conditions created a push factor for women to seek paid employment but the return of Jordanian expats meant a shortage of jobs and high unemployment rate, which disproportionately affected women. Despite the adoption of reform policies, the labour market remained heavily segmented and failed to pull women into waged work, replacing them with migrant labour. It is in this last period that the Jordanian case becomes puzzling; conflicting accounts as well as

missing macro-level data means that it is not possible to draw any conclusions on what the changes in the welfare of households, labour market wages, and demand structure meant for women's economic activity.

In summary, this paper provided evidence for three intertwined reasons that inhibited the growth of female labour force participation. The first is the institutionalised patriarchal contract that reinforces a traditional division of labour, especially in marriage. The second is living standards that were maintained by economic and social policy to preserve a shaky political legitimacy. The final reason is a labour market that is characterised by segmentation, a high unemployment rate, and unsatisfactory job growth. Future research should test and account for the effect of these factors on the current structure of female labour force participation.

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