The Cost of Knowledge: Female Education, Labor, and Empowerment in Jordan and Morocco

by

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Chapter 2: Navigating Labor Landscapes and the Marriage Market

Chapter 3: Voices

Chapter 4: Education and (National) Identities

Chapter 5: Feminist Movements, Norms, and NGO Work

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Bibliography
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

A quiet but powerful tsunami. That is how Saadia Zahidi, member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum and head of Education, Gender, and Work, characterized the wave of women entering the workforce in the Muslim world, fifty million of which have alone joined since 2000.¹ Framing this shift as a mass exodus from home to work and from domestic to public, Zahidi illuminates how these women have “changed their own destiny, the future of their economies, the shape of their societies, and perhaps even the world.”² Zahidi describes these changes as catalysts for a distinct type of domino effect: “As more and more girls go to school and university, and as more and more women join the workforce, they change the world around them through their newfound agency. Their talent, skills, spending power, and ideas are a vital fuel for the economies of their countries.”³

Through this domino effect framework, Zahidi sets forth a promising but perhaps somewhat too neat trajectory of progressive development. How can we explain a less linear relationship between education, labor, and empowerment? This thesis will examine female education and labor force participation in the two monarchies of Jordan and Morocco. In particular, the thesis seeks to understand why high female literacy and education levels in Jordan have not translated yet into high rates of labor participation, and why Moroccan female participation in the labor force

² Ibid., 5.
³ Ibid., 10.
is higher than in Jordan, in spite of lower levels of female education. While Jordan’s 2015 female literacy rate for ages 15 and above is among one of the highest at 92.9%, female labor force participation still hovers at a mere 15%, the region’s lowest. On the other hand, Morocco’s 2015 female literacy is 58.8% while female labor force participation is 25%. Female enrollment in primary, secondary, and university education fits into this puzzle, with significantly higher Jordanian female participation than that of Morocco. In examining this puzzle, I will investigate the relationship between literacy and labor force participation, and seek to understand what factors have impacted gender relations, educational policy, and labor patterns in the two countries.

The conclusion of this thesis hinges on a close look at differing cultural perceptions of female education. In Jordan, there is a significant acceptance of education for women and a system that prides itself on equal access. A key part of this story is the social - sometimes cosmetic - value that this education can carry, especially within tribal networks. While Jordanian households might be financially reliant on female income, this has perhaps not (yet) translated into a widespread cultural acceptance of female work. Plus, importantly, the services sector of the economy is unable to absorb this highly educated demographic. Education has

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6 “Field Listing: Literacy,” Central Intelligence Agency.

become rather common for Jordanian women, and is thus often more of an expectation than it is an investment. Whereas in Morocco, despite lower female education levels, there is more of an encouragement of and demand for female labor, and thus an expectation that education will bring returns in the form of employment. Central to this comparative discussion is marriage and the marriage market. I suggest that education is seen as increasing one’s prospects of marriage in Jordan but potentially taking one out of the marriage market in Morocco. This implies that the metrics of female education and female employment are perhaps not as intertwined as one might think. Furthermore, such metrics interact in complicated, varied ways within different cultural contexts and produce different perceptions of social capital.

Part I: (Critiques of) Development Narratives About Female Empowerment in the Global South

Zahidi emphasizes that in only a couple generations, “a widespread education movement has elevated the prospects of women in Muslim countries.”8 In fact, in two-thirds of the Muslim-majority countries, rates of female university enrollment now surpass those of men.9 According to Zahidi, female education has in many cases become “deeply rooted and normalized within family structures.”10 The next stage of development has been female entrance into the labor market. Zahidi underscores the unprecedented speed at which shifts in education and labor landscapes swept across the region. At their core, these changes have constituted “a dramatic human

8 Zahidi, 6.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 7.
movement in which economics trumps culture.”

Zahidi offers a thorough assessment of noteworthy changes in both the perception and reality of female societal roles, drawing linkages between countries both geographically and culturally distant. That said, there is space to problematize her framework in light of nations like Jordan and Morocco, with dynamics of education, culture, and labor that depart from this blueprint. There is substantial development literature which, while adopting a more prescriptive approach than that of Zahidi, echoes this linear trajectory where female education yields female labor, and finally, female emancipation.

For instance, a 2004 Council on Foreign Relations report titled *What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World* presents a clear message: “educating girls pays off substantially.” According to the authors of this report, Barbara Herz and Gene Sperling, the merits of female education - which are presented as analogous to the returns on an investment - are massive. Some of these benefits include the following: higher wages, one year of education boosting the eventual wage by on average 10-20%; faster economic growth through metrics of both annual per capita income and GDP growth; more productive farming measured through both malnutrition levels and crop yields; smaller and healthier family units; reduced levels of infant mortality; reduced HIV contraction; reduced domestic violence; and on a larger scale, the promotion of democracy. Finally, education is framed as an invaluable tool of female empowerment and an instrumental ingredient

\[11\] Ibid.

in the political economy of development.\textsuperscript{13} With the title of their concluding chapter alone, “A Problem with a Known Cure,” Herz and Sperling reiterate the broad ranging development incentives to educate women.\textsuperscript{14}

Development discourses presented by initiatives like Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) all fit loosely into this canon.\textsuperscript{15} According to scholar Katja Zvan Elliott in “(Dis)Empowering Education: The Case Of Morocco”, these approaches promote a “Weberian model for development of societies based on imitating Western ‘linear’ transformation from agrarian to industrialized society.”\textsuperscript{16} American liberal feminist discourse endorsing the WID approach presents almost a ripple effect in which an educated female workforce will “subsequently lead to the development of national economies.”\textsuperscript{17} Zvan Elliott, channeling the work of Paul Collier in a 2007 book titled \textit{The Bottom Billion: Why The Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It}, profoundly critiques the idea that educated demographics, with their newly marketable skills, become reduced to “human capital.”\textsuperscript{18}

Ultimately, Zvan Elliott points to multiple sources of flaw in the WID paradigm. Not only does WID frame a Westernized understanding of modernization as the almost teleological end goal, but it also “attempts to integrate women into the


\textsuperscript{14} Herz and Sperling, 83.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
‘masculinized’ market economy without taking into account their reproductive roles within households.” Importantly, Zvan Elliott points out that in many societies, including some of the MENA region, “the status of women improves with both becoming a wife and giving birth to children rather than through generating income.”

Zvan Elliott references Diane Singerman and Homa Hoodfar’s 1996 book *Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo* to exemplify this point. Singerman and Hoodfar discuss working Egyptian women who experienced a loss of status and power within the household as their domestic contributions decreased, which perhaps counters the Western assumption that earning an income is a form of unequivocal power. This is essential to keep in mind in the attempt to understand departures from, even inversions of, Western metrics of status and societal success for women.

In “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” scholar of gender studies and sociology Chandra Mohanty also criticizes liberal WID discourse in which women of the Global South are homogenized into a single category with matching problems, needs, interest, and goals: “women are assumed to be a coherent group or category prior to their entry into ‘the development process.’” In actuality, women are not part of this imagined global sisterhood, but rather “are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion and other ideological institutions and frameworks.” Ultimately, WID opts out of critiquing what Zvan Elliott deems “gendered power relations as the source of

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
women’s subordination.” Instead, WID subscribes to quintessential development narratives and prescribes paid labor as an innate source of freedom for women.

Western development discourse tends to frame Islam as incompatible with female mobility at the least and at the most, directly hindering it. In “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival”, anthropologist Saba Mahmood follows a similar line of thought as that of Singerman, Hoodfar, and Zvan Elliott. Through an exploration of Islamic revival movements, specifically Egypt’s urban mosque movements, Mahmood exposes the almost cognitive dissonance that these events pose to certain veins of Western feminist theory. Mahmood asserts that “the mosque movement represents an unprecedented engagement with scholarly materials and theological reasoning that had to date been the purview of learned men. Movements such as this one...certainly conjure up a whole host of uneasy associations such as fundamentalism, the subjugation of women, social conservatism, reactionary atavism, cultural backwardness, and the rest.”

Within Western discourse, there tends to be a discomfort in reconciling Islamic piety with empowerment, and Mahmood calls for a reconfiguration of our understanding of agency altogether, “not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create.” The mosque movements represented the largest

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23 Zvan Elliott, “(Dis)Empowering Education,” 8.
25 Ibid., 203.
mobilisation of females in the public sphere in Egypt. They were an instance in which religiosity was not a hindrance to female mobility, but rather a vehicle for it. Specifically, these movements entailed an engagement with religious material - perhaps even a development of religious literacy - that created a certain momentum for women which departs from development discourses’ formulas for female empowerment.

Besides illuminating a potential symbiosis between Islamic piety and female empowerment, Mahmood’s account also opens the door for an expansion of our understanding of literacy. Through the exploration of a case in which religious literacy provided a platform for mobility and leadership in the public domain, Mahmood’s framework innately problematizes development narratives which adopt reductive prescriptions for progress. In Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress, scholar Fida Adely too makes a compelling argument that modern-day piety can compliment a pursuit of education. In fact, education that cultivates critical thought and knowledge of religious doctrine is necessary to navigate and assess the most effective way to embody Islam including practices like dress, female-male interaction, and service work. Adely and Mahmood’s accounts are central to this comparative analysis of Jordan and Morocco. Since education and labor statistics obscure the complexity of factors which contribute to and detract from empowerment, analyses like that of Adely and

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26 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 19.
Mahmood pave the way for alternative conceptions of the link between schooling and work. It is not only critical to identify what encourages female participation, but also to problematize factors like religion that many assume innately deter mobility for women.

WAD, according to Zvan Elliott, is rooted in dependency-theory and aims to push back on the WID approach through incorporating a more nuanced understanding of class and geography. Still, both WID and WAD maintain that “once women achieve equality in the public space, positive transformation of the private domain will follow. Men’s position in society is thus set as a standard that women have to achieve in order to be equal.”

Finally, GAD, originating in Marxist discourse, has been adopted by initiatives aiming to alleviate poverty. GAD emphasizes the inclusion of female voices in aid programs as well as legal and structural reform. GAD has been rather contentious: it “angers conservatives in the West because of the GAD’s supposed threat to traditional family values...It is furthermore criticized by some of the grassroots women’s activists in the developing countries, who argue that focusing on gender rather than women denies women their unique reproductive role.”

Ultimately, while these various avenues may differ in approach, they overlap in their emphasis on the intersection between gender equality and development. They each draw this linkage between female advancement and economic development, and importantly, present said linkage as natural, inevitable, and advantageous.

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30 Ibid., 10.
In *Development as Freedom*, economist, development academic, and Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen lays out significant groundwork for the modern discourse of international development organizations discussed above, especially those that focus on reducing poverty through promoting female empowerment in the Global South. Sen advocates for a departure from the norm of utilizing metrics like income, gross national product, industrialization, or technological advancement as litmus tests for general human development. Rather, “if freedom is what development advances, then there is a major argument for concentrating on that overarching objective, rather than on some particular means, or some specially chosen list of instruments. Viewing development in terms of expanding substantive freedoms directs attention to the ends that make development important, rather than merely to some of the means...”

Poverty, tyranny, and gender inequality are three examples that Sen presents as major barriers to freedom.

In *Modernizing Patriarchy: The Politics of Women’s Rights in Morocco*, Zvan Elliott synthesizes Sen’s criteria for female prosperity as essentially women’s ability to “get an education, work outside the home, earn a living, have ownership rights, and be recognized as active managers of households.” Thus, there evolves an almost “organic correlation” between these disparate moving plates. This folds into the perception of “progress as a linear modernization with a guaranteed outcome and

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33 Ibid., 15.
34 Zvan Elliott, *Modernizing Patriarchy*, 143.
35 Ibid.
success - women’s empowerment and gender equality.”36 These different
benchmarks, according to Sen, have a critical commonality: “their positive
contribution in adding force to women’s voice and agency - through independence
and empowerment.”37 Sen implies a definition of agency as a means of achieving
independence from binding societal structures and thereby entering otherwise
exclusionary domains like formal work. This definition is innately at odds with that of
Mahmood. Ingrained in Sen’s logic is the problematic trope of education as an
instrument for lending voices to the otherwise voiceless, suggesting that obtaining an
education and an income makes a female’s contribution visible and thus releases her
from subordination.

Zahidi’s book seems to rest on a similar ideological framework to that of Sen
in that both merge economic prosperity with human rights and civil liberty. While
Sen presents the idea that we must use advancements in freedom to evaluate
advancements in development, Zahidi quantifies precisely how powerful female labor
participation could be as an economic stimulant in the Middle East. If 2025 saw
female labor participation at full potential, the GDP would increase by 47 per cent.38
Ultimately, “the simple and yet complex phenomenon of women working can lead to
economic prosperity - and strengthen conditions for greater societal stability - in the
Muslim world.”39 Both lines of thought fit into a wave of literature of linking
economic prosperity to human rights and female inclusion. The implication is that

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Zahidi., 10.
39 Ibid.
there need not be a tug-of-war between social and economic good. Thus, there emerges a tension between on the one hand, the narrative laid out by Zahidi, Sen, WID, WAD, and the broader development discourse and on the other hand, the discussions of Zvan Elliott, Adely, Mahmood, Singerman, and Hoodfar.

Any comparative study must tread carefully amidst the neocolonial tendency to view women of the Global South as homogenous and characterized entirely by subordination. This tendency is deeply rooted in a rather specific Western vision of empowerment as a litmus test for progress. There is a Western fantasy that Middle Eastern women will emerge from their limited roles within the domestic sphere and their education, labor rates, political participation, and overall empowerment will simultaneously soar. In actuality, the cases of Jordan and Morocco suggest that a constellation of factors make the progress of women in the Middle East complex, seemingly paradoxical, and most importantly, requiring careful scrutiny. Departing from these Western assumptions means raising tolerance to the ambiguity and nuances of those who occupy marginalized roles in what Said deemed the Orient.

For this reason, the nexus between colonial and feminist discourse is especially telling. Mohanty critiques feminist discourses of women in the “third world” as often reductive and homogenizing, collectively otherizing the non-Western woman as neatly fitting into the role of victim. Mohanty argues that, “This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in
contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions." She draws out this linkage between the colonial project and that of Western feminism when adding that the distinction between the characterization of Western and non-Western women is analogous to “that made by some marxists between the ‘maintenance’ function of the housewife and the real ‘productive’ role of wage labor, or the characterization by developmentalists of the third world as being engaged in the lesser production of ‘raw materials’ in contrast to the ‘real’ productive activity of the First World.” Mohanty’s framework calls for an unpacking of the ways in which we conceptualize and innately rank forms of production, deeming some societal contributions and types of labor as more valuable than others.

It is important to keep in mind the colonial undertones of these rankings in the case of this project which explores the relationship between female education and labor force participation in Morocco and Jordan. Side by side, the two nations present an informative lens of comparison, illuminating distinct dynamics of the intermingling between landscapes of education, employment, and advancement.

Part II: Theoretical Frameworks for Gender and Labor

Oil, Islam, and Women

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40 Mohanty, 337.
41 Ibid.
From an economic lens, there are numerous approaches to identifying factors that include and exclude women from work, and account for the varying levels of female employment within a given region. In "Oil, Islam, and Women", political scientist Michael Ross claims that oil-producing states have specifically rigid patriarchal norms since economies rooted in oil innately exclude females from labor. He argues that when countries begin to rely on oil, they experience “Dutch Disease.” This means an economic shift from the traded sector of agriculture and manufacturing to the non traded sector of construction and services. Thus, “a boom in oil production will squeeze women out of the labor force.” This claim begs the question of what, then, might account for the substantial difference in employment for women in varied oil-poor nations?

The crux of the puzzle that this thesis explores comes to the fore: why does Morocco (25%) have significantly higher female labor force participation than that of Jordan (14%)? There are several important assumptions and implications of Ross’s argument. In terms of assumptions, his argument hinges on a quintessential model of the two fundamental forces which impact female labor participation: firstly, the opportunity cost of the female’s time or the prevailing wage given her education, experience, and skill; secondly, the “unearned” income for her household which often

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43 Ibid., 109.
45 Ibid.
includes that of her husband.\textsuperscript{46} In “Women’s Work and Economic Development”, Kristen Mammen and Christina Paxson state that “a higher wage has a substitution effect that makes working, and working longer hours, more attractive, but also has an offsetting income effect that depresses work hours.”\textsuperscript{47} On the other hand, “increases in women's unearned income exert only income effects on women's labor supply, resulting in reduced work hours and possibly withdrawal from the labor force.”\textsuperscript{48} This discussion taps into the central question of what incentivizes - and for that matter, disincentivizes - female work.

There are two major implications of Ross’s claims. Firstly, by presenting oil-based economies as specifically exclusionary, his argument innately counters the neocolonial assumption which frames the religion of Islam as the primary culprit for female subordination.\textsuperscript{49} Situated in two completely different approaches and even academic disciplines, both Ross and Mahmood counter the narrative of Islamic piety as incompatible with female empowerment. In addition, Ross’s argument departs from the commonly accepted notion that economic growth and gender equality go hand in hand. This deviates from the narrative, invoked by Sen and international development organizations alike, which suggests a sort of symbiosis between economic and social advancement. While GDP might benefit from female labor as Zahidi claims, this relationship may not be reciprocal. In other words, Ross is careful to point that oil perhaps has even “broader consequences than previously recognized:

\textsuperscript{47} Mammen and Paxson, 142.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ross, 107.
it not only affects a country’s government and economy but also its core social structures.”

Thus, in some ways, Ross’s argument implicitly problematizes the domino-effect, linear trajectories which development discourses often present in which disjointed metrics of progress are streamlined into an evolutionary model. In other ways, however, his claim is worthy of scrutiny in light of the varying levels of female labor force participation in nations like Jordan and Morocco, both of which have economies that are not anchored in oil.

In “Kinship, Islam, or Oil: Culprits of Gender Inequality,” sociologist Mounira Charrad, using Ross’s theory as a springboard, calls for the need to complicate and broaden the factors we regard as deterrents of female labor participation and social mobility. Charrad claims, “other factors are at work. They may be more significant than oil in some cases or combine with oil in complex ways in other cases.”

Charrad points to the way Ross perhaps underestimates the role of history. The use of history becomes central to Charrad’s claim when she points out that the starkly patriarchal norms prominent in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, and Iraq, in fact, predate the development of their oil-based economies. In particular, Charrad emphasizes what she calls a “kinship/politics nexus,” or the unique patriarchal networks that often sustain gender inequality in the disparate spheres of law, politics, and economy. She convincingly claims that “oil was discovered in societies that

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50 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 548.
53 Ibid., 547.
54 Ibid., 547.
were based on tribal or kin ties, with strong patriarchal networks invested in the control of women. These tribal or kin ties became the basis for the political system, and the oil economy later was grafted onto these social structures.\footnote{Ibid., 548.} It is predominantly these kin-based patriarchal webs, not oil-based economies, that sustain restrictive conditions for women. In this regard, it is nations where patriarchal networks dictate the political system which are likely to have more female-subordinating policies in place.

Ross partially exemplifies his argument by comparing oil-rich Algeria and oil-poor Tunisia and Morocco, noting that Algeria lags significantly behind in both female workforce and political participation. Charrad, however, urges us to look closer at a different juxtaposition: Tunisia and Morocco. Based on 2002 data, Tunisia has significantly more women in parliament. While labor participation is by no means entirely parallel to political participation, the two can be seen as linked expressions of female inclusion. Ross’ framework would predict that a nation with relatively less oil would have relatively more female participation, but Tunisia has an oil rent of $61 per capita while Morocco has effectively none.\footnote{Ibid., 549.} In presenting her argument, Charrad weaves in a discussion of Tunisia’s progressive family code called the Code of Personal Status that went into effect within three months of independence from French colonial rule. This is extremely significant as the code “made women equal before the law by freeing them from some of the most patriarchal practices previously in effect. This facilitated their entrance into public life, whether in education, the
labor force, or politics.”\textsuperscript{57} Charrad quotes Asma Khadar, a Jordanian women’s rights activist who stated that “family law is the key to the gate of freedom and human rights for women.”\textsuperscript{58} Ultimately, Charrad’s account is central to the puzzle this thesis explores on multiple levels. Her discussion of kin-based solidarity and patriarchal networks as the foundations of exclusionary conditions for female mobility introduces a relevant layer to the comparative analysis of Jordan and Morocco. It brings into question how the role of (gendered) tribalism plays out differently in each monarchy as well as how this impacts females’ educational opportunity and labor force participation.

Supply and Demand

Economic theory regarding female education and labor force participation is often distilled into two main approaches: supply-side analyses and demand-side analyses. Much like debates over foreign aid, the field of educational policy is bifurcated into education interventionists and those who subscribe to a more laissez-faire assessment.\textsuperscript{59} Those who fall on the supply side tend to emphasize the essential need to “get the children into a classroom, ideally taught by a well-trained teacher, and the rest will take care of itself.”\textsuperscript{60} The 2000 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) highlight the aim of boosting enrollment of children worldwide in primary school by 2015. These goals quite clearly fit into this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 550.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
supply-side approach by emphasizing school enrollment but not any specific criteria or expectations for such schooling.\textsuperscript{61}

Those who underscore demand, on the other hand, claim that education is futile without proper demand for it. In other words, “the quality of education is low because parents do not care enough about it, and they don’t because they know that the actual benefits...are low. When the benefits of education become high enough, enrollment will go up, without the state having to push it.”\textsuperscript{62} Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo assert that demand-side analyses are rooted in the framing of education as a straightforward form of investment.\textsuperscript{63}

Labor studies split similarly along supply and demand lines. Along the supply side there is an emphasis on “improving skill formation in MENA education systems and reducing the mismatch between the skills the education systems produce and what private employers need” while the demand side highlights “the role of improving the business environment.”\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, within supply-side analyses, there are two general camps. The first “focuses on what the World Bank (2008) calls ‘engineering’ reforms, increasing the quantity and quality of classrooms, teachers, and textbooks and improving curricula and instruction methods.”\textsuperscript{65} The other “identifies the poor incentives that public financing of education provides as a source of the problem and advocates for private education as a way to improve labor market

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 143.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 148.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 150.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Ragui Assaad, Caroline Krafft, “Does the type of higher education affect labor market outcomes? Evidence from Egypt and Jordan,” \textit{High Education}, (2017): 946, doi: 10.1007/s10734-017-0179-0.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 947.
\end{itemize}
outcomes of graduates.”66 Ragui Assaad and Caroline Krafft, adopting a supply-side approach, use Egypt and Jordan as case studies to examine the nature of skill formation and employment in the region. They seek to assess the validity of the notion that private higher education institutions have more incentive to “produce more employable human capital and better labor market outcomes.”67 Ultimately, Assaad and Krafft conclude that “family background plays by far the largest role”68 and that institutional incentives have minimal influence on the employment.

This discussion of family network harkens back to Charrad’s discussion of the nexus between patriarchal kinship and politics which are ingrained in institutions and networks, and which impact female access to opportunities like labor. Assaad and Krafft make a persuasive claim for the role of *wasta* as a powerful determinant of employment outcome, stating that especially in Egypt, “family network (wasta) is more important in employment than the type of higher education”69 which means that “the education system fails to provide useful signals of productivity. Employers thus rely instead on more easily observed attributes, such as family background and social class.”70 Assaad and Krafft’s piece focuses on educational outcomes across the board instead of a specifically gender-based analysis. However, in conversation with one another, the account of Charrad and that of Assaad and Krafft have important implications about potentially gendered elements of family networks and hiring, revealing a topic perhaps missing in the current literature. This will be a significant

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66 Ibid., 947.
67 Ibid., 945.
68 Ibid., 945.
69 Ibid., 970.
70 Ibid., 970.
point of study in examining the paradoxical education and labor landscape of Jordan and its comparison to Morocco.

Assaad and Krafft suggest that problems of mismatch lie on the demand side, noting that “employers or students (or both) fail to demand a variety of skills. Employers may face difficulty signaling to students, families, and education institutions what human capital they seek. With poor signals emanating from the labor market, neither public nor private institutions are able to adequately respond to labor market needs.”\textsuperscript{71} This brings to the fore the efficacy of communication between the four main silos of power that impact female inclusion and will be relevant in this study about Jordan and Morocco. These four camps are family units, institutions of education, employers, and finally, women themselves. Assaad and Krafft also note that the mismatch problem could lie in what they refer to as a “credentialist equilibrium.”\textsuperscript{72} This means that there is often an ingrained preference for credentials over skills. This prioritization of credentials is common in the Middle East and specifically in the public sector, which has a history of hiring most graduates. Importantly, those working in the public sector “are not paid for productivity but based on the salary scales of the civil service codes. Under these circumstances, students and their families have little reason to seek out the type of higher education that builds productive skills, and [Higher Education Institutions] have little reason to produce them.”\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 969.  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 970.  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 970.
Underpinning much of supply side labor analyses is a framework called the human capital model introduced by Gary Becker. This model suggests that education is predominantly about future employment and the cultivation of skills. In a state of optimal functionality, there would be a seamless signalling system between individuals, institutions of higher education, and employers. Thus, “Prospective students and their families would use the signals to decide in which skills to invest...and HEIs would in turn respond by designing curricula and delivering instruction in such a way as to maximize the employment potential of their students...”\(^74\) This points to the importance of examining the way in which Jordan and Morocco compare in terms of communication between higher education institutions, employers regarding marketable skills, and individuals.

**Fertility**

In addition to the provision of and demand for certain skills, fertility and family size are also intertwined with discussions of education and labor. Gary Becker’s “An Economic Analysis of Fertility” is a central canonical theory regarding education, fertility, and labor market outcomes. Becker sets out to assess family size decisions through an economic framework, labeling children as durable consumption and production goods that are thus assumed to provide some “utility.”\(^75\) Becker defines “quality” children - an undoubtedly off-putting framework - as children who cost more to parents. In other words, “If more is voluntarily spent on one child than

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\(^74\) Ibid., 948.
on another, it is because the parents obtain additional utility from the additional expenditure and it is this additional utility which we call higher ‘quality.’”\(^{76}\) Becker likens these so-called expensive children to Cadillacs.\(^{77}\) It is critical to layer Becker’s analysis with an understanding of the way gender can dictate expectations, labor outcomes, and perceptions of “returns” on the investment of education within a family unit. Becker’s claims seem to persistently present humans as systems or machines. In reality, however, gender is one filter that impacts the way in which one forms biases and expectations about the capabilities of an individual, even within one’s own family.

In “Do Labor Market Opportunities Affect Young Women's Work and Family Decisions? Experimental Evidence from India” (2012), scholar Robert Jensen conducted research that involved providing industrial recruitment services to young women in rural Indian villages. Based on this study, he concludes that increases in employment opportunities and access “led to increased human capital investments for girls and delayed marriage and childbearing for women.”\(^{78}\) Women expressed increased desire to work as well as the desire to have fewer children going forward which was “consistent with increasing aspirations for careers.”\(^{79}\) Women who began to work through these programs had a reduced likelihood of getting married or having children during this window, instead choosing to enter the workforce or obtain more

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 211.

\(^{77}\) Ibid.


\(^{79}\) Ibid., 785.
schooling and training. Channeling the logic of Becker’s analysis of fertility, Jensen states that when there are minimal work options available, “the opportunity cost of having many children, or getting married and having children at a young age rather than accumulating human capital and/or entering the labor market, is low.” Here, Jensen concludes that minimal work opportunity is correlated to increased fertility. The logic seems to be that when opportunities are scarce, a woman who stays home to care for children is missing out on relatively less than if there were ample work opportunities available. The lack of work opportunities means there are not compelling factors that are discouraging her from having more children. This brings to the fore an almost chicken-egg dilemma. Are women deterred from work by lack of opportunity, lack of cultural acceptance, or the double burden? The relationship between these three potential deterrents could go in multiple different directions. Ultimately, the association between child rearing, education, and labor is central to the puzzle that this thesis addresses.

In “Women’s Schooling and and Fertility Under Low Labor Force Participation: Evidence from Mobility Restrictions in Israel,” economists Victor Lavy and Alexander Zablotsky study a Muslim female population with low levels of labor participation in order to explore the impact of female education directly on fertility. Lavy and Zablotsky, like Jensen, use Becker’s phenomenon of fertility as a jumping off point, asserting that according to this framework “education increases the opportunity cost of women's time, prompting them to have fewer children but also

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80 Ibid., 753.
81 Ibid., 753.
raising their permanent income through earnings and tilting their optimal fertility choices towards higher children's quality." Within this formula, labor force participation is the key nexus between education and fertility. Lavy and Zablotsky’s paper, however, departs from the labor market as the primary means through which education and fertility are intertwined. Specifically, Lavy and Zablotsky look at the policy change of removed restriction to access of primary school for Arab women in Israel which yielded an increase of one year of schooling for the impacted population. The authors conclude that “the effect on fertility is negative and large, and explains some of the dramatic decline in the fertility of Israel's Arab–Muslim population." These findings have important implications for Jordan, a country with starkly low female labor force participation.

**Emancipation, Constancy, and U-Shaped Hypotheses**

There are a number of hypotheses that have been used to trace female labor force participation. Three prominent ones are the emancipation hypothesis, the constancy hypothesis, and the U-shaped hypothesis. The emancipation hypothesis upholds the notion that industrialization is innately intertwined with the freedom of women. This is parallel to Zvan Elliott’s discussion of narratives that linearly align the dichotomy between agrarian and industrial with that of female exclusion and

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83 Ibid., 121.

inclusion.\textsuperscript{85} The constancy hypothesis, on the other hand, essentially invokes the idea that women have always worked. Rau and Wazienski explain that such a hypothesis suggests that 19th century censuses defined work in such a way that it often excluded women’s activities and duties. In fact, the 1900 female employment rate was recalculated, incorporating both the formal and the informal economy, to reveal that “a minimum of of 49 per cent of women were gainfully employed at the turn of the century.”\textsuperscript{86} Thus, there was not a significant discrepancy between 1900 and 1980 female employment rates.\textsuperscript{87} According to Rau and Wazienski, “the constancy hypothesis is supported by those who pin much of the growth of the service sector in postindustrial nations to the commercialization of reproductive work (child care, cooking, cleaning).” Work that women had always done simply became more visible in the formal economy.\textsuperscript{88}

Lastly, the U-shaped hypothesis suggests that preindustrial societies entailed most goods being produced within the home where women could take on the double burden of childcare and domestic work.\textsuperscript{89} Farms became more specialized and mechanized during industrialization which amounted to a decrease in the value placed on women’s work since production of goods no longer occurred in the home but rather the factory. Thus, women’s employment decreased during early industrialization and didn’t increase until “changes in family structure occur and the

\textsuperscript{85} Zvan Elliott, “(Dis)Empowering Education”, 8.
\textsuperscript{86} Rau and Wazienski, 506.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 505.
growth of white-collar service occupations follow in the postindustrial period.”\textsuperscript{90} This was a transition form the breadwinner system to a more egalitarian system in industrialized economies. Rau and Wazienksi, using data from 62 countries, ultimately support the U-Shaped hypothesis.

Paolo Verme, on the other hand, tests the U-shaped hypothesis in the MENA region and finds little evidence of it. He concludes that a wave curve is perhaps more appropriate and that there are two primary forces at play: “The first is economic and related to the lack of expansion in sectors that we proved critical for expanding female employment like manufacturing and services. The second is cultural and related to the finding that women seem to exit the labor force around marriage age.”\textsuperscript{91} The implications of this two-pronged assessment of low female labor participation are that both cultural and economic factors are active. Perhaps it is not a matter of either culture or economics trumping the other as Zahidi suggests,\textsuperscript{92} but rather their combined impact on women’s access to and mobility within the workforce.

**Part III: Methodology and Outline**

The sources that this thesis most heavily draws upon are the following:

- interviews from International Review Board (IRB) approved fieldwork in Jordan and Morocco; data and statistics from entities such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organization; academic literature from fields including political

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 7.
economy, feminist theory, and comparative politics; think tank reports; NGO reports; and international funding reports. Each vein of research was critical to this project. Interviews provide the invaluable perspectives of women themselves along with those of individuals working in the NGO world of advocating for women’s rights. While statistics of education and employment provide the concrete benchmarks that establish the puzzle this thesis seeks to unpack, the academic literature discussed above serves as the theoretical parameters within which this thesis operates. Finally, reports from think tanks, NGOs, and international donors identify different stakeholders’ analysis of current Jordanian and Moroccan landscapes when it comes to education, work, and gender relations.

This thesis will engage in a comparative analysis of a series of potential explanations for education and labor dynamics in Jordan and Morocco. The second chapter will examine the labor market and economy of each country and the influence of international funding. The third chapter will center the voices of women themselves by presenting vignettes of individual narratives. The fourth chapter will explore the education system in both countries and whether the specific characteristics of said system influence female labor force participation. The fifth chapter will explore cultural norms, feminism, women’s movements, and NGO work.
Chapter 2: Navigating Labor Landscapes and the Marriage Market

Uses of Time: Detangling Labor and Wage

There is an ethnocentrism embedded in the common Western narrative that a woman of the global south can only emerge as empowered as a corporate C.E.O. within global capitalism. The assumptions behind this narrative are in line with the fixation on microfinance for women as the golden ticket to liberation. FINCA, a non-profit microfinance organization, champions that microfinance is beneficial to women in four central ways: entrepreneurship, family support, employment, and finally, empowerment. The website reads, “As their businesses grow, many women gain self-confidence and take pride in their small businesses. They become full of ideas and have the power to make choices for themselves and their families. They gain a voice among their peers and become advocates for other women.”

The line of causation here is rather clear: access to financial services is empowering. Such logic invokes a paternalistic liberalism as lending voices to the “voiceless” through initiatives aimed at both poverty alleviation and human development.

This harkens back to a Marxist notion of false consciousness which becomes troubling when it renders individuals unfit to determine their own goals and definitions of empowerment. Women become recipients of, rather than agents within, processes of development. Western notions of self-determination, along with the rhetoric underlying the mission of some initiatives like FINCA, tend to be rooted in individualism and an emphasis on pure equality between man and woman.

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94 Ibid.
It is often assumed that Islamic feminism, on the other hand, hinges on the principle of complementarity between genders. However, there are important nuances of the different strands of feminism that have emerged outside of the West. According to historian Margot Badran in a 2010 interview, “Actually it was Islamic feminists who advanced a stringent critique of the notion of complementary gender roles in the family in favor of an egalitarian model of the family backed by strong arguments grounded in their re-readings of the Qur’an.”\(^9\) Muslim secular feminists were the ones who embraced gendered complementarianism and unequal familial structures. Badran adds that “It was the new interpretive work of the Islamic feminists that produced the idea of full gender equality within the context of the family—a gender equality that accounted for gender difference—as in keeping with Islam.”\(^9\) Ultimately, Islamic feminism and Western feminist are not as diametrically opposed as some assume. Complementarity between genders would dictate that just because women and men engage in different types of labor does not mean one is innately inferior to the other; a distribution of labor which assigns different work to men and women is not innately disempowering. Islamic feminism does not blindly accept such complementarity but rather acknowledges that gender difference and gender justice can be compatible.

When engaging in a gendered analysis of work, it is important to look beyond conventional labor statistics. In many ways, labor statistics adopt a rather narrow

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\(^9\) Ibid.
scope for what is deemed a worthy use of time. Most often, the value of one’s activities is linked closely to the income one earns. Similarly, these earnings are perceived as equivalent to one’s contribution to the family unit. What this narrative leaves out is the labor that individuals - namely, women - do behind the scenes. This can include child care, household duties, and other often feminized activities. This begs the question of how we can better conceptualize work. Enter: time-use surveys.

Time-use surveys emerged on the national level in the 1970s as an alternative avenue for quantifying how people spend their time, which includes but is importantly not limited to paid labor. The United Nations Development Programme produced a compilation of time-use surveys from 65 countries across the globe in 2015. While Morocco was included in this report, Jordan was not. In Morocco, the study showed that women spend on average 5 hours in unpaid work and and 1 hour 21 minutes in paid work. Out of the total nine countries in the region surveyed, Morocco came in third highest for amount of female unpaid labor. Moroccan men, on the other hand, spend on average of 6 hours 8 minutes on paid labor and 43 minutes on unpaid labor. In Morocco, unpaid labor is less than 12% of men’s total work and women spent almost 7 times more on unpaid work than men.

While there is no time-use survey for Jordan, a 2014 ILO report about Jordanian youth’s labor market transitions can illuminate similar while not nearly as comprehensive metrics. Firstly, the report indicates that 64% of youth outside the

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98 Ibid., 20-21.
99 Ibid., 23.
labor force were female. Results showed that “the dominant reason for inactivity was participation in education and training (69.6 per cent), accounting for almost the totality (92.1 per cent) of young men and more than one-half (57.0 per cent) of young women outside the labour force.” The second most influential reason mentioned was the unpaid labor of familial and household responsibilities which was “an almost exclusively female reason. It was responsible for inactivity among women in nearly one-third of cases (32.1 per cent), but was negligible as a reason among men (0.3 per cent).” The report looks at this critical juncture of transition from education to employment, and concludes that Jordan is similar to many other nations in that men are four times more likely than women to complete said transition. Plus, significantly more women than men had not yet begun the transition. This demographic was mostly students and females taking on familial duties.

While the ILO report does not use the same framework and language as the time-use survey, there is still meaningful information that can be gleaned. The ILO report’s discussion of women as family carers and emphasis on their household duties are parallel to what the time-use survey deems unpaid labor. In Morocco, the fact that women spend seven times more time on unpaid labor than men suggests that this dual-burden is at least partially a hindrance on their ability to work outside the home. In Jordan, almost one third of female respondents indicated that household

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., 40.
103 Ibid., 4.
responsibilities contributed to their economic inactivity. While the hole in this comparison is the lack of time-use survey for Jordan, there is still a rather clear pattern - much of a female time in both places is spent doing unpaid work.

Thus, there is a strong case to be made for not only the economic, but also the cultural factors contributing to this dynamic. It is perhaps uncomfortable to Western development narratives that women are not in the home merely waiting for their emancipation and entrance into the productive world, but rather that they are spending their time and energy differently. In an interview, Nermeen Murad, journalist, gender specialist and Chief of Party at Takamol, a USAID flagship initiative aimed at gender equity and female empowerment, spoke of just this. Describing Jordanian women, she explained, “They’re not sitting at home because they don’t know that it is a good idea to work. It’s not a good idea to work currently because they have to pay for childcare and they come home and they have to do all the work and they know personal status law does not give them any rights.” Murad also added that marriage prospects, not work, are often what motivate a cultural acceptance and encouragement of education.

This commentary is crucial to paving the way for this thesis’ argument about the perhaps cosmetic value of education for women in Jordan. The female transition from student to employed individual has specifically gendered obstacles, namely the pressure to marry and the pressure to assume household responsibility. Thus, there emerges this notion that education can serve to fuel one’s transition into the marriage...

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104 Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
market, a social expectation for women, instead of the labor market. In Morocco, there is a labor market that perhaps better incorporates women. Women who are included in the labor market, however, must simultaneously manage household duties. Additionally, as will be discussed in later chapters, it seems education level is less of a normalized expectation for women in Morocco, and thus not as deeply linked to one’s marriage prospects as in Jordan. In short, statistics in both countries indicate women do significantly more unpaid labor, but the patterns of how and why this occurs as well as the consequences of this imbalance are worthy of careful scrutiny.

Returning to the Puzzle

Jordan’s dynamic of a high rate of female education but low rate of female employment presents a distinct puzzle. In contrast, Morocco has a relatively lower rate of female education but higher rate of labor force participation. There are certain assumptions about female empowerment ingrained in depicting Jordan’s dynamic as a puzzle in the first place. In *Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress*, Fida Adely thoroughly examines these assumptions. Adely pries open the conversation about rates of female labor and maintains they must include the following: “What does it mean to be an educated woman in Jordan today? What is required to be a successful citizen, as well as a good Muslim, mother, and wife? What are the desirable pathways to womanhood and success?”

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105 Adely, 12.
women, “families hope that education will provide security and valuable marriage prospects. Plus, they also seek the status education confers on their children as well as the family.”  

Female education has become an important cornerstone of public discourse that reconciles the demands of modernization and development with the demands of tradition and legitimacy. Furthermore, schooling is often deemed a source of not only individualized protection but also a nationalized one, tied in with crisis prevention on a national scale. In other words, while there is an unwavering national support for female education, it seems that there are still ambiguous negotiations surrounding what exactly the proper use of this education for women is. Ultimately, when rendering Jordan a puzzle, one must carefully avoid framing female education as merely a failed investment in the sense that it is not yielding the expected returns. One must acknowledge the complexities of the aims of education for women and their families.

In Morocco, it seems that unlike in Jordan, education does not tend to increase one’s marriage prospects. Of course, such patterns are not by any means comprehensive or consistent, as they differ individual to individual and family to family. That said, the relationship between education, marriage, and work is an important one and differences between each country have come to the fore. Scholar Katja Zvan Elliott, from Al Akhawayn University in a town in Morocco’s Middle Atlas Mountains called Ifrane, pointed out the contrast between her findings in Morocco and that of Fida Adely in Jordan. Zvan Elliott noted that in Morocco, “the

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106 Ibid., 35.
107 Ibid., 35-36.
fact that women were educated did not really bring them better marriage prospects.”

She likened the dynamic in Jordan to “the US in the 1950s and ‘60s” in which “it wasn’t so much that women would do something with their education, but it was really to go to the university to meet their future spouses and then stay at home.”

In Morocco, on the other hand, “it seems like [education] was an impediment to getting married.” Without generalizing, Zvan Elliott pointed out the significance that education can prevent one’s successes in the marriage market. She added, “It was education. It was living away from home for that particular period of time...their communities couldn't trust them anymore because there is this idea of women who live by themselves without the family and community supervision, that...they're there to fool around and drink.”

Central to this thesis is the notion that education for women can have such varying associations in different cultural contexts. In Jordan, education is a norm or an expectation that tends to symbolize security and clout. Meanwhile, in Morocco, education presents this departure from the norm - sometimes a geographical departure - and thus a symbol of one’s separation from the fundamental family unit. Doris Gray, also a scholar from Al Akhawayn University, reiterated this notion when stating that education often times reduces one’s marriage prospects. She explained, “it's a double-edged sword. You know, education in and of itself, of course, has a value, but

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108 Katja Zvan Elliott (scholar at Al Akhawayn University), phone interview with author, December 17, 2018.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
there is...a real downside to education. One is it delays marriage and then women educate themselves outside of the marriage market…”\textsuperscript{112}

**Economic Landscapes**

A 2018 report by the Economic Research Forum declares that the new economic reality that the MENA region needs is a “moonshot model.”\textsuperscript{113} The moonshot model refers to “the US effort to land a man on the moon in the 1960s,”\textsuperscript{114} and the report suggests it can “unite people behind a common goal and transform the ways in which governments, companies, international financial institutions and civil societies conduct business. It would transform MENA economies and help to ensure that millions of the region’s young people can find the good jobs they deserve.”\textsuperscript{115}

While this report reveals the broad economic structures that are conducive and inconducive to absorbing educated youth, there is a missing gender dimension to such a discussion.

Below are two labor force participation figures drawing from 2017 data from the International Labour Organization (ILO). An individual is said to be participating in the labor force if she is employed or actively seeking employment.

\textsuperscript{112} Doris Gray (scholar at Al Akhawayn University), phone interview with author, December 12, 2018.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
These statistics establish the significantly higher number of women in Morocco who are included in the labor force. Below are two figures also drawing from 2017 ILO data. Unemployment is defined as “all those of working age who were not in employment, carried out activities to seek employment during a specified recent period and were currently available to take up employment given a job opportunity.” Unemployment rate is therefore a percentage of the labor force.

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117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
In summary, only 14% of women in Jordan are included in the labor force. While a quarter of the women actively seeking employment in Jordan remain unemployed, only about 13% of Jordanian men in the same boat are without work. In Morocco, on the other hand, there is only a 1% difference in unemployment between men and women. Even though cultural norms and mindsets are undoubtedly central, making sense of female labor force participation and unemployment in Jordan and Morocco begs for an examination of the economy of both countries. The differing economic landscapes of the two countries is one dimension of this inverted dynamic of levels of female education and labor in the two countries. While there is inevitably more to the story, it is worth examining the notion that neoliberal globalization manifests itself differently in different countries and economic climates, producing different levels of general youth unemployment and labor force participation as demonstrated by the graphs below from the Global Economy.

“Compare countries with annual data from official sources” (Graph by The Global Economy: Economic Indicators for over 200 Countries)
Nermeen Murad pointed out that Jordan’s economy, based in small to medium enterprises (SMEs), is partially unconducive to high rates of female employment because of factors like transportation and mixed-gender environments. Significantly, she nodded to the conundrum that Jordan poses as a country with “high unemployment in general...so you’re trying to improve the participation of women in an environment where jobs are not available for either [men or women].”\textsuperscript{120} The graph above indicates these high general relates of unemployment in Jordan.

For Jordan, the 2016 World Bank data indicates that 81.4\% of female employment is in the services sector and only 1.2\% of female employment is in

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Labor force participation rate for Jordan and Morocco from 1995 to 2017.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{119} “Compare countries with annual data from official sources,” \textit{The Global Economy: Economic Indicators for over 200 Countries}, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/compare-countries/.
\textsuperscript{120} Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
agriculture.\textsuperscript{121} For Morocco, 2016 World Bank data indicates that 57.2% of female employment is in agriculture and 30.3% of female employment is in the services.\textsuperscript{122}

Jordan, an upper-middle-income country, has an economy that is one of the region’s smallest and has a serious deficiency of resources like water and oil. With these conditions, Jordan relies heavily on foreign aid, imports, and foreign worker remittance, making the economic conditions in the country rather volatile. While reforms have been implemented to sustain stability and increase Jordan’s tolerance to external shocks, the “challenge is whether the economy can fully break away from its rentier characteristics and diversify and deepen its modern service and industrial base, thus creating a labor market that harnesses the talents of an increasingly educated workforce.”\textsuperscript{123} Ever since independence from Britain and World War II, foreign aid, which will be discussed in more depth in the section below, has been at the core of Jordan’s economy.\textsuperscript{124}

During the early 2000s, Jordan’s efforts to expand its foreign trade and privatize companies that brought in foreign investment ultimately yielded an 8% annual economic growth from 2004 to 2008. Since, however, the economy has undergone decrease in GDP and government debt. In the past decade, “Jordan has also pursued structural reforms in education, health, as well as privatization and

\textsuperscript{121} “Gender Data Portal: Jordan,” The World Bank, \url{http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/jordan}.
\textsuperscript{122} “Gender Data Portal: Morocco,” The World Bank, \url{http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/morocco}.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
liberalization; social protection systems and reformed subsidies have been introduced.”\textsuperscript{125} However, the ILO suggests that “stabilisation programmes and conventional economic reform, while leading to some macroeconomic stability, have not necessarily led to reduced unemployment.”\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) are export-focused production efforts and have “led to employment of low-cost migrant workers”\textsuperscript{127} more than “creating employment opportunities for Jordanian labour force,”\textsuperscript{128} as will also be discussed later in this chapter. Estimations indicate that 44.2% of workers in Jordan do not have access to social security and that “being male in Jordan is associated with a higher probability of working in the informal sector. This is likely linked to the fact that women in the labour force, who tend to be highly educated, are working in the public sector.”\textsuperscript{129} 95% of working women in Jordan are centered in the following three sectors: public administration, education and health, and social work.\textsuperscript{130}

Morocco, a middle-income country, has an economy in which agriculture comprises 15% of GDP. There are three different sub sectors within agriculture: modern, irrigated, export-focused agriculture; dam-irrigated agriculture; and rain fed agriculture. Also, “Moroccan agriculture products are allowed preferential access to EU markets.”\textsuperscript{131} Significantly, about 80% of employment in Morocco is constituted as

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 7.
informal - meaning without social security - as of 2012. It is estimated that the informal economy is 42.9% of GDP and increasing. 83% of women workers are informal, 90% of non-government women workers are informal, and nearly 100% of rural women workers are informal. 60% of women are working in the rural and agricultural sector and studies show that half are unwaged and the other half are informal workers. This work is often seasonal and labor protection like minimum wage and number of hours are not upheld.\textsuperscript{132}

The general unemployment rate in Jordan as of 2017 was 18.5\%\textsuperscript{133} and the rate in Morocco was 10\%.\textsuperscript{134} Perhaps, the higher rates of employment for women in Morocco are partially due to the more effective conversion from agriculture to agribusiness. In other words, the agriculture sector of Morocco better incorporates women than the services sector of Jordan. Furthermore, it seems that the service sector requires higher levels of education than that of agriculture. Lastly, Morocco has seen rapid growth in the cooperative movement. Support for cooperatives often emphasizes their successful stimulation of “social, economic, and environmental development.”\textsuperscript{135}

A 2018 \textit{Jordan Times} article states that “for starters, the world of ‘co-ops’ consolidates volunteerism, democracy, productivity, synergy, creativity, self-reliance and economic diversity: the core values our country needs to prosper, shed the traces

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
of rentier economy; free itself from overdependence on the public sector as an employer and empower people, especially women.” Specifically, the article calls for the need for “a national strategy to advance the cooperative sector that engages all stakeholders”\textsuperscript{136} This suggests that Jordan is still in the midst of developing a foundation of support for the cooperative model. Perhaps the more robust cooperative model in Morocco is tied up in the prominence of the agricultural sector and can help to explain the relatively higher levels of female labor in Morocco as compared to Jordan. A 2016 \textit{Guardian} article discusses a cohort of 30 argan oil cooperatives that have since 1965, “been turning Morocco’s ‘gold’ into a thriving business that is changing women’s lives. It is not only giving them money and access to international markets, it is also giving them status and turning traditional views about the role of women in society on their head.”\textsuperscript{137} While it is perhaps an overstatement that cooperatives alone can transform traditional gender expectations, the cooperative model - often an all female environment that allows opportunities for leadership without extensive levels of education - is an important part of understanding the landscape of female work in Morocco.

\textbf{Foreign Aid and Foreign Labor}

Since external pressure can have influence on gender landscapes and realities, foreign aid is an important metric in this discussion. Jordan receives $1.3 billion from

\textsuperscript{136} “A national strategy to boost the neglected cooperative sector,” \textit{The Jordan Times}, April 4, 2018, \url{http://jordantimes.com/opinion/mahmoud}.

\textsuperscript{137} Celeste Hicks, “‘Free, local and special’: argan oil co-ops booming in Morocco”, \textit{The Guardian}, June 7, 2016, \url{https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016}. 
the United States, the third highest recipient in the region as of 2018. Morocco is situated as number eight and as of 2018, receives $490 million from the United States. For Jordan, the top targets for funding are governance ($1b), humanitarian ($176m), health and population ($161m), and education ($80m). Furthermore, the top activities include a foreign military financing program; a Red-Sea-Dead-Sea project aimed at initiating cooperation between Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian authorities to address water shortage; Syrian humanitarian aid; and anti-terrorism assistance training. The top sectors of aid, in order of importance, are government and civil society, conflict peace and security, emergency response, water supply and sanitation, and basic education. For Morocco, on the other hand, the top categories of funding are education ($231m) and urban development and management ($152m). The top activities include firstly, a land productivity project of $119m, and then two separate education and training for employability projects of approximately $100m each. Secondary education and post-secondary education occupy number two and three for USAID’s top sectors in Morocco.

The EU provides funding to 16 partner counties - including both Jordan and Morocco - through what is called the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI).

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Worth 15.4 billion euros, the ENI is a 2014-2020 initiative. The EU’s “cooperation priorities” with Morocco are democratic governance, rule of law, and mobility; sustainable growth and employment; and access to basic human rights. From 2014 to 2017 the funds from the ENI allocated for Morocco were 728-890 million euros while those for Jordan were significantly less at 335.5-410.1 million euros. For Jordan, the priority sectors were similarly social and economic development as well as strengthening the rule of law, but had the additional pillar of “upgrading border management and preventing violent extremism.”

In addition to the ENI, Morocco is a recipient of thematic and regional program funding from the EU which constitutes 14.1 million euros and includes support for human rights and civil society. According to the European Commission website, in 2017, the EU secured funds for gender equality, specifically “adult literacy (€ 50 million), gender equality (€ 35 million) and a complementary forestry programme (€ 12.5 million).” Besides the ENI avenue of funding, as of 2018, the EU provided Jordan with 1.1 billion euros allocated for response to the Syrian crisis. In addition, in 2016, the EU and Jordan established a Compact, or a “‘holistic approach’ to address the consequences of the Syrian crisis.”

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143 Ibid.
When it comes to employment in Jordan, Syrian and migrant labor is an important piece to this puzzle. A 2017 ILO report estimated that there are 655,900 Syrians living in Jordan.\(^{148}\) Taking into account both the documented and the undocumented, the migrant worker total is reported between 440,000 and 540,000, mostly from Egypt, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and India.\(^{149}\) In Morocco, the EU has been heavily involved in 2014 reforms to encourage migrants to stay in Morocco instead of journeying to Europe. While King Mohammed VI has made statements regarding Morocco’s solidarity with sub-Saharan migrants, policy and sentiment have been less than accommodating.\(^{150}\) A 2018 *New York Times* article discussed Morocco’s recent crackdown on sub-Saharan migrants through multiple measures including arrest, banishment, and even expulsion. Human rights groups estimate that just over six thousand migrants have been displaced or arrested since the rigidity amplified in June. The article estimates that around 70,000 sub-Saharan currently reside in Morocco, a significantly smaller number of migrants than those of Jordan. While both 2014 and 2017 saw campaigns aimed at legalization for migrants in Morocco, the more recent crackdowns render the residence cards that legal campaigns secure rather useless in the face of such exclusionary measures.\(^{151}\)


\(^{149}\) Ibid.

\(^{150}\) Gillian Coyne, “‘Migrants don’t exist’: Morocco struggles with migration despite reforms,” *Middle East Eye*, April 1, 2018, [https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/migrants](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/migrants).

In July 2016, the EU agreed to a “ten-year relaxation of the EU Rules of Origin requirements to Jordan exports to the EU.”\(^{152}\) In return, “the Jordanian government committed to offer job opportunities to Syrian refugees, to facilitate access to education for Syrian children and to increase opportunities for Syrian youth to receive vocational training.”\(^{153}\) In a 2019 ILO article, EU Ambassador to Jordan Andrea Matteo Fontana notes that “We are creating new job opportunities for workers...But there are also other benefits; first of all, that Jordanian workers and Syrian workers will get the chance to work side-by-side and finally, the important possibility for workers to find decent jobs that are in line with Jordanian and ILO standards.”\(^{154}\) There are currently thirteen employment centers throughout Jordan “to help connect Jordanian and Syrian job seekers with employers. The centres provide support to over 16,000 Syrian and Jordanian job seekers and 900 employers through career guidance, training opportunities, job matching and work permit applications.”\(^{155}\) There have been 6,894 jobseeker beneficiaries and 37% are women. 55% of these women have found work in manufacturing, mostly the garment industry.\(^{156}\)

While the ILO report sets forth rather favorable results of this EU partnership, there are more critical perspectives. The initiative represents a perhaps precarious effort to fuse economic and humanitarian agendas by framing Syrians as “enterprising
subjects” and laying out an ambitious two-pronged plan of both reinvigorating the Jordanian economy while also incorporating Syrian refugees into the formal labor market. According to scholar Katharina Lenner in “Making Refugees Work? The Politics of Integrating Syrian Refugees into the Labor Market in Jordan”, the job fairs near the zones which aimed at informing Syrians of the nearby opportunities were largely unsuccessful since Syrians were hesitant to sign up for the low-pay and poor-conditions of the work. While such work had the potential to appeal to South Asian workers who often come to Jordan alone, many Syrians decided the low salaries were insufficient to support their families. Additionally, many worried that receiving a work permit would disrupt their United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) status and access to resettlement. Lenner added that “Syrian women were the (implicit) main target population of this scheme. If the target of 200,000 Syrians working is to be reached, it would require a large-scale recruitment drive among Syrian women.” In actuality, women were often deterred from these opportunities by a series of factors including long commutes, lack of childcare provision from employers, and the possibility of mixed-gender work environments.

Another obstacle has been factories’ delineation of a rather rigid hierarchy of which individuals are the most sound “investments” as workers. There are certain quotas dictating that garment factories can employ 75% migrant workers while the

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158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
remainder must be Jordanians. Lenner explains that a high concentration of migrant labor is vital to the sector, stating

Employers wanted to be able to replace their Jordanian labor with Syrians. Many factories already perceive themselves to be overly burdened by their obligations to employ a minimum of 25 per cent Jordanian citizens. Jordanians work shorter days than migrant workers...They are seen as a drain on the factories’ productivity because they are only willing to do the easiest jobs and are more expensive to employ.

In fact, both Syrians and Jordanians are viewed as less valuable workers than the pool of South Asian migrants. As a result of the 25% quota, the government of Jordan has opened 16 satellite factories across the nation. These satellites have “made it easier for Jordanians, especially women, to work closer to home, in a more familiar environment. Thereby, they have effectively increased Jordanian employment in the sector.”161

While this satellite model operates to secure opportunities of employment, the government of Jordan is less inclined to create these spaces of exception for Syrians, especially since “Jordanian unemployment is persistently and stubbornly high, and has risen since the start of the Syrian crisis, from 11.4 percent in early 2012 to almost 16 percent by late 2016.”162 In an interview, founder of World of Letters-MENA and former founding CEO of Education for Employment in Jordan Mayyada Abu Jaber discussed the fear of harassment for women as a deterrent to work. She explained that in these Qualified Industrial Zone factories, “the problem is really harassment,

160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
working in a mixed environment, where there is mixing of men and women.”

Amidst women’s families, “[There is a] perception that this is not the right job for her because she will not get married...like it’s bad enough that she’s failed grade 12 because then she’ll become less desirable for marriage, and then she becomes a factory girl...they don’t want her to become a factory girl.” Importantly, this reiterates that marriage is the first and foremost cultural obligation for women.

Nermeen Murad echoed this discussion of workplace harassment by maintaining that

Workplace environments are [changing]. Managers are learning to be managers, employees are learning to be employees. The relationship between manager and employee is developing...the attitude of professionalism is not mature for both. We are a developing country. We think because we have modern buildings in Amman and we look like a modern country that somehow we’ve bypassed hundreds of years of growth of mentality and mindset especially in work environments.....The country is in phases of development and therefore the work environments are in those phases.

Additionally, Abu Jaber discussed the increased competition Jordanians face in the job market, particularly with the presence of Syrian labor. She stated that “So the fact is that the Syrian are more skilled than [Jordanians]...they are...good with their hands and handicrafts.” She added that satellite factories aim to bring work to women to alleviate the barrier that travel can pose: “The work is coming to you. [Families] cannot forbid her to work here, you see.” Abu Jaber expressed concern at the prospect of establishing satellite factories designated for Syrian women,

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163 Mayyada Abu Jaber (CEO of World of Letters), interview with author, July 30, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
164 Ibid.
165 Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
especially since Jordanian small businesses are already forced to compete with those of Syrians. She said, “I think that’s such a bad idea, but what can we do? Because now the jobs...which Jordanian women should do, now it’s Syrian women....now the dynamics may change.” Ultimately, Abu Jaber emphasized the need for regulations in satellite factories to ensure jobs for Jordanians because otherwise “they will employ Syrian women...Remember, Syrian women are more skilled than our women.” Both the presence of Syrians and the role of migrant labor are important parts of understanding Jordan’s foreign aid and labor landscape, particularly the competition women face.

**Beyond the Market**

Overall, discussion of factory labor cannot be limited to quotas of foreign and domestic labor. A key part, as explained by Abu Jaber and Murad, is perceptions of harassment and general discomfort with women entering into a mixed-gender environment. Both reiterated that the perhaps most prominent barrier between women and work is cultural mindsets. Specifically, Murad noted,

> Women are seen as the homemakers and men are the breadwinners. It has its roots in the culture but it has its roots in the Islamic framing that says that women are not responsible for bringing money to the marital home and that’s the responsibility of men and that their responsibility lies in looking after the home...Culturally and religiously their role assignment isn’t one that allows for the men and women to share house duties or the marital funds. The division is very clear, the personal status law is very clear in assigning the benefits.

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168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
170 Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
This introduces an important series of factors besides those of the economy that influence female work, both within and outside of factories. Clearly, the economic and foreign aid landscape of Jordan and Morocco cannot be the full story. Social and cultural norms surrounding work are a pivotal part of the narrative, and individual accounts must be central to this discussion. The following chapter presents a series of vignettes from the accounts of women themselves, and illuminates varied perspectives on education, work, tribal networks, and gender dynamics.

Many of the women in the following chapter seem to reject complementarianism and maintain that standard metrics of empowerment like education and work outside the home are vehicles for empowerment. While it might seem that this reifies a typically Western individualism, Islamic feminism does not accept a separate-but-equal logic for different types of gendered labor. In fact, as outlined by Margot Badran, it can lean toward an egalitarian model through a reassessment of Islamic principles. The interviews conducted in both Jordan and Morocco in the following chapter will set forth a series of factors that pose barriers between women and work including transportation, lack of childcare services, cultural perceptions of women, and double burdens.

Chapter 3: Voices

The following vignettes are a product of a series of interviews I conducted in July and August of 2018. In Jordan, most of the interviews were in the city of Amman and the outskirts. In Morocco, most of them took place in Rabat as well as in the town of Azrou, south of Fez. Having lived in Jordan in the fall of 2017, a number of the women I interviewed in Amman were friends of mine or friends of friends. In Morocco, I hired a translator and fixer who generously connected me to her family members and friends. In analyzing the narratives and perspectives of these women, I aim to tread carefully, to do justice to the weight of their words but also to avoid essentializing or generalizing their realities - to draw connections and notice parallels without homogenizing.

The individuals who shared their stories with me span a range of ages, from an 18-year-old to recent university graduates to middle-aged women. They also span a variety of education levels, geography, socioeconomic statuses, and of course, lived experiences. That said, it is imperative to acknowledge that these voices are not representative of all constituencies, nor do they form a comprehensive encapsulation of all women’s perspectives in either country. Rather, they add important nuance to the discourse surrounding women’s schooling, work, and mobility. The questions I often asked in interviews were surrounding the women’s backgrounds; family dynamics regarding education, work, and marriage; definitions of empowerment; perceptions of gendered barriers; and perceptions of religion.
Jordan - Urban Voices

“I prefer to work with men and others work with women. We don’t like the good things for each other. I don’t know why... he quickly could be your friend if he’s a man. But if she’s a woman, it’s very different.”

- Heba // Amman, Jordan

Heba, age 27, graduated in 2013 from Al Balqa Applied University with a degree in electrical engineering. She initially wanted to be a children’s doctor, but her Tawjihi marks weren’t high enough for her to attend a public university for medicine. Tawjihi is the standardized secondary education examination and determines one’s eligibility for university as well as the path one can pursue. After graduating in July, Heba found a job as quickly as November, working in a factory for which her father’s friend was the manager. When that factory closed, she found another job through her own qualifications. Several years later, she got married and pregnant and quit soon after. She’s now searching far and wide for a job. If she were to begin working, her family could care for her now year-and-a-half year old son during the day.

Heba spoke of what seems like the progressively fewer job opportunities available since she graduated. Especially in the public sector, she thinks, the prospects are scarce and the salaries have plummeted. “When I graduated my salary for the first one was 600 JD and that was more than the average...” she said. “But now with my experience, so five years working in engineering, I can’t find a job with 350 JD.” When asked about specific barriers that women face, Heba said “a woman

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172 Heba Johar, interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
always faces challenges. In a lot of jobs, they ask only for men. And for me, project engineering, when there is a project and it’s outside Amman or it’s in other cities or it’s in a very faraway place, they prefer to have a man not a woman.” Heba has begun to look for work outside of Jordan.

Reflecting on past working environments, Heba was blunt about what it’s like to work with other women, admitting that women can be obstacles for other women. “They try to destroy each other,” she said matter-of-factly. “I prefer to work with men and others work with women. We don’t like the good things for each other. I don’t know why... he quickly could be your friend if he’s a man. But if she’s a woman, it’s very different.”

Heba was also straightforward about the prominence of something called wasta, a form of nepotism rooted in tribal connections and affinities. “Ninety-nine point nine” percent of graduates find jobs through wasta, she said. Wasta is so dominant that as a form of discrimination, it almost doesn’t discriminate. In other words, according to Heba, wasta impacts men and women alike. The bottom line is that connections matter and wasta is everywhere. Heba described a specific instance when wasta undermined her chances at a job. “In Jordan, for the public sector, there is this exam...some people...take [the] exam and they do the interviews, and other people, they don’t at all and their names go to the center or to the ministry, even if they didn’t take it. That happened to me...I applied with all my papers and when I went back to ask what’s happened they said there’s no application for you,” she explained.
Heba’s mother, Eman, also emphasized wasta. Born in Jordan but with Palestinian origin, Eman received a two-year diploma in English from Al-Arabiya College, and met her husband at her first job as a secretary after graduating. Like Heba, she found this job through a man her father knew. “Just wasta,” Eman said with a shrug. She highlighted that in Jordan, wasta and the clout of famous family names are invaluable. Eman thinks that over time wasta has become even more important. “For me, my name is….not famous for the Jordanian people,” she said. “You take your job from your family name. This is my opinion.”

With the high cost of living in Amman, Heba and Eman explained that some men want a working woman for a wife. Even so, Heba said it’s common for women to quit their jobs upon marrying because of duties they must fulfill at home. If the job requires travelling and late hours, it will be difficult for the woman to maintain. In Heba’s own experience, it was hard to balance her marriage and her work, not because of the work itself, but because of the difficulty of navigating gendered stigmas. “Our tradition is different,” Heba said. When Heba was working, her weekend happened to be Sunday and Monday. Since Friday is normally a day of rest in Jordan, her work schedule was seen as strange.

Heba recounted, “So, my ex…didn’t tell his family for three months…and he said to me, ‘Don’t tell them that you are working on Friday.’ And they keep saying to me, ‘Each Friday you are going out. What are you doing? Why are you not with your

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husband? Why are you not at your home?.’ He didn’t tell them and he said to me, ‘Don’t tell them.’ And I’m stupid because I didn’t tell.”

While Heba’s family approved of her working, her husband’s family would not have. Heba’s narrative suggests that when it comes to work, some women experience financial pressure urging them in one direction and cultural pressure urging them in another. In this way, her story sheds light on the disjointedness between social norm and financial demand. Neither her engineering degree nor her desire to work has secured her inclusion in the labor force. Once she was able to land a job, she then needed to skirt the potential social ramifications for deviating from the assumed female role. While her education was normalized, even expected, her work remained stigmatized.

“A lot of people have the university degree and they just hang it on the wall and don’t have employment chance or opportunity.”
- Suzan // Amman, Jordan

Just a 5 minute walk away, 18 year old Hala lives with her three younger siblings, her mother Suzan, and her father Bashar. Bashar works at a bank and Suzan stays at home. Suzan sees education for women as “an opening that [they] can secure their future with.” At the private school Hala attended, class participation and engagement was encouraged. Suzan chooses to send her children to private school because she knows they’ll be safe there. “No one will bully them. The teachers will

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175 Hala Saad, interview with author, translated by Qais Rababa, July 26, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
176 Suzan Saad, interview with author, translated by Qais Rababa, July 26, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
treat them well,” she added. For Suzan, working was out of the question, especially since she was raising a daughter with special needs until she passed away at the age of twelve. Afterwards, Suzan worked for several years before having four children. She didn’t have time to put her children in kindergarten and work at the same time, so she stopped working altogether.

Hala has just completed the equivalent of high school, and is nervously waiting to receive her Tawjihi scores. Her dream is to study marketing at the University of Jordan. When asked about the desire to study marketing, Suzan jumped in to point out that she’s heard the major is promising for post-graduation employment. Suzan is judgmental of the superficialness of a degree in Jordan. She explained that “a lot of people have the university degree and they just hang it on the wall and don’t have employment chance or opportunity.”

In regard to work, Suzan thinks there are certainly challenges that women face, but unlike Heba, she doesn’t think women are barriers to one another. “Women are not equal to men. They are not like men. Women do not have freedom,” she stated. “They can’t work at what they want. Not like men.” Suzan thinks that for her three daughters, having a job is important for confidence. She claimed that the working woman “will actualize herself. She will have life experience. She can help herself and the people around her.” When asked about wasta, Suzan shrugged it off disapprovingly. What’s important to her is that someone demonstrates their competency for a job. She also pointed out that wasta can be double-edged. If one’s family has a good relationship with the employer, it’s clearly an advantage but if not,
it can negatively impact one’s chances. While wasla doesn’t concern her, Suzan is very worried about Hala’s use of transportation when she begins university. Not only is transportation in Amman expensive, but Hala has never used it alone.

To Suzan, marriage is crucial for women. Single women have an especially low social standing in Jordan. They face harsh disrespect from the community. Suzan explained that “they don’t have a glimpse of happiness for the future.” To her, worse off yet is the single woman who is not working. She added, “The working single woman can contribute to society but the single women [who don’t] have jobs - they’re like obstacles. They’re just sucking everything from society. So they’re like parasites or something.” According to Suzan, an empowered woman, on the other hand, is someone who can contribute to society. Hala understood an empowered woman as someone with confidence in her own personality. To her, this entails strength, a sense of responsibility, motivation, and proactivity. Hala too sees the importance of marriage as a part of becoming a responsible adult. When Hala said she hoped to be married by 30, her mom interjected that in Jordan, if you’re past 25 or 26, you’ve missed the boat. Suzan warned that if you wait until you’re 30, you’re bound to marry someone much older. Education, Suzan said, is an important part of increasing one’s marriage prospects.

“Because of the economic situation in Jordan and the high cost of living, the participation of the woman...it’s a must. It’s not something she would like to do, it’s something she needs to do to be able to live in Jordan.”
- Maisa // Amman, Jordan
Maisa\textsuperscript{177}, age 28, had grandparents who moved from Palestine to Jordan in 1948. Up until the tenth grade, she attended schools through United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) before moving to a public school in Amman for the last two years of high school. Then, she studied financial economics at the Hashemite University.

When asked about the dynamics of female education and labor in Jordan, Maisa pointed to dominant societal stereotypes which dictate that women do not need money since they’re not equipped to spend it responsibly. Like Heba, she added that the currently high cost of living in Jordan means that a man cannot realistically support an entire home alone. “So he needs the participation of women,” Maisa explained. Maisa expanded that “In the past it was not acceptable a lot for a woman to work because her responsibility is to take care of her home and children...but because of the economic situation in Jordan and the high cost of living, the participation of the woman...it’s a must. It’s not something she would like to do, it’s something she needs to do to be able to live in Jordan.”

Maisa, a mother of a one-and-a-half year old, worries about finding an affordable kindergarten for her son. While Maisa is at work, her mother or mother-in-law cares for her son. It’s cheaper and safer to have family members look after him, as daycare scheduling often times doesn’t work with her schedule. Regarding legislation, Maisa also mentioned that lack of daycare provision is a gendered problem, and nodded to initiatives that advocate for requiring workplaces to

\textsuperscript{177} Maisa Jazar, interview with author, July 24, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
provide them. Maisa added that teaching is an attractive profession for women because of the benefits, hours, and holidays. Maisa also emphasized that it’s not about the existence of certain laws, but rather their implementation. This is especially important in regard to minimum wages and wage gaps.

While at university, Maisa became interested in how accounting works, specifically in hospitals. She took part in a program that was a one-month training and internship at Palestine Hospital, for which she paid a fee to participate. In 2012, Maisa started working where she works now: FORSA, a platform that aims to connect youth in the MENA region with education and career opportunities. She started as a secretary and then progressed to the finance department. Reflecting on her job search and trajectory, Maisa brought up the presence of wasta. She got the internship at the hospital because of her cousin. Then, her husband was volunteering at FORSA as a copywriter and content writer. He saw the opportunity for the secretary and filled out an application for her. She’s now been at FORSA for six years.

Maisa spoke of the transportation system in Jordan as a significant barrier, clarifying that “it’s not only hard, it’s a disaster.” She added, “We have a very, very weak transportation system and it is one of the challenges that I face. For example, if we need to work late here most of times we are not able to find a public transportation, we need to take a taxi and to take a taxi the cost will be high.” If she is able to use public transportation instead of a car, it takes over an hour and a half.
Maisa pointed out that for some, transportation is so expensive that one’s salary doesn’t even make working worth it.

Maisa couldn’t remember learning at all about navigating the labor market throughout her schooling. She did, however, remember doing an exercise in the eighth grade about how to design an invitation card for her wedding under the umbrella topic of leadership. In a way, Maisa’s schooling mimicked the societal expectations she was facing, preparing her more for the marriage market than the labor market.

“I think education is the best weapon for any female because if you’re educated and you can be independent, you don’t need anyone.”
- Marah // Amman, Jordan

Marah\(^{178}\) and Nesreen\(^{179}\), age 22 and 24 respectively, are sisters who were born in Jordan but moved to Saudi Arabia soon after for their father’s work. While their parents are still in Saudi Arabia, the two sisters live together in an apartment in Amman. “We live alone,” Nesreen said. “All of this situation is not acceptable for this society...two girls live together and alone, and their family’s not in the country, it’s a kind of weird…” That said, Nesreen discussed the comfort and lack of judgment that comes with living with her sister. “If I come late at home it’s okay. If I want to bring a friend, it’s okay. If I want to go and sleepover with my friend it’s okay, but if my family [was] with me I would put some consideration,” she recounted.

\(^{179}\) Nesreen Khalid, interview with author, July 31, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
They both attended public school in Saudi Arabia and then university in Jordan. Marah studied producing at Yarmouk University and Nesreen studied dentistry at the Jordan University of Science and Technology. Nesreen hopes to specialize in pediatric dentistry, and noted that with her high Tawjihi marks, medicine was the logical path to pursue. Marah discussed that while her mother hoped she’d be a dentist too, she truthfully always wanted to be an actress. She drew a connection between her initial interest in acting and the field of media that she ended up in. Both seemingly disparate fields incorporate storytelling and the crafting of messages.

Marah brought up environmental conditions that can deter women from work. She spoke of factors that ultimately lead women to feel devalued - whether it’s being talked over in a meeting or sexual harassment. In regard to sexual assault, Marah discussed a perceived culture of silence but an actual culture of shame and collective accountability in Jordan. “[Women] think if they talk, no one will believe them but actually in the real life, it’s the opposite,” she explained. Marah had a personal experience with sexual assault on a bus, and when she told the police officer next to her, he brought her to the police station. When the perpetrator brought his uncle to vouch for him, the police officer advocated for Marah and made sure she saw the justice she wanted. Ultimately, Marah felt protected by the law, but shed light on cultural traditions, norms, and assumptions that make it hard for these laws to function as they could. “So, I think the law is with females…but we are afraid to talk,” she said. “At the same time, I didn’t tell my parents, to be honest, because they would
tell me, ‘you can’t go there, and you can’t go there, and you need to be here at a specific time.’ In the end, it will...make your life real closed, not open.”

Marah and Nesreen’s parents are educated and the girls were raised far from their extended family. For some of their relatives, marriage was a more central expectation or priority, and their 22 year old cousin is uneducated, married, and has two children. In the sisters’ upbringing, their parents always encouraged their independence. Marah’s opinion on the importance of education is as follows: “I think education is the best weapon for any female because if you’re educated and you can be independent, you don’t need anyone. So, then you can say that you’re part of the society and you can have your own word in policy, in jobs, in work, and even in your house.” In Marah’s opinion, a woman’s empowerment means the following three spheres of power must allow her to make her own decisions: her society, her family, and her religion.

Marah realized pretty early on during university that without any experience in an actual work environment, she’d never get hired. “This is how it works in Jordan,” she said. “If you didn’t show how good you are at something you will not be qualified...So, I start volunteering and started doing some freelancing and practiced my English...” Even when Marah applied to internships after graduating, she said applications asked for experiences, portfolios, and language proficiencies. If she hadn’t acquired these while in college, she never would have gotten an internship at FORSA. Soon, Marah became an employee as a social media officer. A former supervisor told her of an opening at UNICEF, where she now works. Marah made an
interesting distinction between a job and career, explaining that while wasta might
land you a position of some sort, it won’t result in a meaningful career. Like Suzan,
Marah dismissed the centrality of wasta. “I believe if you really work hard, you don’t
need that wasta, trust me,” Marah said. “Because if you have the wasta, you’ll have a
job, but you will not have a career....”

That said, Marah didn’t deny the reality of the weight of wasta. She noted,
“you need to do something because there’s thousands of people graduating every
semester. What makes you qualified more than them? Here, if we have like 3
thousand students who graduated and none of them have any qualifications and three
of them have wasta, of course, the three of them will have the job.” According to
Nesreen, wasta doesn’t play much of a role in the field of medicine. “If you know the
owner of the clinic, okay, he will accept you. But I don’t have wasta actually, and for
my life, until now I didn’t use wasta...I don’t have anyone,” she clarified.

Nesreen explained the difficulty of the field of dentistry since trainings are
expensive and her family still has to help her out financially. She’s now working in a
clinic in the initial stages of her career and the salary is low. If she could go back,
she’d study art, architecture, or music. In terms of finding actual opportunities, unlike
Marah, Nesreen said “It’s easy.” Nesreen got a job with the second place she
interviewed. “Because I’m a dentist, you know,” she added. “Yeah, it’s required here.
It’s not difficult to find a job.” Also, mobility isn’t too far ahead. “All of us will start
in a low salary, then it will increase with time. I mean, it will reach about 1,000 JD.
From 350 to 1,000,” she said.
Nesreen explained that some families are resistant to women entering the field of medicine because of the innate mixed-gender environment. “It’s for men...They don’t accept that he is a man and he’s sitting really near from you. In the school, it’s okay. In the medical school you can go and be a specialist, but when you go to the job in the community, they don’t trust you as a girl to be a surgeon,” Nesreen said. “They want the male doctor. ‘Where is the male?’ they keep asking me. ‘Are you going to extract this tooth?’ Yes, I’m going to extract it. ‘You are not tough. You are petite for extracting this tooth for this huge patient.’ Okay, but it’s not about the force. It’s about the technique. It’s about how I’m going to hold the instruments, about the movement, not about the force. But they don’t get it.”

Reflecting on a point of pride in her own career, Nesreen said “You know, at the beginning I was scared to give him an injection…it was a root canal treatment, my first patient. Okay. I give him everything and it was more than perfect...Yes, it really was perfect.” Thinking about her own aspirations, Nesreen said she hopes to live elsewhere at some point in her life. “This country does not appreciate you,” she said. “They just give me the passport....They didn’t give me a good life. Also, I’m a doctor, okay, and they keep asking you, ‘why did your family spend that much on you, that much money?’ At the end of the day you are a girl and you will go back to your husband’s house…” Nesreen explained that while these gendered expectations haven’t dictated her life entirely, the city of Amman is somewhat of a bubble compared to the rest of the country. Nesreen defined empowerment as follows: “The education is a power. It’s a power for every female and male in the world…you have
your diploma, you have your education, and it’s a power for you...The community and the society...they appreciate the educated...especially doctors and engineers are special. They think they are the highest...people in the society.”

“I think there is this challenge where there is a gap between what we’ve learned in college and what we need...to get the job opportunity.”
- Maram // Amman, Jordan

Maram, age 26, was born in Saudi Arabia where she went to school before coming to Jordan at age 17. While she had a very high GPA which would’ve allowed her to study medicine like Nesreen, she decided to study something she loved: media. Like Marah, Maram attended Yarmouk University where she majored in mass communication. During her last year at university, she began an internship as a content writer at a magazine. She interviewed people and wrote articles. Next, she did communications work for a pharmacy and decided it wasn’t for her. Soon, she got a job at FORSA doing social media and writing content before becoming the content manager. Now, she works at an international NGO called Spark which focuses on youth entrepreneurship and scholarships. She does outreach, documenting narratives, and communications. She explained, “if I look back on what I’ve done in the past three years, I think I have a passion for working with an entity or a project that is supporting youth and gender and is giving them better opportunities.” Maram had a whole philosophy about the way in which information is communicated from those with power to those without it, from the intellectual, political sphere to the public one.

Importantly, Maram also had a philosophy about her role within this network. Maram identifies as someone who delivers messages, almost translating content from the abstract to the concrete.

“I always found myself playing the role of connecting these two [spheres], so at the same time these are not like clouded by false information...what they know and can change for the better is not only in their own intellectual group or bubble...So I thought social media is very important for that,” she explained. This is in line with Maram’s deep interest in filmmaking and understanding how messages are delivered. Maram often ponders the most effective way to communicate complicated ideas or messages so that they are digestible for the public. While she did not end up pursuing filmmaking, the question reverberating in her mind has and continues to be “how can we deliver messages?”

Maram discussed her gratitude for attending a very prestigious institution in Saudi Arabia and her subsequent frustration with the emphasis on memorization in the Jordanian education system. She reflected, “the shock was when I came to Jordan and then most of the subjects I studied was like a professor who was just talking... In lots of cases, [the textbook] was an old version. We’re talking about media, you know?...We need to keep up. We did not study anything about social media in college, though this uprise of social media started in 2010 and 2011.”

Besides the content of her education, Maram also saw a lack of career development training in her schooling. “I think there is this challenge where there is a gap between what we’ve learned in college and what we need to have to get the job
opportunity,” she said. “So for example, if we’re talking about simple things...like communication using emails. How can we write a professional email? All of this I think I got from working...as a volunteer throughout my school years and university, the majority of the people really don’t get access to this kind of information...If you don’t know how to express yourself and answer questions in a 15 minute interview, how are you going to do this later when you interact with your colleagues and so on?”

Maram spoke of the role of transportation and the obstacle it poses for working individuals. “I think that transportation is a very huge challenge...If I did not get a job that would make me be able to afford to order an Uber or a Careem\footnote{Careem is a transportation company based in Dubai that operates throughout the region of the Middle East and North Africa.} every morning, it wouldn’t work,” she stated. In the same vein as Maisa, Maram discussed the low salaries for recent graduates. “If you imagine fresh graduates who are engineers, who are supposed to make more than others, or doctors, taking 300 and 400 JDs when they’re graduating. This is barely the tax you are going to pay for the month,” she explained. Some graduates need to accept a low paying job to acquire experience for future opportunities, but the cost of transportation makes the lifestyle fully unsustainable.

In terms of work, Maram said that jobs almost always require a bachelor’s degree. Simultaneously, there have been recent efforts to encourage vocational trainings. “How many engineers do we have in Jordan who are not finding a job in engineering? If I give you an example of the people in this office who are working with us as project officers or trainers, we’re talking about 15 team members...More
than 50 percent of the team are people who graduated with an engineering degree. Engineers are also going to work in other sectors...so we have a lot of bachelor degree holders but we don’t have the people with the technical skills or with the vocational education.” Spark, where Maram works, for instance, is supporting vocational scholarships in addition to bachelor’s degree scholarships. While there are an abundance of graduates with engineering degrees, there are not nearly enough opportunities for engineering work.

Like many others, Maram spoke of the high cost of living in Jordan and how this impacts a calculated acceptance of female work. She emphasized, “to live in Jordan, this is very, very, very costly. Most of the cases...one income is not enough to actually provide for a family.” Unlike Heba, Maram is inspired by what she sees as a culture of women supporting other women in the workplace and beyond. “I can see women supporting each other a lot when it comes to actually helping each other,” she said. She brought up a Facebook group called Women in Business with tens of thousands of members, and she admired the support women show for each other. She explained, “So I always feel like there’s this kind of support between females, and I’m not sure if it exists in the male world.

“I think we need to have more training in our schools and our universities because they’re not used to looking at females as ‘she’s going to be a leader.’”
- Tagreed // Amman, Jordan
Tagreed\textsuperscript{182}, age 37, is from a small village in the north of Jordan, where she lived for 22 years until she finished her degree. She got a scholarship to complete her bachelor’s degree at a university in the east of Jordan. Her commute was four buses in each direction. When she began university, transportation was immediately an issue. “So that was a total of eight buses on a daily basis, but I got the scholarship and I couldn’t say no, especially if you’re coming from a village, your economic situation wouldn’t be a great one, so I couldn’t say no,” she said. “Also I’m coming from a village where the second language is not a common thing to know. English was only a class in school so you do not practice. It was hard for me to be able to do it but I did it.”

Tagreed got her bachelor’s degree in 2004 and afterwards, moved to Dubai for a year to work as a flight attendant on a private jet. Tagreed decided she didn’t want to stay in Dubai because while she was able to live a luxurious lifestyle, she wasn’t passionate about the work. Her mindset was, “I have to have a better career.” Tagreed returned to Jordan and through someone she knew, she got a job as a program coordinator working with diplomats at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy. She worked there for three years, and realized this was the right field for her. When the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy began a partnership with the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), Tagreed was asked to join as a coordinator for the Diplomacy and Policy Studies program.

\textsuperscript{182} Tagreed Odeh, Interview with author, July 19, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
After two years working with CIEE, Tagreed decided she wanted to pursue a master’s in human rights and human development, and she finished the program in December of 2016. Recently, Tagreed was accepted for a PhD program at a university in Indiana, but the partial scholarship she received was not enough. She’s now applying for PhD programs in Jordan in the field of political science. Tagreed made sure to emphasize her mother’s support of her and her siblings’ education, despite growing up in a community where education was not necessarily a priority. She explained, “My mom was insisting that every single person of her family would get at least a first degree...Now my oldest brother has a PhD in philosophy. I’ll have my PhD. My sister is doing her master’s.”

Tagreed, like Marah and Nesreen, discussed the stigma of women living alone. “I have a very good job. I was able to buy my own apartment. I’m living in an apartment, but my family would not accept me living in an apartment alone. So they moved to live with me because they would not accept the idea that their daughter is living in a house,” she recounted. “You might have your stability and freedom to do things that you love to do, but all the time you have to keep in touch with your family. You have to take their permission for whatever you do.”

Tagreed also talked about the role of marriage and the double - or triple - burden women face between house work, child care, and paid work. “Marriage is still a big thing here in Jordan,” she added. Plus, in the same vein as Heba, Tagreed discussed how women sometimes are barriers for each other, gatekeepers through judgments. “Sometimes women are not taking care of themselves. I mean it’s a
community, the culture. You would find the woman against another woman [who is working], going out.” Tagreed explained.

Like Maram, Tagreed talked about how schools perhaps need to better equip women with the tools they need to enter the workforce. “I think we need to have more training in our schools and our universities because they’re not used to looking at females as she’s going to be a leader,” she said. “We need to have more training on leadership in our schools and universities and even in our work...” Plus, Tagreed echoed Maram in her frustration with the memorization emphasized at school.

“School basically was memorization,” she said. “Even when I did my bachelor’s degree, I was studying the same system of teaching. When I started my master’s, it was different because I was mature enough to know what I want from this program. So it was more of critical thinking.”

Like many previous accounts, Tagreed emphasized how the economic situation in Jordan almost has a ripple effect into gender dynamics. “I think everybody is looking now for a better economic situation,” she said. “So economy is playing a big role here in Jordan...One person is not able to take care of the whole responsibility for the family.”

**Jordan - Rural Voices**

“The females, we're all educated, we're all engineers...my brother [who] failed four times his high school, is now not educated and is just in the military with my father, a regular soldier.”

- Noor // Amman, Jordan
Noor and Tala, age 23 and 27 respectively, live in a small town in the suburbs of Amman with their father, a prominent military figure, their step-mom, their younger sister, and their two brothers, one younger and one older. Growing up, the women’s world was rather contained in their town, a town mostly comprised of their tight-knit Bedouin tribe. “My entire education was there,” Noor said, gesturing across the street. “The community I live in is...all related.”

Noor studies computer engineering at Al-Balqa University in Al-Salt, where she got a scholarship because of her father’s military status. Tala studied engineering with a certificate in communications at the same university, and afterward completed a training with the Ministry of Information Technology. Their father, an educated man, has always encouraged their studies. According to Noor, this is somewhat of an anomaly in their community as many don’t see the value in female education. The sisters have six uncles, and only one of their wives is educated beyond fourth or fifth grade. “They don't want women to be a force in the house,” Noor said. “They just don't want women to be equal, and then when it comes to actually educated women, my sister has been unemployed for three years.”

Noor and Tala’s father worked hard for his daughters to study engineering and in a way, people admire him for it. That said, there is a limit to the freedoms of which neighbors will approve. “People admire that [my father] not only worked on himself..but...he's working on his children as well...but when it comes to too much, like letting his daughter travel...it's just different...He's criticized at that point,” Noor

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184 Anonymous interview with engineering graduate, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
said. “The females, we're all educated, we're all engineers…my brother [who] failed four times his high school, is now not educated and is just in the military with my father, a regular soldier.”

Regarding Tala’s unemployment, wasta entered the conversation. Noor described wasta as a lifestyle. “Wasta is everywhere in Jordan,” Noor explained. “Even if you go to a bank, I mean, you'd have wasta to not wait in the line.” Noor added that some people witness her unemployed sister and judge her father for not better using his wasta. As her father has had a high rank in the military, his status might allow him to pull more strings than he has, but he refuses to engage in the corruption of wasta for his daughter. The women insisted that wasta isn’t even perceived by most people as corruption, but rather a part of life, a reality. In fact, using wasta is nothing to be ashamed up but rather a source of respect. However, they described their father as a “pride man” who doesn’t want to ask others for help.

Noor told an anecdote about wasta in action. A member of her tribe took note of her good English and encouraged her to apply for a youth exchange program.

“People with more experience actually applied but because he knew me, and I was from the same family that he is, he was like push her, let her go, and literally I think I took the spot of someone who’s more qualified to go. So that was an act of wasta,” Noor admitted. Traveling to Greece through this program is part of what she thinks helped her application to another exchange program in the U.S. she attended last summer. Noor delved into the mindset of the relative who helped her: “I would love to see a woman from my tribe who can represent this world with her really good
English.” Tala expressed her exasperation with her father who has significant power, and yet she is still at home jobless.

“I mean, look at this wall,” Tala said, gesturing to the wall behind her, covered in photos documenting her father’s professional accomplishments. “I mean, he’s a man with something. He is a man with the power. So where is it? I can’t find it. I can’t see it,” Tala said. A central question becomes, does wasta impact women in a unique way? Noor said definitely. According to the sisters, the tribe system is crucial in Jordan. “If two people applied for a job to become a secretary... and I’m from this tribe, and one of the girls is in the same tribe, most likely I’m going to choose her,” Noor admitted. Employers might look at resumes but it’s the ones with wasta that are legitimately considered. “With a wink,” Tala explained. Noor added, “Most women work in jobs that they hate because all the jobs that they would want are actually being taken by other people who have wasta.” Plus, Tala pointed out, “you know, I think [my father] used wasta several times for my brother.”

Noor chimed in, “You can even find it funny that my brother actually...didn’t graduate Tawjihi. ...And now...he’s in the army with my dad. Literally an office of his own...He sleeps like most of his time. ” Tala added, “Yeah, he’s sleeping right now.” Pointing to Tala, Noor said, “she's been sitting in the house for three years now.” At home, Tala spends her time on social media and watching American movies. Two of her favorites are Black Swan and The Help. “So, can you imagine an engineer that graduated five years of engineering and then a year of training sitting at home doing nothing but watching movies,” Noor reiterated.
Noor and Tala presented marriage as a deep-rooted expectation for women in Jordan. Noor spelled it out: “I mean everyone was like ‘why isn't she getting married?’ And then when my sister got engaged, everyone was like, ‘now there is nothing more.’” Like Maisa and many others said, the marriage market is what people see as important for women. “It is the most important thing,” Noor stated. “My aunt is 40-something now. She is not married. I mean the way this community perceives her is terrible.” An unmarried woman of a certain age is regarded an “ahnes”. The translation Noor gave me was “maiden”, but other accounts describe it as akin to a “withered branch.” Whether the term implies said woman is immature or shrivelled up, the bottomline is that an unmarried women is unfit, parasitic even, consuming but not contributing. Noor and Tala’s aunt has been working her entire life and has even run for municipality, but her failure to marry supersedes any professional accomplishments in the eyes of her neighbors.

There is a certain perceived cosmetic value to Tala’s engineering degree. People respect her for having it and respect her father for supporting a highly educated family. People are impressed at their household of three women who will have engineering degrees. That said, marriage, not work, is the ultimate expectation and priority. Marriage is success. Furthermore, a divorced woman is keenly judged because the assumption is that her own actions led to her husband’s rejection of her.

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The men in the women’s community often view educated women, but not working women, as desirable marriage prospects. Noor explained, “Education here is not a process of you gaining knowledge to go to university, picking a major you love, then living a happy life with a major you love. Education here is...an everyday thing.”

In a way, education is normalized and for women especially has important social power in the marriage market. According to Noor, if you finish your last year of high school with good grades, you go to college. If not, you stay at home.

“It's just by default,” she said. “So, education is not crucial here. It's not. Everyone wants their daughters and sons to be good at their school so they can brag about them,” she said. “I mean I don't even know why [a lot of women got] educated. It's just because it's not for a reason. It's just because I had good grades, why shouldn't I go to a free college?”

While Tala wanted to be an engineer since she was a kid, Noor was never actually interested in the field of engineering. Instead, with her high GPA in her last year of high school, Noor thought, “this shouldn’t go to waste.” Plus, there’s a certain clout that comes along with having a “house full of engineers.” Now, Noor is more interested in being civically engaged, so she has little hope for her engineering degree. Noor expressed frustration with her sister’s pickiness in terms of job prospects. “I always blame my sister. She graduated wanting to be a telecommunication engineer that works in a telecommunication company, and she should've worked at anything,” Noor said. “I would've worked at a library to feel independent, and now she's been in the house for three years, literally doing nothing.”
Tala is keen on getting employed in the government, since jobs in the private sector are long hours, low pay, and without benefits. Tala explained that since private sector employers know engineers are desperate for employment, they offer unreasonably low salaries. Noor added that in some cases, engineers in the private sector end up paying more for transportation than they make.

Noor, on the other hand, would be open to working for no paycheck if it meant independence from her community. Sometimes, Tala regrets studying engineering because of the minimal opportunities available. Like Maram suggested, the way in which cultural norms dictate social capital it economically unsustainable; there is this emphasis placed on the clout of engineering degrees, but the labor market simply cannot include them. Noor and Tala didn’t agree about the role of gender when it comes to employment. While Tala brought up community traditions as potentially limiting, she said the struggle to find a job is ultimately the same for men and women. Noor insisted that these community traditions are restrictions. “We have a traditional saying here that if we throw a random rock it probably is going to land on the head of an engineer,” she added.

The summer before I found myself in Noor’s living room, I met Noor while she was on a prestigious travel program to the United States with a group of students from different countries in the region. On this program, Noor developed a project called “Minha Eleha” (منها لها) which translates to “her to her.” Her proposed program responds to cultural concerns about mixed-gender work environments being inappropriate for women. Specifically, her initiative would provide female recent
graduates with female-led trainings, workshops, and career sessions. “If your excuse [is] ‘we don't women to be around men,’ if that's your excuse, then I'm giving you something. I'm giving you a woman to train your daughter, and I'm giving you jobs. Now give your excuse,” Noor explained. Noor discussed the deeply ingrained gender roles that prioritize women’s domestic, reproductive roles. She was exasperated with the way in which in many cases, women have internalized these mandates and ultimately, their economic dependence paralyzes them.

“Is this how you're going to spend your entire life, just serving that one man?” she said. “I mean you have a lot of potential...I mean, we're losing a lot because women...don't have jobs, so they're not independent. They're not economically independent.” Noor partially attributed these cemented gender roles to women’s conception of their own self worth. She spoke of her hope that her own program, Minha Eleha, will begin with changing the mindsets of individual women. Noor said, “I think women who don't appreciate themselves, they are actually convinced that this is their job, that their job is to prove to the world that they can get married...I mean every woman is born with...a cause. Every woman has the woman's cause. You're not equal, and you're going to fight for equality. That makes you special. This motivates any woman. I mean every time I remember that I'm not equal to men, it makes me more strong and it makes me more motivated that I want to be equal to men. They don't know that. They think that they are literally lower than men.”

Noor explained that even though travel is extremely taboo for women, her father simply could not forbid her participation in the program because of how
competitive it is. Actually, it was Tala who first warned her not to go. Tala told Noor
that women simply don’t go to the other side of the world for a month and a half
alone. Noor took the opportunity anyway. While community members applauded
Noor to her face for her participation in this program, Noor was confident that behind
her back, they were harshly judging her. Women travelling, especially to the West,
holds deep stigmas in her community. Particularly if the woman is accused of
committing some perceived misdeed while abroad, the consequences from
community members can be severe. “Trust me, killing her is nothing for them,” Noor
said.

She explained that, “I mean literally, in some Bedouin communities, and it
happens, if a woman committed a crime like sex, let's say, and it's a crime if you're
not married, it's a crime and it's a sin, she would be killed, like cold-blooded killed,
and then...some people hang a white flag on top of their houses as a sign of a rinsed
honor. This is how we rinse our honor.” According to Noor, the fear of women
travelling is really a fear of scandal, a fear that given the freedom to explore the
world, women will taint the honor of the family. In the house, they can be better
watched.

To Noor, travel presented this sacred opportunity for her. “Women, like
oppressed women, eventually, when they find a chance to be free, they're going to
just take it,” she said. “If I traveled and I didn't feel the freedom there, and I came
back just the same person as I went, why would I travel [in] the first place?” she
asked. Noor hopes to travel to the United States again. “In the United States, I woke
up every day at 6 a.m. in the morning to run. No one looked at me, and I was safe,”

she explained. “Here, I'm not. I love my country...it's a beautiful country for men but
not for women because women are not living here. They've literally dead...every
woman you see in the street, she's dead from the inside. She has nothing. She doesn't
have a job. She doesn't have an income. She doesn't know what's happening in the
world. She thinks that the entire world is this.” It’s a custom in Jordan to shoot a
bullet in the air as a sign of joy or celebration. When Noor returned from her trip in
the United States, her father wanted a bullet to be shot. When a passerby asked what
the occasion was, her brother responded that he’d been promoted.

Noor also spoke of the role of religion. “When religion came, when Islam
came, Islam came at a point when women were buried alive. You know that? Like,
whenever someone knows that he's having a daughter... she would be birthed
and...buried alive. Then Islam came and said, ‘no, women shouldn't, they have the
right to live, they have the right to have a job, and they have the right to be educated.’
So, it stopped there,” Noor explained. “Women's right in this region stopped fourteen
hundred years ago, and they never had more rights. They only have the right to live,
to be educated, and to have jobs. [Those]...rights are not even given now, so the only
right that women have here is to live. So, now they're like, okay, look at you now,
you were buried alive, look at us now giving you a chance to live..” What Noor was
referring to is the concept of Jahiliyya, or the pre-Islamic period of “ignorance”
without systems and values in place.186

186 “Jahiliyyah,” Oxford Islamic Studies Online,
http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1157.
In addition to travel, speaking to men is highly forbidden in Noor’s community. In high school, Noor was caught speaking to a boy. “I mean my family found out three times that I have a boyfriend, and I have been beaten three times. I have this mark that has been here for a year, almost,” Noor said. “They found out, and the punishment was severe...and the thing that made me so frustrated at one point is I got physically hurt by my brother...I remember the same day I went to my room [and] felt really dizzy because I was beaten, and at 2 a.m. in the morning I go downstairs to have water, and literally my brother is video chatting with his girlfriend...I thought this is not fair. I mean this is really not fair. Why should I be punished and you get to do whatever you want!?...Privacy level is zero for me as a woman here because my phone is not mine.” Her brother also took her phone as a consequence of the incident.

When Noor told her grandmother of the beating from her brother, the response was far from sympathetic. “They were like ‘you deserve it,’ ” Noor said. “Everyone thinks they deserve it. ‘Why would you do something that we're not allowed to do? What makes you special? So, no one here is allowed to have a boyfriend. Why would you try to have a boyfriend? You're working on getting yourself beat.’ This is how they think.”

Noor took a second to nod to the rural-urban divide when it comes to gender inequality. “So, I'm really happy you're here in the suburbs,” she said. “Because I think in the capital, you're not going to hear that...They just have a job because they want more income, but it's the only reason why women have jobs here...” Here, Noor illuminates an important dynamic - that one cannot equate the economic pressures for
female entrance into the world of work with any genuine strides in the acceptance of female independence.

Noor also spoke of both the merits and the limits of legal reform. She brought up the value of initiatives that advocate for employers’ provision of daycares. However, Noor was sure to point out that, “The law will not do anything. I think laws change when people complain. Women are not complaining in Jordan, and if you hear women complaining, they'd be like really strong activist who have jobs, and they want to speak the voice of those who don't have a voice. The laws are not with women. I mean Jordan has a lot to work on...Women, again, are too afraid of the community.” Ultimately, Noor believes mindset is the most powerful barrier between women and work. While laws can be traced to mindset, mindset can be traced back to tradition. Noor explained, “people are so attached to their traditions.” To her, empowerment has many facets. Strength can come from economic independence, the right to speak one’s mind, to run for elections, or to walk in the street safely and without harassment. “It sounds like basic rights,” she said. “I want women to pick their own husband, to get to know him before getting married...She might not be educated, but she might be someone with an idea. But how can I hear your idea, because your voice is just so, so low?”

Morocco - Urban Voices

“Now a woman is like a man here...We have good jobs, better than men. More responsibility. Now we feel that we have power.”

- Laila // Rabat, Morocco
“We are different. We don’t have the same culture. We have the same religion but culture is different.” That’s how Laila, a 46-year-old pharmacy owner living in Rabat, situated her country in the region. There was a certain Moroccan pride ingrained in the way in which she was sure to separate her own homeland from perceptions of the global south as a whole. “We are open minded,” she said. “If you compare with Jordan, you will see the difference. We don’t have the same things and we are more liberal because we are nearer Europe.”

After finishing high school or “lycee” in Ifrane, Morocco, Laila studied chemistry and pharmaceutical studies in Romania for six years. Laila chose Romania because her cousin was there and she’d heard it was a good place to study. When she came back to Morocco, she opened her own pharmacy with three employees. Laila said it wasn’t her dream to own a business. She was initially interested in political science, but decided suddenly to change her plan because of “timing.” Initially, it seemed like she meant “timing” as in the trajectory of her life. What she actually meant was the hourly work, the flexibility. With two children, owning a business meant having control over her schedule. It meant a degree of independence she just couldn’t have were she to work for the government. That said, Laila mentioned that a government salary is far more stable and owning a business is unreliable since profit fluctuates. Laila explained that it was difficult initially to balance raising her children and working, especially because while she lives in Rabat, her pharmacy is in Fes.

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187 Laila Agherabi, interview with author, translated by Aicha Brahimi, August 5, 2018, Rabat, Morocco.
Laila would never consider leaving her children in daycare because the thought of a stranger looking after them makes her nervous.

Laila reflected on how much more independence women have nowadays.

“Now a woman is like a man here,” she said. “We have good jobs, better than men. More responsibility. Now we feel that we have power. Twenty years ago, it wasn’t the same. Now it’s different.” Laila suggested there’s an almost feedback loop. The more women work, the more men respect them, partially because of the weight of an individual having a degree of financial independence. “That’s why men respect more women here - because we have jobs. We have our own money,” Laila said. Laila is married to a colonel in the military, but she doesn’t think that societally, marriage is a major expectation. “I think now it’s not important for women,” she said. “Before it was in our religion each woman must be married, to have children. You know now women have jobs, they have money, they don’t need to be married.”

“Are you really an asset to this society? How do you help your society?”
- Fatima // Rabat, Morocco

Fatima\textsuperscript{188}, age 53, also lives in Rabat. Unlike Laila, Fatima went the governmental route. Fatima got a diploma in statistical engineering from the National Institute of Economics and Statistics. According to Fatima, there were only 30 people in her year who received this diploma and the institute is the only of its kind in Africa. Because the specialization is rather rare, it was quite easy to find employment

\textsuperscript{188} Fatima Akhbar, interview with author, translated by Aicha Brahimi, August 5, 2018, Rabat, Morocco.
afterwards. With her diploma, she moved back to Agadir for a job to be closer to her family.

She reflected on a male supervisor completely underestimating and misunderstanding her abilities. When she said she was an engineer, her boss gave her a calculator and series of numbers to crunch. She stayed for 10 days before moving to Rabat. “In Rabat, they know what an engineer [is],” Fatima said. She ended up working in the Ministry of the Interior, keeping track of the “family book” which includes family names and dates of birth, almost like a census. She works for an initiative which sends people throughout Morocco to assist the local government in educating people and encouraging them to register their families so that accurate statistics can be obtained. Fatima talked about her parents’ encouragement of her education as a route to independence, and her own motivation to work so as to give back to her parents. “I will help my parents because they helped me a lot. I’m going to have a good job and have money and send my parents to pilgrimage. To go to Mecca,” she said.

Fatima said empowerment for women cannot only be financial independence, but rather what one truly brings to society. “Are you really an asset to this society? How do you help your society?” she asked. She said we must assess our contribution to our nuclear family as well as to the larger societal family. This is what pushes her to work hard at her job. In her field, Fatima is seeing more and more women in positions of leadership. Partially, she said this is because her place of employment has signed agreements with international organizations that dictate that women must be
integrated in development. These agreements require, for instance, that leadership committees must have a certain number of women. Plus, females are becoming more educated and thus more qualified for these positions.

Fatima is unmarried and has no children. She mentioned not wanting to financially rely on a man. If anything, she would want a companion to travel with, but marriage is simply not a priority for her. “Either this or no marriage,” she said.

“The woman needs to be powerful. She has to have a very strong personality not to be weak. Some women are weak and even their money they give to their husband. I could never give him my money. No. I work for that.”

- Kaoutar // Rabat, Morocco

Kaoutar189, age 41, is a dentist from Rabat. Kaoutar decided to pursue dentistry because she saw people around her wearing braces and realized they were popular. Also, she liked the uniform. Since Kaoutar studied in a government university, finding a job after graduating was rather easy - she was automatically assigned somewhere. Like Nesreen from Amman, Kaoutar suggested a degree of job security in the field of medicine. There is a rather the linear trajectory paving the way from completion of education to the workforce.

Kaoutar talked about how the Quran actually upholds gender equality. To her, “the difference between men and women is that the women are stronger. They can do more than the men. They work both outside and when they come home the man says ‘I’m very tired,’ but she has more energy to do other things.” Kaoutar herself has four

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children, so her mother was the person who primarily helped her at the beginning.

Kaoutar said her husband is proud of her work but would never say it to her face because he doesn’t want her to become arrogant.

Kaoutar feels proud that she isn’t financially reliant on her husband, emphasizing that this economic independence is key. There are women, she says, who have jobs but who still cannot make decisions without the permission of their husbands. For instance, when it comes to travel, if she wants to go on a trip but her husband does not, she will use her own money and go with her children anyway. She added that “the woman needs to be powerful. She has to have a very strong personality not to be weak. Some women are weak and even their money they give to their husband. I could never give him my money. No. I work for that.” In Kaoutar’s opinion, there are not prominent barriers between women and work. “If she has her degrees and everything...it’s the same like men. She doesn’t have any challenges or any barriers,” she said. Furthermore, to Kaoutar, “The woman who is unemployed - she’s lazy. The employed woman she can do double [the] work.”

Morocco - Rural Voices

“When [a woman] has a job, she has her own money. She will make, as we say, she will make her place at home in her society and she would be productive instead of just a consumer. To be empowered, she should be a producer instead of a consumer.”

- Aicha // Azrou, Morocco
Aicha, age 54, is Fatima’s best friend and is from a town called Azrou. While her mother was uneducated and her father had minimal education, it was her mother’s project to send all of her six daughters and two sons to school. All throughout her schooling in Azrou, Aicha loved the English language. Right after completing her baccalaureate, she studied English literature at a university an hour away from Azrou in Meknes. For Aicha, finding a job afterward was not easy. “Living in a small town, it’s a big challenge,” she explained. “This is the difference between me and Fatima.” Aicha brought up the role of family name and networking in hiring. “There [were] people who know people at the ministry. They get jobs easily...Two years after I graduated there was a program that the government initiated. This was a big program in Morocco and they started making selection from what we call like grade five, grade two, grade three, grade one….So they selected the people. They took people based on their [knowledge of] other people. Then the rest of us in the region of Azrou and Ifrane were just not selected,” she said.

In the meantime, Aicha taught English - 100 dirhams for 1 hour - and started doing crafts like knitting and embroidery to make money. She did that for two years before getting a job she hated - in a jail. “Wearing that uniform and having those keys - I said ‘this is not for me.’ No way ” she said definitively. She quit after two days. Aicha met a group of students from Holland, and she was connected with a woman who needed help with translation. Soon, joined a travel agency, helping to conduct cultural meetings in her hometown of Azrou. She worked with this agency for 10

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190 Aicha Brahimi, interview with author, August 5, 2018, Rabat, Morocco.
years. At some of these cultural meetings, Aicha met volunteers from the Peace Corps. She became a homestay coordinator for the Peace Corps. Aicha was in charge of making sure that volunteers were safe, and also ensuring that their volunteer work was in line with the actual needs of community members. Aicha later served as a program assistant for the Peace Corps’ environmental sector as well as a gender and development coordinator.

Aicha relayed an example of the importance of making sure women are present in Peace Corps projects. Aicha ensured that volunteers were asking themselves and community members certain questions before implementing a project. “Why are we going to get rid of this well? The women go there to get together. It’s a cultural part for the women also. They get together, they have fun. They can meet men to marry them,” she explained. “So as an organization we should make sure to see all the details of the village before we start the project for them. It would affect the woman. She will have the water at home. She won’t go out. She won’t meet other women...”

Recently, Aicha has begun her own travel agency with her brother, and she’s simultaneously looking for an NGO job in gender and development. Her dream is to own her own guesthouse. She told, “since I’m not married and I have no children, I want to have enough money to live a good life.” In terms of challenges women face in work, Aicha mostly spoke of being underestimated in the workplace. When she was program assistant at the Peace Corps, the Program Manager would use her for translation but wouldn’t give her credit in the report. She thought to herself “I can’t
Aicha said the core of empowerment for women is having a job, being productive. She added, “when [a woman] has a job, she has her own money. She will make, as we say, she will make her place at home in her society and she would be productive instead of just a consumer. To be empowered she should be a producer instead of a consumer.”

Aicha spoke of the common imbalance of power in marriages. “The women should speak up. She should have her work in the house, have her place, she should be proud of herself. She does a lot...She shouldn’t be inferior or feel inferior. For me, that’s why I divorce. I got married three times and because I don’t want any man to treat me like his servant. I’m not his servant. It’s just too much...I just say no. I can’t be the servant. Either we respect each other and we help each other or let it go,” she explained.

“The upper hand is better than the lower hand. So the lower hand takes, the upper hand gives.”

- Fatima // Azrou, Morocco

Aziza, age 54, is one of the founders of a natural medicine cooperative outside Azrou. Aziza grew up working on a farm. The work - collecting cherries or apples - was seasonal, not stable. An association in Rabat that belongs to the government did a needs assessment in the areas surrounding Azrou. The women were asked what they do with their time, and they said “we don’t do anything. Some of us work in the farms and the others can’t.” They thought to themselves, “at least we

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Aziza (natural medicine cooperative), interview with author, translated by Aicha Brahimi, August 9, 2018, Azrou, Morocco.
have a lot of water. We have a lot of plants. Aromatic medicinal plants.” That’s how
the idea for their natural medicine cooperative originated. As a child, Aziza’s
grandmother would tell her to use aromatics like oregano or thyme for cramps. Earlier
in her adult life, she’d taken literacy classes through a mostly-female program.

Aziza’s mission right now is to expand the cooperative and to acquire an
official certificate from the government. With this certificate, the cooperative’s goods
are approved, almost like a pharmacy. With this, they can sell both outside and inside
Morocco. Without the certificate, they’ll be banned from the markets where they’ve
sold their goods in the past in Casablanca. There are certain specific criteria for
obtaining it, however. Aziza pointed to the door of the bathroom and explained that
the layout of their space would need to be reconfigured for approval, including more
windows.

Aziza added that part of women’s participation in the cooperative is their
training, meaning they’re not expected to have experience with natural medicine
beforehand. Membership in this cooperative is not only financially beneficial, but
also instructive. “There are some plants, we just step on them,” she said. “We don’t
know if they are useful or not but now we know what kind of plants we can use and
what they are used for and if we use the leaves or the roots, which part of the plant
it’s used for.” Aziza highly values education, and says that with an education, “you
know when you should talk. When you should keep quiet. What you should say, what
you shouldn’t say.” That said, to Aziza, education is not a direct route to
empowerment. “Even with education, some women are not powerful,” she said.
“Education is very important but still the woman is strong enough to do many kinds of jobs. That’s the powerful woman for her.”

Fatima, another 54-year-old member of this cooperative, explained a generational difference in terms of comfort with working outside. She said her generation is very comfortable working under the sun with the plants, but for some of the younger women, it’s difficult labor. “They are scared of the sun,” she said. To Fatima, her sense of strength has truly come from her involvement in the cooperative and her ability to earn an income. She feels liberated by not having to ask her husband for money. She has her dignity, and she feels like people respect her. With her own money, she can travel. That said, she hopes for her children to work for the government, more reliable work, instead of farming. When talking about how she hopes her daughters work, Fatima said a phrase from the prophet: “The upper hand is better than the lower hand. So the lower hand takes, the upper hand gives.” To Aziza, work is crucial to a woman’s empowerment. Women who don’t work, according to her, “sit under the sun and have no importance. You have to work at home and outside.”

At her cooperative, Aziza said the women are like sisters and it seems like a horizontal structure. They split the profits evenly. As the president, Aziza is the first one to arrive in the morning but she doesn’t want to play the role of the boss. Aziza has three daughters, one of whom works at the cooperative. While her daughter’s

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192 Fatima (natural medicine cooperative), interview with author, translated by Aicha Brahimi, August 9, 2018, Azrou, Morocco.
husband was initially reluctant of her joining the cooperative and coming to Azrou alone in a taxi, he has changed his mindset over time.

“If somebody sets you on your back, if he doesn’t cut you in two, it makes [you] stronger.”
- Bouchra // Azrou, Morocco

Bouchra\textsuperscript{193}, age 50, runs a sewing cooperative in Azrou. Bouchra attended a university in Meknes, where she studied biology and geology for two years. Then, she went to Rabat and studied information technology before getting married right away at 23. She moved to Marrakech with her husband and tried to find a job but had no luck. She and her husband moved to Azrou, where he was a teacher. She had two children, and for ten years, she stayed at home. During this time, she read and read. She would buy used books she found in the streets. Bouchra said that with all the stresses she faced, she needed to end her day with reading to clear her mind. She began a babysitting business in her own home, where working women could drop of their kids for the day. Soon, she started tutoring children in French and math in the afternoons, and she has done so for 19 years since. For three years, she had a designated room in her house that she used as a classroom. Bouchra has a love for learning, and fears that if she stops tutoring, she’ll forget her education thus far. Simultaneously, Bouchra was working at a sewing cooperative, learning the craft and helping illiterate women. This cooperative started with seven people and as word

\textsuperscript{193} Bouchra (sewing cooperative), interview with author, translated by Aicha Brahim, August 11, 2018, Azrou, Morocco.
spread, there are now 30 members. Soon, she began her own sewing cooperative with six members.

Bouchra has been divorced for five years and she is the only one providing for her children. “After many years of miserable life, it’s a paradise to be independent,” she said. She added that “If somebody sets you on your back, if he doesn’t cut you in two, it makes [you] stronger.” Her husband was against all of her projects and her work. Bouchra was the one supporting their daughter studying in France since he was against it. The last straw for Bouchra was when she was facing a medical problem with her eyes and needed laser surgery in Rabat. When she asked her husband for money, he said he didn’t have any. She ended up selling her goat to pay for the surgery. This was the critical moment in which she decided “I have to be independent. I have to have my own income, my own money so I won’t need him anymore.”

In terms of barriers between women and work, Bouchra said that rural men often have an initial distrust of their wives working at her sewing cooperative. However, Bouchra said that over time the husbands notice a change in their wives. Bouchra isn’t just teaching them sewing, but she’s teaching them how to organize and manage their time. Bouchra sees the importance of the all female nature of the cooperative, especially in gaining a husband’s acceptance of his wife’s choice to work. Men are more likely to trust the employer if they know their wife is entering into an all female space.
Chapter 4: Education and (National) Identities

National Identities

Discourse around the education of women in the Arab world is inherently entangled in colonial legacies, development narratives, and national identities. Rhetoric surrounding female education of the global south is often homogenizing and presents women as without agency. Such rhetoric can be seen to echo that of European colonizers toward the end of the twentieth century, “a discourse that framed colonialism as in part a project to save oppressed women in the region. Central to this discourse then and now has been the belief in the transformative power of education.”

In this way, the project of educating the constructed, singular Arab female was and is inextricably linked to projects of modernization and national development.

Education became this panacea for a series of other ways in which colonial logics rendered women by default unmodern. It was deemed a part of (re)conceptualizing fertility and the female voice within the household. Problematically, this paradigm situates female education - and in some ways, female empowerment - as in opposition to the family unit. The implication is that women’s social networks are an ever present barrier between themselves and their own progress. Education becomes this heroic, marketable, and romanticized Way Out. The narratives of the women in the previous chapter, however, suggest that family networks have a variety of impacts on female education. Thus, they cannot be solely

194 Adely, 12.
195 Adely, 13.
framed as obstacles between women and schooling. In both countries, many of the women I spoke to presented their families as encouraging of their education. This thesis examines whether the motivation for encouraging female education is women’s meaningful entrance into the public sphere through work or their fulfilling of social expectations like marriage. While it is worth assessing the perhaps textured incentives for a father wanting an educated daughter, one cannot deem the family unit as singularly preventative of female education.

Fida Adely frames the school as a critical space in which young women sift through gendered messages, norms, expectations, and mandates. Schools are “critical arenas in which young women negotiate these dynamics and search for clarity and meaning.” Importantly, they are places in which women often “construct a vision of what is possible and desirable.” Adely also sheds light on the perhaps less rosy underbelly of education as it serves as a fundamental instrument of state-building rather than an apolitical stepping stone for progress. She explains that education is “also an idea, a discursive project of global development organizations, a nation-building endeavor, and a local bureaucratic institution.” Education generates new avenues of opportunity and simultaneously new hierarchies. Additionally, Adely frames education as “the institution in which the state, its ideology, and its bureaucracy interact most directly with young women; in schools, the regime’s representatives work to cultivate the loyalty of young people…” In other words,

196 Adely, 14.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
education is this nexus between the state and the individual - sometimes schooling is a mouthpiece for the state and sometimes it is an access point for individual expression. Either way, since school is this critical site of interaction between individual and state, it is important to examine the relationship between education and national identity in both Jordan and Morocco.

The official government website of King Hussein presents education as none less than a crown jewel of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, stating:

The development of Jordan's educational system can only be described as dramatic. Starting from almost nothing in the early 1920s, Jordan has forged a comprehensive, high-quality system to develop the human capital of its citizens...Unlike in many other countries, in Jordan there is a very small disparity in primary school attendance rates between urban and rural areas.

Other accounts of Jordanian history, however, present a less streamlined story than that of the official Hashemite Kingdom website. Initially, the education sector was one of the least developed of Transjordan. Between 1922 and 1924, the government concentrated on supporting educational facilities from the Ottoman and Faysali state, but education then became a low priority after Britain’s “administrative takeover” of 1924 and the system grew at a very slow pace. According to Ambassador Abu Nowar, it was not until 1935 that budget increases enabled actual growth of the education sector. Even then, these schools served limited areas and were normally elementary education for children up to 11 years old. Secondary education did not progress until the end of the British mandate. According to

202 Ibid.
scholars Joab Eilon and Yoav Alon in *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism, and the Modern State*,

Government neglect combined with an initial lack of public demand contributed to the late development of the education sector...until 1930 demand for education was insignificant and...schools had to resort to inflicting fines on parents who did not send their children to school...A change of attitude and popular demand for education was recorded in an *Al-Urdunn* article published in 1930 titled ‘The Education Renaissance (*nahda*) in al-Karak’...Ten years after the establishment of Transjordan a change in attitude towards the merits of education had occurred.203

This attitude entailed fathers’ newfound insistence on formal education for their sons. In the 30’s and 40’s, there was such a high demand for education that the system as it stood simply could not accommodate. The growing number of educated men led to a growing generation of elite, politically minded individuals.

In Morocco, post-independence of 1956, the public school system emerged as a “counterweight”204 to French colonial dominance. While the development of the education sector in Jordan emerged primarily from individuals’ increased demand for schools, in Morocco, education was an avenue of nation-building and identity formation after independence. Over sixty years have passed and while Jordan prides itself on a very strong education system and high rates of enrollment, an education crisis in Morocco persists. In 2013, King Mohammed VI acknowledged the deep rooted problems in education when declaring, “Why is it that so many of our young people cannot fulfill their legitimate professional, material, and social aspirations?”205

Queen Rania of Jordan echoed this genuine expression of concern for squandered

203 Ibid., 137.
204 Ibid., 3.
205 Ibid.
youth potential in a 2016 speech launching the National Strategy for Human Resources Development. She explained that meaningful improvement in the education system of Jordan would not be through “revolutions, aid, or the discovery of natural resources.” Rather, “the real treasure is in the minds of our children and all we have to do is extract it.” Indeed, Jordan has made strides in developing the education system to incorporate the youth population. There is a sense of pride in Jordan of an educational system that has close to equal access, exemplified through a female primary school enrollment of 96%, secondary school enrollment of 86%, and girls outperforming boys in almost all subjects across the age groups. Plus, according to UNESCO, enrollment of women in Jordanian universities actually exceeds that of men at 52%. 

King Mohammed VI’s concerns are parallel to those of Queen Rania, and are in line with a series of World Bank reports which rank Morocco’s levels and quality of education as toward the bottom of the region. In *Learning in Morocco: Language Politics and the Abandoned Educational Dream*, Charis Boutieri sheds light on the perhaps overlooked role of language policy in the postcolonial education landscape of Morocco. Such policy, which hinged on translating public school curriculum into Modern Standard Arabic or *fusha*, reflected nationalist policies and Arabization with


207 Ibid.


“the objective of creating a homogenous, literate, arabophone society.” The language of instruction was no longer French but standard Arabic, leaving high school graduates to “manage a predominantly francophone and increasingly anglophone job market. Give this linguistic split and their late entry into francophone instruction, the job market treats them, in their own words, as ‘multilingual illiterates’ and hence unemployable.” This is a concrete way in which Morocco’s colonial legacy remains prominent in the modern education system. Morocco continuously tackles this problem of illiteracy. In contrast to Jordan, Morocco has a 63% literacy rate and 10% of girls attending university. While Morocco’s 2015 literacy rate for women, defined as the percentage of women aged 15 and above who can read and write, is 58.5%, that of Jordan is 97.49%.

Part of what hinders female literacy and closing the gendered education gap in Morocco is high drop-out rates. In fact, the main challenge is not including women in literacy campaigns and programs but rather “how to retain them and sustain their motivations.” This begs the question of whether adult literacy courses are addressing the actual needs of beneficiaries. Some potential reasons for withdrawal from literacy courses include the inconvenient evening meeting time of the courses.

211 Ibid.
and the double burden women face in balancing class with domestic duties.\textsuperscript{216} Plus, 63\% of the learners are not earning a wage while the rest often work as dressmakers, cleaners, maids, or factory workers.\textsuperscript{217} Thus, the pressure to earn a wage is a barrier to regular class attendance for adults becoming literate. Also, social events like weddings, funerals, and the general entertaining of guests are often situated as more important female obligations than class attendance.\textsuperscript{218}

While the growth of Jordan’s education sector may have emerged from actual individuals’ shifting attitudes and increased demand from schools, education became and remains absolutely central to Jordan’s national identity. Adely reiterates this by explaining that in Jordan, “the regime has worked to construct a uniquely Jordanian identity...education has been at the heart of this process of creating and sustaining a Jordanian tradition and a shared history.”\textsuperscript{219} Additionally, Jordan lacks both natural resources and a strong industrial base. Thus, Jordan relies heavily on human capital as a driver of the economy - what Rania deemed an invaluable “treasure.” Dr. Abeer Dababneh, director of University of Jordan’s Center for Women’s Studies, nodded to King Hussein who considered education the “main source of power in the country.”\textsuperscript{220} To Dr. Dababneh, Jordan’s educational policy reflects a belief that “human beings are the most precious thing we have.”\textsuperscript{221} In many ways, Jordan has led the way for educational reform in the region, with a government that allocates a significant

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 85.  
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 81.  
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 84.  
\textsuperscript{219} Adely, 32.  
\textsuperscript{220} Dr. Abeer Dababneh (The University of Jordan - Center for Women’s Studies), interview with author, August 1, 2018, Amman, Jordan.  
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
portion of resources towards schooling. These government investments, beginning in the early 1990s when Jordan’s educational expenditure of 6.5 percent of GDP ranked higher than the regional average of 5.3, have cast a wide net, targeting all stages of education and including vocational and informal education. Meanwhile, Morocco’s 1990 public spending on education as a share of GDP was 4.5. At the core of Jordan’s reform efforts is a “desire to remodel Jordan’s education system for the modern knowledge economy and to equip young Jordanians with the skills that young people need to compete in the global economy.” In other words, reforms have been framed in terms of market demands, hinging on pedagogy, curriculum, and educational equipment. For instance, through providing the majority of public schools with Internet and computers, Jordan has become one of the first nations in the Middle East to incorporate ICT into the educational system.

Jordan has a unique trajectory of demographic shifts that have inevitably influenced the nation’s educational landscape, dating back to the 1917 Balfour Declaration which promised Palestine as a Jewish homeland. After Britain lifted the Mandate in Palestine, the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in 1948, the 1967 Six-Day War and Israel’s subsequent occupation of the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, Jordan experienced an immense flow of refugees and major demographic changes. It is estimated that 65% of Jordan’s population is

223 Kannan and Hanania, 145-146.
224 Ibid.
Jordanian-Palestinians.\textsuperscript{225} Resources aside, Jordan faced the challenge of legitimizing its own identity while reconciling two national narratives.\textsuperscript{226} This struggle manifested itself in a 1970 civil war between the state of Jordan and Palestinians; the counterweight to Jordanian national identity was no longer the British colonial project but rather the internal faction of Palestinians. The government established discriminatory measures which ascribed preferential treatment to Transjordanians to ensure their authority in the state’s bureaucracy.

Education is one of the services through which Jordanians-Palestinians have been pushed to the periphery. Since 1970, Jordan has ensured that Transjordanians receive preference especially in public sector higher education. This includes unofficial and untransparent quotas, scholarships, and affirmative action policies.\textsuperscript{227} While Palestinian-Jordanians comprise over half the population, students and faculties’ participation in public higher education has plummeted from 95\% in the early 1970s to now under 50\%.\textsuperscript{228} Essentially, discriminatory policies assign women of Palestinian origin less privilege than Transjordanians since the former “are suffering the traditional maligns associated with patriarchal societies and also the socio-political ones brought about by the balance of power relations in Jordan.”\textsuperscript{229}

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides education only for Palestinians who are deemed official

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid.
refugees and who qualify for these resources, thus only about 30% of Palestinians receive UNRWA’s elementary education services.²³⁰ Palestinians have been quite successful in education despite the discrimination that they have faced. One reason for this was that “deprived of their normal institutions and options in life, the Palestinians began to view education as perhaps constituting the single most important avenue for decent maintenance and, ultimately, for social and economic mobility.”²³¹ Additionally, Palestinians tended to stay in school longer since the work opportunities available to them were limited.²³²

Overall, this dynamic within Jordan’s education system, specifically the limited inclusion of Palestinians, reiterates the centrality of education to Jordan’s national identity. In particular, the education sector is one manifestation of a country continuously navigating the construction of a cohesive national identity within a landscape that includes a series of different waves of displaced groups. Education is pivotal to the national identities of both Jordan and Morocco. In Morocco, education predominantly served as a counterbalance to colonial dominance and thus is still wavering to establish its roots in ways such as language policy. Meanwhile, education in Jordan is at the forefront of the nation’s pride as well as its construction of identity amidst a series of demographic shifts.

**Perceptions of Education**

²³¹ Ibid., 104.
²³² Ibid.
Since a central question of this thesis is determining how female education is perceived, it is telling to identify who the relevant stakeholders are. Three prominent ones emerge: women themselves, women’s families, and the education system itself. In other words, the individual unit, the familial unit, and the structural unit. Regardless of the motivation, all three entities’ investment in female education is critical. This investment can be rooted in either what an education is or what an education brings. While these two veins of investment are by no means mutually exclusive, the former suggests the innate value that some ascribe to education while the latter suggests the perception of education as a stepping stone on the way to employment. Furthermore, an important component of this discussion is examining the type of value, “positive” or “negative”, that education affords. In other words, does education protect against external threats like a potential failed marriage and the messy splitting of assets or does education offer something independent of what it might prevent? Perceptions of education are key.

Nermeen Murad, a gender specialist from USAID organization called Takamol in Amman, in some ways reiterated what the official Hashemite Kingdom website set forth about the importance of education for Jordan’s national identity. She emphasized, “education matters. It’s part of the collective identity of the Jordanian community. There is this peer pressure for having your kids educated, then attending schools and good universities, graduating as doctors, engineers, becoming business people. So I think it’s also part of a social context we have here.”

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233 Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
Obeidat, deputy and director of the women’s economic participation programs at Takamol, added that “we like the title of being the exporters of grades. Historically this has been sort of the strength, so to speak.” Finally, and most central to the argument of this thesis, Murad maintained that “marriage is motivating education. Marrying up is motivating education. Below [that] is the possibility that this could be a skill they need further on...It isn’t because they’re not working they shouldn’t be educated. They should be educated anyway. Education isn’t a precursor to work.” Here, Murad crystallizes the way in which the perception of the immense value of Jordanian women’s education cannot be conflated with the perception of their entrance into the world of work. Education can be beneficial to one’s success in the marriage market and marriage remains an extremely important obligation as well as means of social status for women.

**Education for Employment in Jordan - Training to Place**

An international umbrella network called Education for Employment (EFE) works closely on these issues, primarily by providing vocational training. EFE has an affiliate center in Amman, Jordan and its largest affiliate with different locations throughout Morocco. EFE-Jordan’s two main programs are Job Training and Placement (JTP) and microentrepreneurship or self-employment. The JTP track focuses on various sectors with a market-driven and demand-driven approach for both university and non-university students. Sectors range from garments to heating,

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234 Nermeen Obeidat (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
235 Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
beauty, welding, mobile repair - essentially whatever the market needs and whatever EFE-Jordan can fund. Since the focus is vocational training, about 70% of beneficiaries are non-university students who undergo trainings that are between one and six months. For the university students in the JTP track, the program is shorter and focuses on career development skills like networking, interviewing, and resume building. EFE-Jordan’s second track, microentrepreneurship, has most of its beneficiaries outside of Amman where the private sector has minimal presence. Many times, the only access to work is through self-employment or home-based business.

There are two models within this second track: general skills for micro-entrepreneurship like branding, marketing, and social media; and technical skills for a specific sector like pastry-making.

Vital to the mission of EFE-Jordan is its market-driven approach. Before beginning a class, EFE-Jordan’s corporate engagement department conducts a market assessment of the given sector. There is direct communication with the employers to inquire about vacancies and the types of skill deficiencies they find in applicant pools. EFE-Jordan then reevaluates their curriculum based on these findings of market needs. The next stage is recruiting the appropriate participants for the program. EFE-Jordan has field officers who conduct awareness sessions and outreach. Sometimes, they’ll visit families to get crucial family buy-in, which is especially important for female participants. This involves convincing individuals to allow their daughter, sister, or wife to take part. EFE-Jordan is deliberately not a mere training provider. In other words, EFE-Jordan does not send participants blindly out into the
world. Instead, EFE-Jordan upholds an end-to-end trajectory in which they maintain contact with graduates for a year post-graduation through phone calls, surveys, and focus groups.

Around 55% of EFE-Jordan’s beneficiaries are women. When it is culturally feasible, EFE-Jordan attempts to achieve gender parity for classes, although sectors like car mechanics are inevitably male dominated. EFE-Jordan tries to weave in the changing of mindsets into their work. There are general stigmas around women and work, but also specific stigmas surrounding vocational training. It is worth noting that Jordan’s educational system is considered one of the most flexible in the region, enabling mobility between the vocational and the academic track; it is only the approximately 6% of students who choose applied secondary school who are no longer eligible for pursuing tertiary education. EFE-Jordan makes a point of presenting vocational jobs as respectable and viable. This is why outreach to families is needed in order to secure permission and encouragement from families regarding female entrance into the labor market.

The ingrained stigmas about women working make female retention rates a challenge that EFE-Jordan faces. Some women, looking for an opportunity to leave the house, will participate in the training but will not want employment afterwards. Alternatively, some will be placed in work and then ultimately drop out. Other women will get married or their parents will forbid working. EFE-Jordan is careful to acknowledge that even if a woman is trained but unemployed, this is still a step

forward in the sense that work has at least become desirable to her. According to Business Development Specialist at EFE-Jordan Elizabeth Clark in an interview, this means women are being folded into the “economic fabric of the country.”

EFE-Jordan’s CEO, Ghadeer Khuffash, weighed in on the role of female education in Jordan. She noted that while education for women tends to be highly normalized and encouraged in Jordan, work is not. In other words, she explained that families often say “we will allow you to go and study, but not necessarily go to work.” In this way, education is deemed acceptable by families and a desirable exit from the house by women themselves. In fact, Ayed Tayem from the King Hussein Center Information and Research Center in Amman described female education in the eyes of the Jordanian family as “a seatbelt for her or as something that she can hold on after she gets divorced...If things turn against her.” Education is limited to a form of baseline, feminized security. Ingrained in this ceiling is a certain transactional approach to what education can bring, whether in security or social capital through marriage.

Khuffash discussed the common dissonance between females’ education level and their line of work. One of the barriers she listed between females and the workforce is the mixed-gender atmosphere of the workplace, something many deem unsuitable for women, whether it be women themselves or the males in their families.

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237 Elizabeth Clark (Education for Employment), interview with author, July 23, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
239 Ayed Tayem (King Hussein Foundation Information and Research Center), interview with author, July 24, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
The 2018 Arab Barometer survey, however, suggests a rather high acceptance of female work outside the home - 86% in Jordan and 78% in Morocco. While these numbers seem high, it is important to remember the difference between hypothetical and actual acceptance. For instance, male family members might not be opposed to the idea of women working, but when the fine print of such exit from the household involves entrance into a mixed-gender environment, the possibility seems more daunting, taboo, and unsuitable. In other words, the acceptance apparent from such surveys perhaps has hidden caveats. Additionally, it is important not to let these numbers suggest strides in perceptions of the capabilities and agencies of women. Especially in Jordan, economic conditions can require men in the household to accept another source of income, as discussed by Heba, Maisa, and Maram in the previous chapter. Importantly, financial demand is not indicative of an unwavering acceptance of women working.

Khuffash reported that at EFE-Jordan, they sometimes find women with university degrees participating in trainings for jobs that do not require their education level. For instance, garment factories are generally female only. It is preferable for women to work in these environments even if their degree qualifies them to work elsewhere. Again, it is difficult to trace whether the origin of this tendency is indicative of the preference of a woman herself or that of male family members. Either way, this presents an important dynamic, and the fear of sexual assault is often at the core of such work environment preferences.

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Khuffash brought to the fore the gendered curriculum within Jordan’s education system as an aspect of the mindset that potentially limits women’s conception of their own mobility. Even in math textbooks, she notes, the language targets men. In Arabic and religion books, too, there is a focus on male-driven activity. She discussed how religion books perpetuate harsh messages about the centrality of child raising for every woman. Khuffash implied the way in which religion can thus become an instrument of subordination, “a tool that men use against women who want to penetrate the market and want to work, ‘But your religion says that it’s better that you sit and raise your kids at home.'” While education was an expectation for women, work becomes equivalent to an abandonment of social duty. This is not innate to religion itself, but rather the way in which religion has been constructed to uphold certain cultural norms. Additionally, with a clear emphasis on careers in medicine and engineering, vocations are entirely missing from discourse in educational spaces. Within that, jobs themselves are gendered in the sense that these highly respected, professionalized uses of time are almost always reserved for men. Ultimately, Khuffash emphasized that reductive perceptions of women and their designated societal duties starts in the textbooks.

**Education and Values**

The comments of Khuffash and Tayem add texture to surveys conducted through the Arab Barometer which indicate that across the region, few believe that a

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university education is more important for men than women. A 2018 survey reported that only 18% in Jordan and 12% in Morocco held this belief. In terms of differences between male and female attitudes on the equal value of education, in Jordan, women are 14 points less likely to hold the view that there is a gendered discrepancy in the value of education than men. In Morocco, there is less of a gap in female-male respondents as women are only 3 points less likely to have this attitude. Overall, while surveys in both countries indicate a relatively high regard for female education, it is important to keep in mind that in Jordan, there still persists this perception that women are fit for education but not for work.

In terms of values more generally, 2008 findings from the World Values Survey (WVS) Database indicate that Morocco and Jordan have high scores in the categories of traditional and survival values. According to WVS, “Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, parent-child ties, deference to authority and traditional family values. People who embrace these values also reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide. These societies have high levels of national pride and a nationalistic outlook”\textsuperscript{242} while “Survival values place emphasis on economic and physical security.”\textsuperscript{243} It is interesting to situate education in this discussion of security. In some ways, education provides a baseline protection for women in Jordan, especially in terms of ensuring social status and marriage prospects. In other ways and particularly in Morocco, however, education can have implications of abandonment of one’s community and one’s household duties, invoking a degree of

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.
disloyalty. In this way, education can be intertwined with its own “insecure” baggage. Education can be symbolic of independence and one of the first times women are permitted to leave the house without a chaperone, as was the case for 18-year-old Hala from the previous chapter. In Jordan, cultural norms tend to render female education as favorable in terms of marriage prospects and family reputation. While education is part of this gendered societal expectation, work is not.

**Education for Employment in Morocco - Training to Place**

Education for Employment’s largest affiliate in Morocco was first established in 2006 in Casablanca before expanding throughout the country. 52% of EFE-Maroc’s graduates are female.\(^{244}\) As the youngest CEO of the EFE Network, 27-year-old Jihane Lahbabi-Berrada pointed out in an interview that EFE “leads by example.”\(^{245}\) To Lahbabi-Berrada, “a country cannot truly develop if half of its population is left behind.” Lahbabi-Berrada discussed the challenges EFE faces in including women. Part of this involves outreach; women do not tend to seek out the resources of EFE as much as men, so EFE-Maroc must initiate dialogue with families and schools just like EFE-Jordan. This includes information sessions that reiterate the importance of financial independence and “explaining why it’s important to get a job even if, at 22 or 23, they’re thinking of getting married and not getting a job at any time.” The women EFE-Maroc encounters must also shift their mindset, altering their

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\(^{245}\) Jihane Lahbabi-Berrada (EFE-Maroc), phone interview with author, November 16, 2018.
expectations for themselves so that their participation in family life as a wife and mother can compliment instead of contradict their participation in labor.

To identify what sets EFE apart from other NGOs, Lahbabi-Berrada underscored that “We do not train to train; we train to place.” Like EFE-Jordan, EFE-Maroc conducts what they call “rapid market assessments” to determine the high growth sectors that will actually produce jobs for graduates of EFE trainings. They then assess what precise skills are needed and they develop trainings accordingly. Lahbabi-Berrada presented retail and ICT as examples of female friendly sectors. Specifically, ICT has become inclusive to women since men trained in ICT tend to seek better employment opportunities abroad, leading to high turnover and to employers’ realization of the value of women’s consistency. In other words, it is pivotal for employers to internalize that “hiring women is not just good because people say it’s good. It makes business sense.” This is in line with development narratives which focus on instrumentalizing human rights. They approach advocacy for female employment by emphasizing the squandered female potential that could contribute to economic prosperity. While EFE-Maroc has a 80% 6-month retention rate, they do not have data that delineates this by gender.

Lahbabi-Berrada noted that one challenge is preventing women from withdrawing from school, particularly in the teenage years. Especially with distances between school and home as a factor, some families will hurry women through their education in order for them to become productive contributors to the family. This is especially salient in remote, rural areas where it can be important to have “an
additional human resource for the family to take care of the farms.” The critical
window for girls, according to Lahbabi-Berrada, is age 12 to 18. There is a perception
of education as a waste of time if it does not guarantee that the daughter will be
“successful or productive.” The focused, one-on-one discussions in which EFE-Maroc
engages with parents includes framing female education as “a long-term investment,”
emphasizing the importance of financial independence especially in the modern
world. According to Lahbabi-Berrada, since fostering this dialogue involves pushing
back against powerful stigmas and social codes, it has mixed outcomes.

A point of comparison that is central to the argument of this thesis emerges. In
Jordan, according to Mayyada Abu Jaber, a regional education and workforce
development expert and the CEO and founder of World of Letters, there is an almost
cosmetic value of a college degree for women in Jordan.246 There is pressure for
women to get educated but sometimes equal pressure to drop out of the workforce
upon marrying or having children. These societal expectations create a ceiling for
women in which education is the norm but work is still stigmatized. At EFE-Maroc,
however, Lahbabi-Berrada suggests the most effective strategy to get parent buy-in is
presenting education as securing the long term returns of employment and financial
security down the line.

After completing K-12 in Morocco, students have two options: a free
university education or the vocational training system. The vocational avenue,
associated with manual jobs and low pay, is still stigmatized in both Jordan and

246 Mayyada Abu Jaber (World of Letters), interview with author, July 30, 2018, Amman,
Jordan.
Morocco. However, Lahbabi-Berrada pointed out that “there’s too many university graduates every year in Morocco for not enough jobs in the formal sector...which means that...people are studying disciplines that do not actually hire.” Simultaneously, “You have sectors that are hiring that provide significant career development opportunities, but no one is interested in that. So there’s a lot of information to be deconstructed and also provided on what are the key sectors that recruit and what does it mean to do this job.”

Khuffash made similar comments about Jordan when noting that discussion of vocational training is missing from the prominent school curriculum. Perceptions of worthy work is still in many ways limited to medicine and engineering.

Delineating what a job actually entails is an important part of the puzzle and a challenge that EFE-Maroc faces. According to Lahbabi-Berrada, many people think they are interested in a certain job so they complete the training before deciding it is not for them. This points to the importance of thorough career orientation and guidance. She emphasized that in fact, one does not need a bachelor’s or master’s degree for many career-launching jobs. This ignites a certain discomfort or frustration because many youth are under the assumption that “just because they have a degree, they’re entitled to get a job.” Lahbabi-Berrada candidly clarified, “Well, that’s not the case anymore.” Lahbabi-Berrada said education can be like a driver’s licence: “You’re allowed to learn how to drive. Well, a university or vocational training

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degree is the same. You’re allowed to finally get yourself in the labor market and prove yourself, and there’s so many of them every year...there is this frustration, you know, ‘I worked so hard so many years’, while most of the jobs do not require a baccalaureate plus 3 or 5 years.”

Lahbabi-Berrada described the trajectory of EFE-Maroc’s work in stating that “We started with university graduates because there was a big problem...many of them were holding university degrees and unemployed for an average of three years because they could not land a steady job, and there was a complete disorientation on what they were supposed to do. So we started with that, and then in some regions, we had to work with youth with no qualifications or no high school degree.” Part of what EFE-Maroc does is reading between the lines of job descriptions, engaging in dialogue with employers, and thoroughly assessing what precise skills and qualifications a job entails, while going beyond the standard job description and removing unnecessary barriers to employment for EFE participants who demonstrate the eagerness to learn. Overall, Lahbabi-Berrada summed up the work of EFE-Maroc as follows: “We’re here to approach employers to secure job opportunities and tell recruiters... ‘trust us to provide you with profiles you wouldn't have looked at for this position, but there’s really untapped potential.’”

Importantly, EFE-Maroc includes a stage of corporate outreach, in line with EFE-Jordan’s end-to-end approach, which involves demonstrating to employers that according to Lahbabi-Berrada, “it’s really important to hire women not just because they’re women, but because they have unique assets that can be leveraged in the
workplace all the way to monitoring and evaluation.” In some ways, this line of reasoning folds into Sen’s argument in *Development as Freedom*. Put simply, the premise is that human rights are not at odds with development agendas but rather instrumental to them. Measures of corporate outreach within the EFE network suggest that in order to get corporate buy-in for female employment, the rhetoric must be rooted in why an investment in women is ultimately a productive cause, not why reimagining gender imbalance and striving for gender justice is worthy or noble. Lahbabi-Berrada reiterated this need to shift the narrative, stating that EFE cannot “just say ‘hire women because they’re unemployed and its good for the country. No, hire women because, for your positions, it will be an asset. It will make you more competitive. Women have unique qualities and tend to be more loyal and stay longer with the same organization. They are also the ideal candidates for internal mobility.’” Ultimately, she was careful to assert the following: “I mean, we don’t do charity. We say we’re fully aware of the potential of our youth, and you know, we don’t tell people to hire them because they’re unemployed. We tell them to invest in their human capital.”

**Educational Structure and Reform**

In a 2014 report titled “Breaking through Glass Doors: A Gender Analysis of Womenomics in the Jordanian National Curriculum”, Abu Jaber tackles the crux of this thesis, exploring the puzzle that Jordanian female educational achievement is insufficiently reflected in their labor and economic participation. This is ultimately
detrimental as Jordan is not reaping the potential of a significant portion of the qualified and competent population.\textsuperscript{250} Abu Jaber acknowledges systemic changes that both the government and the private sector have implemented to counter barriers between women and work such as the lack of daycares available and regulations in places of employment. This includes incentive systems and policies like child care center requirements that make the workplace more accommodating to women.

However, Abu Jaber claims that while these measures have proved to be necessary, they are entirely insufficient. She emphasizes the perhaps overlooked culprit which is the deeply ingrained and persistent “culture of work”,\textsuperscript{251} in Jordan. Often, the males in a female’s life are the gatekeepers between women and the workforce. These males “are likely to weigh the social consequences of her leaving home for family cohesion.”\textsuperscript{252} She argues that truly increasing female participation requires a “shift in the subjective beliefs about women and economic life.”\textsuperscript{253} Drawing from Alexander and Welzel’s social theory of belief mediation, Abu Jaber posits that female economic empowerment and equity hinges on two criteria: desirability and legitimacy. Ultimately, “For Jordan, this means that female-friendly employment services, incentive systems and policies (i.e., objective conditions) must be coupled with a corresponding change in people’s mindset (i.e., subjective beliefs) about women in the workforce.”\textsuperscript{254}

\textsuperscript{250} Mayyada Abu Jaber, “Breaking through Glass Doors,” 1.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid.
In addressing desirability, Abu Jaber's study suggests that in order to shift the values and deep-rooted beliefs that shape cultural mindsets, there must be a reconfiguration of the messages children receive at a very young age - from family, school, and society as a whole - about the gendered division of labor. In her study, Abu Juber sheds light on the gendered biases entangled in the school textbooks grades 4 through 10. Among her findings is that “the curriculum prepares women to enter the marriage market rather than the labor market.” She also concludes that it is deemed more desirable for women to stay at home since there is an assumption that “women who work outside the home will not be able to meet their family’s demands and expectations and their family responsibilities.” This finding aligns with the work of Hoodfar and Singerman regarding women in Cairo which suggests that it is possible for women to face a decline in social status as a result of entrance into the workforce.

This departs from Western narratives and metrics for empowerment which maintain that earning an income is a fundamental form of advancement. Abu Juber emphasizes the way curriculum can be instrumentalized to begin reshaping these norms. In problematizing the optics of femininity and the messages fed to children as they begin to conceptualize gendered differences, Abu Juber discusses the way in which while men are depicted as entrepreneurial, women are presented as subordinate. Ultimately, “there is a distinct absence of women performing productive tasks and an overrepresentation of women performing reproductive tasks.”

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255 Ibid., 2.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
In addressing the second prong of the social theory of mediation - legitimacy - Abu Juber uses the Ministry of Education as a case study to assess workplace leadership structures. Abu Juber explains that “the greater the number of women role modeling positions of decision making and leadership, the stronger the legitimacy behind the notion that women can take control of their economic and political lives.”

It seems a chicken-egg paradigm comes to the fore. It is only with the existence of women in leadership that perceptions of women as competent and productive can emerge, but it is also only the shift of norms and assumptions about women that will carve out positions of authority for women.

Ultimately, Abu Juber concludes that there is a “hidden curriculum” ingrained in both the school system and leadership structures at the workplace. She states that

Gender-biased content in textbooks directs males and females toward employment futures that are socially desirable to and culturally acceptable for society, rather than those that make economic sense for individuals, families, communities and the nation. The leadership landscape in Jordan further legitimizes the undesirability of female economic empowerment through a gendered division of labor...

In an interview, Abu Jaber discussed her role as the former founder and CEO of EFE for a total of eight years. She became concerned, however, with why 60% of the women who graduated from EFE-Jordan declined the job into which they were placed. From conducting questionnaires that proposed variables like transportation and daycare as potential barriers, Abu Jaber suggested that family dynamics - specifically the preferences of fathers and brothers - are the primary culprit of the female decision to stay out of the labor market. In other words, Abu Jaber discussed

258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., 3.
that for women, the decision to join the workforce is not an individual but rather a collective decision. Abu Jaber was careful to note that the social barriers and stigmas regarding vocational training are stronger than those surrounding more conventional forms of education. While there is a powerful normalization of Jordanian women’s education - perhaps for its cosmetic value, social capital and impact on marriage prospects - there is still discomfort with females entering the labor force.

Part of Abu Jaber’s reasoning for leaving EFE was her quest to determine precisely why women do not enter the workforce, and her research brought her to examining the Jordanian education system. EFE, she noted, did not sufficiently account for all the variables influencing female work like mindset and culture. Abu Jaber, departing from the demand-driven approach of EFE, emphasized the importance of the supply-side. Supply-side analysis means interrogating the messages that the education system itself perpetuates. This is demonstrated by her work mapping out the gendered biases ingrained in textbooks. Abu Jaber nods to the ‘80s and early ‘90s initiatives for gender sensitization policy within the Ministry of Education often led by the USA and Canada. Despite such efforts, Abu Jaber critiqued the harsh messages that remain within school curriculum and that prepare women first and foremost for the marriage market.

According to Abu Jaber, “university will never match the skills of the private sector here because [the private sector is] moving a lot faster than the university.”

The crux of vocational training, such as that of EFE, is to coordinate between the

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261 Ibid.
skills provided in training and the demands of the private sector. To Abu Jaber, however, vocational education alone adopts a too narrow, tunnel-vision approach. Ultimately, “[at] EFE, it was just skill building, which is not a complete picture.” After critiquing the current messages that are upheld in the education system as it is, Abu Jaber discussed possible avenues for a change in mindset which begins with the fundamental societal unit: the family. Specifically, there is need for a shift in the way co-parenting is imagined and discussed. Abu Jaber explained

We have to use the language of partners because completing oneself means one works and the other cooks...but if we become partners, we both cook...See, the whole narrative has to be changed...It’s beyond the technical skills. And if we go back also to technical skills, you’re sitting at home until 2 o’clock, you’re doing nothing, waiting to get married...

Dr. Dababneh, too, discussed the restrictive framework of familial functionalism that is pervasive in Jordanian society. These modes of thought, also critiqued by Abu Jaber, suggest that the relationship between a man and a woman cannot just be complimentary, with the man doing one type of professionalized work and the woman doing feminized, domestic labor. In other words, the family is treated as a distinct type of system and each component must work in its traditional way in order for the entire system to function properly. So, the assumption, according to Dr. Dababneh is that “we complete each other and to have a...really stable social system...everybody should do his role, and his traditional role.” Any deviation from this norm is seen as an iteration of dysfunctionalism meaning “somebody is trying to change his role and this is not for the benefit of the social structure all in

262 Ibid.
263 Dr. Abeer Dababneh (The University of Jordan - Center for Women’s Studies), interview with author, August 1, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
There are certain veins of feminism which actually uphold such complementarianism, not to be conflated with Islamic feminism as a whole which will be discussed in the following chapter. Complementarian feminism suggests that women can be empowered even if their work *compliments* that of men rather than being identical to it. Dr. Dababneh and Abu Jaber, however, suggest that such complementarianism can be limiting as it sequesters female labor into contained, feminized spaces.

Abu Jaber, like Khuffash, asserted that a woman’s education in Jordan can surely boost marriage prospects. She reflected on an anecdote in which during a training about seven years ago, youth males were discussing that they open a newspaper and look for girls who have graduated from university as potential future wives. If the woman is working, however, she is often asked to leave work either upon marriage or upon bearing her first child. Abu Jaber presented a distinct conundrum regarding the selective societal preference for women: “So if you look at the private sector, she gets married, she’s going to leave. She gets pregnant, she’s going to leave.”^265^ Educated women are often deemed more desirable but “once they get married, they’re pulled out of the workplace.”^266^ Even if a woman is not an active engineer, there is a certain clout and desirability that comes along with obtaining an engineering degree, as Noor and Tala discussed in the previous chapter. Referring again to her interactions during EFE trainings, Abu Jaber expressed shock at the male

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^264^ Ibid.
^265^ Mayyada Abu Jaber (World of Letters), interview with author, July 30, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
^266^ Ibid.
attitude; ultimately, “the higher salary he was, the more he wanted to pull his wife out of the workplace.”  

To Abu Jaber, there is need for conscious awareness since the subconscious dictates certain ingrained, gendered norms and biases. There must be someone specialized in combating the gendered curriculum. This goes beyond merely measures of gender sensitivity. In fact, the World of Letters has developed a gender training based on the Brookings’ mapping of curriculum that will inform those who are creating and revising textbooks. Ultimately, Abu Jaber stated that “Unless you have bodies that push, it’s not going to happen...because the unconscious mind is going to make us do whatever we’ve been doing for hundreds of years. You need to get consciously aware that this is not the right thing to do, that we have to move away from this...for every change you need to consciously be aware when you are...creating any kind of messaging or content.”

Initiatives like Education Reform for Knowledge Economy Project (ERfKE) and the Discovery School pilot through the Jordan Education Initiative are examples of efforts to boost Jordan’s educational outcomes that focus on structural reform instead of messaging. These initiatives targeted teacher professional development and the integration of ICT. The Discovery Schools initiative provided for 80,000 students and 3,500 teachers, introducing six crucial e-curriculum tools of math, science, Arabic, ICT, English, and citizenship. Jordan also developed an entirely new subject, information management, into curriculums. These changes were anchored in an effort

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267 Ibid.  
268 Ibid.
to boost the skills necessary for the private sector such as “communication, teamwork, and analytical and problem-solving skills.” With such government investment in education, Jordan has expanded enrollment rates across both socioeconomic and gender lines. 2009 saw an enrollment rate of 90% for primary, 80% for secondary, and 40% for tertiary education. Additionally, according to a Brookings Institution Press report, “98.4 percent of children (98.2 percent male and 98.7 percent female) complete a full course of primary school and 87.2 percent (86.7 percent male and 88.2 percent female) complete a course of secondary school. Jordan also has one of the lowest repetition rates in the region (1 percent for primary and secondary education).” Furthermore, 2007 averages of eighth grade academic performance showed significantly higher scores for Jordanian females than males, especially in science and math.

Despite these remarkable successes in the education system, Jordan still faces the major challenge of equipping youth with employable skills, or “a spectrum of skills and proficiencies that are sound and flexible enough to close the so-called mismatch between job opportunities generated by economic growth and the abilities of the Jordanian labor force.” Part of what this entails is extending and expanding reforms such that “education is no longer solely geared to serve the public sector but also is fully adapted to Jordan’s private sector economy.” In other words, reform must transcend the “engineering approach” which focuses on funding for schools,

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269 Kannan and Hanania, 145-146.
270 Ibid., 147.
271 Ibid., 148.
272 Ibid.
273 Ibid.
teachers, and books. In actuality, it is important that reforms “address the underlying incentives of teachers and students that drive teaching and learning quality.”274 Dr. Dababneh noted that there is need for improvement within the Jordanian education system in terms of developing a “strategy of having a better relationship between the fields of specialization at a university and the labor market.”275

According to Dr. Dababneh, “a huge number of female students usually go to literature specializations, because they want to go to teach.” Teaching is considered a traditionally acceptable profession for women since the annual schedule and daily hours support their domestic role. However, the challenge is that “the market cannot absorb any more” teachers. Dr. Dababneh emphasized the importance of mentoring programs, especially for female students. University of Jordan’s Center for Women’s Studies, led by Dr. Dababneh herself, initiated a program in which female students with different specializations in their third or fourth year were paired with “pioneer women in the labor market” to exchange experience and advice. In a way, this addresses Abu Jaber’s emphasis on the importance of visibility of women in positions of leadership.

In “The Disconnect between Education, Job Growth, and Employment in Jordan,” Taher Kannan and May Hanania suggest the importance of increased monitoring of teacher and school quality, and developing a reward system that incentivizes teacher performance. Plus, “Additional funds should be allocated to

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274 Ibid.
275 Dr. Abeer Dababneh (The University of Jordan - Center for Women’s Studies), interview with author, August 1, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
improving the educational qualifications, salaries, and social standing of teachers.”

Second of all, Kannan and Hanania emphasize the importance of groups like parents associations which allow avenues through which families can demand better educational policy. In this vein, “greater involvement of primary stakeholders in the education system, including the private sector, is needed to maximize returns on investment in education.” Thirdly, the authors suggest that attention must be paid to not only changes in curriculum, but also opportunities for learning outside the classroom through extracurricular activities that exercise skills like creativity and team building.

Kannan and Hanania’s last central point is a call for a reconfiguration of the current transition between secondary and tertiary education, primarily problematizing the current Tawjihi system “during which the students opt to pursue either the academic (arts and sciences) track or an applied/vocational track.” Public university admissions is most competitive and requires the highest Tawjihi scores. It is important to note that the Tawjihi examination does not measure critical thinking, nor does it assess students’ various inclinations toward different specialties in higher education. Instead, high scores direct students toward medicine followed by engineering, meaning “students are pointed to courses of study that could possibly run counter to their aptitudes and interests.”

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276 Kannan and Hanania, 149.
277 Ibid.
278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
Ultimately, Kannan and Hanania call for major changes within both the *Tawjihi* system and university admissions policies. The authors elaborate on the potential results of making strides toward such improvements, including allowing more flexibility for when and how students transition from secondary to university education and finally, the labor market. While Kannan and Hanania offer important prescriptions for Jordan’s educational policy and how it could better capitalize off youth education and potential, they perhaps neglect to properly emphasize the importance of not just general reform, but also a specific gendered reform such as that which Abu Jaber emphasizes. Particularly regarding curriculum, it is not simply about curating it to the employability of students, but also about reimagining the messages that are upheld and which greatly influence perceptions of the gendered division of labor. Perhaps, curriculum does not merely need general reform, but gendered reform.

Reforms in the Moroccan education system have had two central aims: increasing access to education and increasing enrollment rates. The reforms of the 1980s focused on making school required until the age of 15. King Hassan II’s 1999 educational reforms included the following: a pledge to increase government funding for education by 5% yearly in line with education as a national priority for the decade of 2000-2010, a goal of eliminating adult illiteracy, and finally, the plan to improve education quality and readiness for the demands of the labor market. The past two decades have seen increases in education across the board - from preschool to secondary - and gendered enrolment gaps have decreased. For instance, the rate of

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280 Ibid.
enrollment for girls in elementary school has increased by 75 percentage points. Rates of retention have increased by three percentage points for elementary education but decreased by six for secondary level education. As of 2007, the quality of education was still a major challenge despite education comprising over 6 percent of GDP in 2003 and 28% of government budget. Importantly, equal access has not been achieved both along gender and urban-rural divides.\textsuperscript{281}

Other reforms in Morocco included the establishment of vocational training programs which like in Jordan, aimed to bridge the gap between the provision of skills and those demanded by the labor market. The most prominent of these Vocational Training (VT) initiatives was in 1984 in response to worsening unemployment rates for graduates due to the reduction of public sector jobs. According to a 2007 Wolfensohn Center for Development report, “VT then was presented as a tool for socio economic development, facilitating young people’s employment, mainly in the private sector, and allowing employers to have at their disposal a skilled workforce able to improve its performance and competitiveness.”\textsuperscript{282}

Plus, this reform preceded one in the following year which aimed to make education accessible to all school-aged children, to decrease rates of dropouts, and to emphasize vocational training. In the 1984, during the early stages of the reform, participants in vocational training had increased by 66%. The government subsequently made the goal of training 400,000 additional youth between the years of 2005 and 2007.\textsuperscript{283}


\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 24-25.

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
These high aims were not ultimately fulfilled since there was “little or no follow-through on the resources and investments needed to reach these goals.”

Furthermore, “The situation of VT graduates in the labor market remains far from satisfactory. In 2002, the unemployment rate among these young people ranged between 18 and 36 percent, depending on the level of training, compared with a national mean unemployment rate of 11.6 percent.” Ultimately, these Vocational Training reforms did not make a significant dent in unemployment and did not successfully harness untapped potential of youth. Education remains quite inaccessible for women especially in rural areas where it is often not deemed a priority or a necessity.

**Education and Development**

A 2008 World Bank report ranked Morocco low amidst other MENA countries when it came to quality of public education. The report identified a “tenuous relationship” between education and development. With the emergence of what was deemed “the knowledge economy,” quality instruction was seen as a necessary ingredient for economic growth and competition. The solutions that this report prescribed were “further liberalization of the job market and increasing privatization of educational institutions.”

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284 Ibid., 25.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 30.
287 Boutierl, 7.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid., 8.
legitimized the claims of the report and produced the 2009-2012 Emergency Reform which took on the following measures: “build new schools for the increased population of children and youth, improve the monitoring of student progress, ensure teacher accountability, and accelerate privatization that would reduce the government’s financial and administrative responsibility for providing formal education.” Plus, there was an emphasis on science, technology, and foreign language. This situated education in a quintessentially neoliberal framework that entailed a channeling of “population size, budget, and selves” while bypassing the historical and political landscapes necessary to cultivate certain skills.

Those actually functioning within the Moroccan school system, even before the release of the World Bank diagnosis, were engaging in a more holistic discourse about the value of skills and knowledge rather than simply focusing on “upgraded infrastructure and pedagogical planning.” In a 2007 teachers’ assembly, an inspector of French language courses named Ahmed Zirari shed light on the immense problem that students’ gap in knowledge of French poses: “The French language in the Moroccan context is the key to professional and social success...As Moroccan citizens, we cannot ignore this reality. *The word is a luxury*, so I ask you to give everyone their part of the word.” Zirari particularly questioned what students will do after completing the state-sanctioned national exam called the Baccalaureate, akin to the high school diploma. Ultimately, Zirari’s discussion went past identifying the barriers to quality education as merely “overcrowded classrooms, inadequate

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290 Ibid., 8.
291 Ibid., 8-9.
292 Ibid., 9.
facilities, an outdated curriculum and method of instruction, and differential access to education in relation to location, class, and gender." Instead, “even if these inhibiting factors were somehow surgically removed from the system, doing so would not eradicate the deep-seated linguistic discrepancies that undercut student efforts at academic and professional advancement and, concomitantly, their aspirations for empowerment and creativity.” While there is certainly discussion of the way in which education does not guarantee employment in Jordan, language discrepancy as a specific missing piece of the educational system is specific to Morocco.

Education is regarded as a consistent pillar of development and is bound to “colonialism, nationalism, and neoliberal modernity.” There is a tendency to enshrine education as a vehicle for safeguarding individual empowerment, for reducing socio cultural inequality, fueling economic growth, and finally, promoting values of democracy. Since the 1980s, extensive market liberalization meant “a strategic push for global uniformity…[that] justified the inculcation of new skills for both labor and citizenship.” Especially within the post-9/11 context in which religious fundamentalism became vilified and framed as the antithesis of progress, development organizations engaged in what Charis Boutieri explained as essentially “reformulating the War on Terror as a pedagogical matter.” In other words, there

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293 Ibid.
294 Ibid., 10.
295 Ibid., 6.
296 Ibid.
297 Ibid., 7.
298 Ibid.
emerged rhetoric about how Western foreign intervention should take on an almost “soft” agenda of promoting or sustaining education systems overseas.

In the 1980s there was a wave of gender scholarship that situated literacy as a form of emancipation, thus framing female education as an avenue of resistance to subordination and oppression. In *Gender, Literacy, and Empowerment in Morocco*, scholar Fatima Agnaou nods to Maxine Molyneux’s differentiation between practical gender interest and strategic gender interests. Practical interests include employment and family while strategic interests “are linked to women's empowerment as they seek to redress their condition within and outside the family, to combat discrimination, oppression and violence against women, and promote their political participation.” Ultimately, “this distinction between women's condition (practical interests) and position (strategic interests) engendered the impetus for research on gender and literacy.” Overall, the cases of Jordan and Morocco suggest that in order for female learning to have an emancipatory quality, there must be not only an emphasis on enhanced female inclusion in the current educational system, but perhaps more importantly, an interrogation of the pedagogy and messages which both systems of education create and uphold. This chapter explored the educational landscapes of Jordan and Morocco, particularly through discussion of national identity, the development of “employable” skills, and educational structure and reform.

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299 Agnaou, 6.
300 Ibid.
Chapter 5: Feminist Movements, NGO Work, and Norms

Feminist Movements in Jordan and Morocco

Understanding the trajectory of feminist movements in Jordan and Morocco is an essential element of unpacking the puzzle that this thesis explores. How much has discussion of gendered discrimination and gender equality entered public discourse? Have abstract feminist discussions mobilized individuals and shifted dynamics for women? Ultimately, what are the norms surrounding women entering the public sphere in Jordan and Morocco, and how have organizations and frameworks of thought navigated these norms?

A 2017 Open Democracy article titled “A new chapter for feminism in Jordan” discusses patterns of female marginalization and barriers that Jordanian women face. Journalist Olivia Cuthbert quotes a 28-year-old dentist named Nadine Ibrahim, who explains that “A lot of girls here are highly educated but they don’t care about getting a job at the end of their studies. They just want to get married because their family tells them that’s the best thing they can do and the only way to be complete.” 301 The article also nods to the rigidity of the legal system and the way in which legal codes uphold patriarchal norms that disenfranchise women. This includes personal status laws which can dictate that men inherit twice as much as women and citizenship laws which prohibit women who marry foreigners from passing along their full citizenship.

While there has been activism to combat these legal disparities, there still remains an aversion to identifying with the word “feminist” as it is perceived to invoke a certain taboo, threatening radicalism. In the article, director of the Jordanian Women’s Union (JWU) Nadia Shamroukh clarifies that “Feminists here don’t always identify as feminists...Some of them criticise feminism because they have an idea that it is linked to radical ideologies and they don’t want to be associated with this and attacked by society.”

Part of what JWU aims to do is introduce feminism as something accessible and destigmatized, something which each woman can claim for herself. Some activists, on the other end of the spectrum, find feminism intellectualized and esoteric, and are more geared toward an action-oriented approach. Shamroukh noted the importance of tailoring Western notions of feminism to the Jordanian context, of making feminism into “a home-grown concept.” To JWU project coordinator Aseel Abu Albandora, an important foundation for shifting these mindsets is ensuring that women become educated on their own rights.

Feminism has been gaining traction in Jordan, especially with the platform of social media offering an alternative channel of action that doesn’t require taking to the streets. Plus, increase in civil society has been pivotal. Farah Mesmar, the regional advocacy officer at a Swedish organization that promotes women’s rights in Jordan called Kvinna till Kvinna, is also quoted in the 2017 Open Democracy article, explaining that “Previously we had very few organisations working on feminist issues but now almost all the NGOs have a gender programme and this has opened a bigger

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302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
pool for feminists to get involved.” Additionally, Jordan has seen an increase in women occupying public office, with the 2016 parliamentary elections leading to women in 20 out of 130 seats. That said, increased female visibility in politics does not innately translate into policy that tackles gender inequality, as women can expect male-dominated resistance. While it has become almost fashionable to discuss equal rights and wages, implementation and action is another matter.

Despite Jordan’s robust civil society, it is worth exploring why the momentum of the Arab Spring did not enable organizations to catalyze meaningful and substantive improvements to the status of Jordanian women. In “The State of Jordanian Women’s Organizations - Five Years Beyond the Arab Spring”, scholar Peter A. Ferguson discusses just this. He presents three main factors that have made organizations unable to induce sustainable change in women’s rights and realities: political liberalization, leadership effects, and international donor effects.

Firstly, the implementation of political liberalization “as a tool for regime survival resulted in a continuation of the depoliticization of Jordanian women and women’s organization, undercutting their ability to achieve lasting change.” Within political liberalization, “regimes advance what appears to be a reform-minded agenda in order to placate the opposition while maintaining control over the country. This

305 Ibid.
307 Ibid.
approach offers the potential for regime survival by venting opposition pressure usually through the use of less force than the repression strategy.”

This is reminiscent of the concept of state feminism, which was originally used by scholars analyzing the “women-friendly” policies of Nordic states in the 1980s. State feminism taps into “the emergence of a new set of state–society relations and introduces a gendered view of state action,” ultimately upholding the notion that “democratic governments, to be successful, can and should promote women’s status and rights.” Other depictions of state feminism are far more critical, and present it as a way in which states operationalize feminism as this symbol of progressivity and thus legitimacy. Feminism becomes a means of claiming membership within a colonial-dominated international order.

In *Feminism and Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, historian of women and gender studies Margot Badran discusses the way in which state feminism manifested itself in Yemen in the 1960s. The General Union of Yemeni Women “organised literacy classes and provided instruction in practical skills, including health and childcare…Meanwhile, through its government agencies, the socialist state offered jobs in the government bureaucracy - mainly clustering in the lower levels, however, where they were employed in clerical positions.” The Union soon became

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308 Ibid.
310 Dorothy E. McBride and Amy Mazur “State Feminism,” *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 244.
311 Ibid.
a tool of state feminism, such that the state could groom itself and create a facade of inclusivity while furthering its own agenda through creating productive individuals occupying low level positions. Ultimately, while Ferguson does not engage directly with state feminism as an analytical tool, state feminism is closely related to his argument about the limitation of women’s organizations amidst processes of political liberalization in Jordan. At one point, Ferguson reiterates the important nuances of the depoliticization of women’s movements in Jordan when stating

The subtle methods of social control employed by the state prevent women’s organizations from fulfilling roles as distinctly political actors. This results in women’s organizations that are constrained to providing traditional ‘women’s services’ rather than engaging in policy advocacy and organizing that might bring more sustained advances to the status of women, and potentially threaten the existing regime.\(^{313}\)

Ferguson makes a point not to undercut the importance of these organizations’ work, but rather sheds light on the state’s co-optation of civil society activity. Jordan has toggled between the strategies of both repression and political liberalization since the 1950s. During the end of the Cold War, Jordan’s government utilized political liberalization in an effort to ensure the regime’s survival.\(^{314}\) Political liberalization has important repercussions for civil society organizations, namely that “civil society evolved in direct response to institutionalized state policies that granted calculated political freedoms, rather than emerging as a distinct and opposing actor.”\(^{315}\) This ultimately means that “the regime legalizes activities yet restricts their scope. So they are seen as reform policies but they allow for state control of the effects of

\(^{313}\) Ferguson, 64.
\(^{314}\) Ibid., 60.
\(^{315}\) Ibid.
the reforms.” This entails restrictions which narrow the scopes of NGOs, sequestering them into often depoliticized, “state-approved spaces.”

Ferguson’s second explanation—leadership effects and the professionalization of leadership—points to the notion that “a large portion of Jordanian women’s organizations appear to be directed by elites with strong regime ties.” The third and last factor he presents is that “the reliance on funding from international donors impaired the ability of women’s organizations in Jordan to independently identify programmatic focus and undercut their domestic support.”

Overall, the combination of these different factors have resulted in a certain depoliticization of women’s movements in Jordan. One of Ferguson’s interviews is with the director of a social organization in Jordan who explains this depoliticization as follows: “Women’s movements have all consented to institutional movements. They have been set within boundaries and parameters that states have defined. I don’t think there’s a movement.” This an interesting analysis, and points to both the merits and the limitations of state-sanctioned initiatives for female advancement that work within certain institutional parameters. The initiatives gain legitimacy and traction, but the cost of such institutionalization is limitations that perhaps prevent more radical, sustainable change.

In Morocco, on the other hand, feminism has historically been entangled with political activity. Women’s involvement in political organizations often evolved into

316 Ibid.
317 Ibid.
318 Ibid., 61.
319 Ibid., 60.
320 Ibid., 63.
feminist activism. Partially influenced by the momentum of the Arab Spring, the social movement that was Feb20 began in response to Morocco’s corruption, inequality, and unemployment. The situating of women and feminism within the movement was new to activism in Morocco, and gender parity became central. As the movement continued, however, gender equality slid down as a priority as human rights more generally came to the fore. Even so, the movement was “a new era of political expression in Moroccan activism and the positioning of women and feminism within the Movement’s framework was new to Moroccan activism...the group’s organizers developed a framework for gender parity...”\(^{321}\) Approximately one third of the activists at the first official meeting at the Moroccan Association of Human Rights were women. While the Feb20 movement was by nature an inclusive and almost amorphous movement - with demands ranging from “the dissolution of parliament”\(^ {322}\) to “wider access to housing and education, better employment opportunities for graduates, and wider recognition of Tamazight as a national language”\(^ {323}\) - it is significant to note that the movement was a benchmark moment in terms of the overlap of feminist and political activism. Unlike the case of Jordan, it seems that feminist activism in Morocco has been more situated within the political sphere and less limited to spaces controlled by the state.

In the past 70 years, women’s positionality in both the public and private sphere has shifted significantly. In “Watered-Down Feminism: An Examination of


\(^{322}\) Ibid., 100.

\(^{323}\) Ibid.
Gender and Revolutionary Ideals in Morocco,” scholar Jessica Lambert explains that, “through legal reforms and the subsequent changes in public opinion, Moroccan women have succeeded in democratizing formerly inaccessible public spaces...”324 The women who initially combatted this dichotomy in 1946 were part of what was called Akhawat al-Safaa or “Sisters of Purity”. Their participation and advocacy for women’s rights, however, hinged entirely on male relatives’ networks within the Istiqlal or independence party. Of course, there were both merits and drawbacks to this “male-driven feminism”. 325 It was not until the 1980’s that many NGOs focused on women emerged and women’s activism took on a new momentum. In the early stages, Lambert explains that women’s associations initially functioned outside the structures of activism and were thus faced with the competition of Islamist groups. Thus, women’s associations were effectively “seen as importers of forced societal change...”326 However, over the last fifteen years, feminist activism and organizations have managed to “turn this perceived otherness into a sustainable model for operating in the country”.327 Women’s associations gained access to the Moroccan landscape by advocating for women’s social and legal rights through reforms to family law, particularly in 1999 as well as 2004.

These NGOs are the recipients of support from both the government as well as the Moroccan King and royal family known as the makhzen.328 Such NGOs can thus use the religious legitimacy of the King to further their own efficacy in advocating for

324 Ibid., 101.
325 Ibid.
326 Ibid.
327 Ibid., 102.
328 Ibid.
reform. At the same time, NGOs cannot push for reform that would entirely disrupt the power structures which prop up the makhzen itself and thus jeopardize their own funding. According to Lambert, “women’s associations no longer function as independent organizations and occupy a liminal space between independent activists and actors of the state.”\textsuperscript{329} Lambert quoted Journalist Omar Radi’s critiques of such organizations’ allegiances to the government when he stated that “Women’s associations now are caricatures of feminism – they can’t, and don’t, do anything. Associations have completely taken over the role of government in civil society.”\textsuperscript{330}

In some ways, the overlap between women’s organizations and government has elevated female plight and normalized discussions around it. In other ways, it has created a certain gridlock that innately situates such initiatives as partners with - tools of, even - the state, veering into the terrain of state feminism as seen in Jordan. In an interview, scholar Katja Zvan Elliott spoke of the presence of state feminism as more prominent under Muhammad VI than King Hassan II. She explained that “Under Hassan II, there wasn’t so much of state feminism as you would, for example, see in Tunisia, as you would see in Jordan, as you would see in Syria.” That said, she pointed out that Hassan II established women’s organizations, mostly comprised of princesses, that worked on “so-called empowerment projects that are also obviously very much apolitical.”\textsuperscript{331} Instead of working on legal reform, there was a focus on “improving employment opportunities for women and literacy classes...geared

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Katja Zvan-Elliott (scholar at Al Akhawayn University), phone interview with author, December 17, 2018.
towards women’s entrepreneurship.” According to Zvan Elliott, Muhammad VI
furthered state feminism. She described

Mohammed VI was looking for his own allies...the allies that he found were amongst the women’s rights organizations...these were the groups that he wanted to coopt because he wanted to legitimize his style of ruling, his policies...his state feminism really started with the Moudawana reforms in 2004, and then with the change of the nationality code...He’s the one that is managing the reform process...and all of that is part of his agenda to promote Morocco as part of the civilized world, as being an active member of the international community...

Zvan Elliott introduces an important dimension of the promotion of women’s rights in Morocco: the international audience. She implies that discourse of the promotion of women’s rights can be streamlined into the discourse of the promotion of Morocco as progressive and civilized. Much of Morocco’s feminist movement hinged on a critique of the “Moudawana”, or the Code of Personal Status, which came about one year after independence in 1957. The “Moudawana” was based on religious law while other regulations were rooted in civil or constitutional law. Additionally, the “Moudawana” restricted women’s rights by rendering them minors and enabling polygamy.

Margot Madran applauded such Moroccan activism aimed at reforming patriarchal legal codes within the context of the region, deeming these initiatives “the only instance of a religiously-backed egalitarian Muslim family law in existence and

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332 Katja Zvan-Elliott (scholar at Al Akhawayn University), phone interview with author, December 17, 2018.
333 Ibid.
329 https://doi.org/10.1080/13530190802525098
a shining example of what can be achieved by concerted feminist action.” Badran, unlike Zvan Elliott, props up Morocco’s 2004 Moudawana reforms as an instance of shifting legal codes trickling into mobilization away from patriarchal family models.

Lambert puts Moroccan feminism into the framework of several waves. Early first-wave activists, in particular those of Akhawat al-Safaa, were preoccupied with legal rights for women, in particular reform of the family code, and hinged upon male support. According to scholar of linguistics and gender studies Fatima Sadiqi, Akhawat al-Safaa began as a division of a political party, similarly to how ‘L’Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines’ (The Democratic Association of Moroccan Women) emerged from the Party of Progress and Socialism. It seems that from the outset, unlike in Jordan, feminist activism in Morocco tended to have politicized roots.

According to Sadiqi, these associations gave “Moroccan women the opportunity to become skilled in the public organization of their demands, the public articulation of their resources, as well as a good opportunity to gain credibility in the public scene.” They were not just training women in education, work, and entrepreneurship, but were cultivating a newfound awareness of women in positions of power. Associations were a platform for females’ participation and a space through which they could gain legitimacy. International organizations were a significant

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336 Ibid., 328.
337 Ibid.
source of support for these associations and in 1993, Morocco ratified the Convention to End Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).\textsuperscript{338} Overall, Sadiqi explains

By questioning the sexual division and the ideology on which it was based, the journalistic, academic and associative discourse of liberal feminists questioned patriarchy...women’s condition was not considered a ‘natural state’, but a state that had historical origins and women’s work was seen as production, and not merely reproduction...This discourse sought to politicize women’s collective consciousness of their oppression...

Second wave Moroccan feminism of the ‘60s and ‘70s was predominantly politically leftist and evolved out of resistance to the regime. The ‘90s brought a third wave of Moroccan feminism and according to Lambert, “it was more inclusive of individual differences, class differences, and specific to Morocco, post-colonial identity, language politics, and the rural/urban divide.”\textsuperscript{340} Finally, Feb20 could be deemed a fourth wave of feminism since this type of activism “offered a new mode of political expression...”\textsuperscript{341} This wave is distinct in the use of media and technology to disseminate messages as well as the effort to function outside the current political structures.\textsuperscript{342}

Journalism was one realm in which feminist discourse arose in Morocco. Sadiqi identifies two avenues of thought that arose through journalism. Firstly, there emerged a cult of domesticity, which “included topics that were meant to improve women’s health, productivity, education, nurturing skills, household management, child rearing, and ‘how to’ be a better, more effective wife and mother.”\textsuperscript{343} Secondly,

\textsuperscript{338} Ibid., 329.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} Lambert, 115.
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{343} Sadiqi, 327.
feminist ideology became more readily dispersed and accessible through published biographies of feminist figures. According to Sadiqi, these writings shed light on what women have to offer, both domestically and in the workforce.\textsuperscript{344} In line with this momentum of journalism and academic writing, women started to mobilize in political parties, in particular the Progressive Union of Moroccan Women and the National Union of Moroccan Women of the 1960’s.\textsuperscript{345}

It seems that in both Jordan and Morocco, legal reform was the most accessible entry point into combating gender disparity, whether through guardianship laws, inheritance, citizenship, or personal status. Such advocacy for legal reform, however, could only go so far, and often leaned on support from governmental avenues. Feminism in both Jordan and Morocco faces this tug-of-war between relying on government support for legitimacy while also tackling structural change that has a less sanitized, state-approved nature. Thus, state feminism plays a role in both places. That said, Jordan seems to have a more prominent depoliticization of women’s movements as outlined by Ferguson through the operationalization of initiatives that appear to promote gender equality while serving to prop up the state. Meanwhile, Morocco appears to have been more swayed by the Arab Spring momentum when it comes to feminist action, and to generally have a more blurred line between feminist and political activity.

Connecting this to the larger puzzle that this thesis explores, the stronger linkage between political and feminist action in Morocco can contribute to an

\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{345} Ibid.
explanation for why in Morocco, there is a more robust cultural acceptance of women working. Feminist action has rather successfully pushed back against patriarchal legal codes, and the realms of journalism and academia have worked to normalize discussions of female mobility within the public sphere. Discussion of the historical trajectory of feminism in both countries helps paint cultural landscapes. In Jordan, this cultural landscape dictates that education for women is still deeply linked to the perception that women’s primary duty, or “labor” even, is that of reproduction. Thus, education may be highly regarded, but it is linked to one’s marriage prospects.

In Morocco, on the other hand, within a context where feminist movements for gender justice have more political origins and traction, the current norms do not tend to prioritize entrance into the marriage market above entrance into the labor market. Within Morocco’s more politicized framework of feminism, reforms such as that of the Moudawana have gained more momentum. This relates to women's control over their own assets, which better incentivizes women working. Nermeen Murad from Takamol explained that in Jordan, the personal status laws places extreme limitations on women and thus disincentivizes their working. She noted, “So why would I work 30 years, then my husband divorces me with one sentence? He takes the home I contributed to, and the car that’s in his name, and I wake up with nothing. What is the incentive for me to be a co-contributor in marriage? There isn’t [one].”

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346 Nermeen Murad (Takamol), interview with author, August 2, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
NGO Work

Jordanian Women’s Union - Amman, Jordan

While in Amman, I sat down with Mokaram Odeh, the current executive manager of JWU. Established in 1945, JWU began with the aim of combating violence against women in Jordan, predominantly through raising women’s awareness of their own rights. Soon, however, JWU concluded that women’s mere knowledge of their rights was insufficient. In 1969, JWU began a hotline which provides psychological, legal, and social counseling; a shelter program; and a guesthouse for children of divorced parents. Since 1969, JWU has dealt with 25,000 cases. In addition to emphasizing the social barrier that divorce presents, Odeh added that some women choose to stay with a potentially abusive husband because of the economic hardship that divorce can produce for women post-divorce. “Unfortunately, there is a strong relationship between the economic situation and the marriage,” she said. To Odeh, when it comes to work, the gendered element is about priorities in Jordan. She stated that “There [are] no barriers for the workforce. There [are] no barriers for the women to work but here in Jordan there is a priority. The priority is for men to work instead of women because here they think that the women might get married. So why should she work?” To Odeh, it is less that the work force distinctly excludes women, and more that as the priority for women is marriage, work innately becomes peripheral. Again, echoing Murad, there is little cultural incentive for women to work.

347 Mokaram Odeh (Jordanian Women's Union), interview with author, July 30, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
Odeh also pointed to the importance of legal literacy. She invoked this logic of knowledge-as-protection when explaining that women’s awareness of their rights can serve as a type of armor in cases of domestic violence. She added, “the educated, she will live a better life with her husband. She knows her rights and...he knows also that she knows about her rights so he can’t...take her rights.” While Odeh acknowledged that education level is of course not a guarantee of domestic safety, she highlighted the importance of knowing one’s rights. In addition to providing services like the hotline, JWU works to combat legal discrimination against women. Odeh stressed the guardianship law in Jordan which dictates that a woman’s father, brother, or husband can legally be her guardian until she is 30. JWU has an initiative to campaign against this law. Guardianship limits women in many ways including work, travel, living alone, and marriage. While of course patriarchal frameworks cannot alone explain low rates of female labor force participation, they must enter the conversation as a piece to the puzzle. They create a norm in which women are not deemed independent, economic agents.

Open Society Foundations - Amman, Jordan

Lama Al Khateeb works at the Open Society Foundation’s Arab Regional Office in Amman, where two of her portfolios are Equality and Anti-Discrimination as well as Women’s Rights. The organizations under these umbrellas have varied focuses including advocacy, research, and legal aid. In discussing the dynamic of Jordan’s highly educated female population who are not a part of the labor market, Al
Khateeb pointed out, like Odeh, that there are no clear legal frameworks that establish female discrimination from work. Rather, it is “a conservative society and this limits women’s opportunities, and also there are certain social norms and expectations and perceptions of gender rules that...a lot of women...endure.” Al Khateeb suggested that such rigidity of norms is likely more prominent outside of cities like Amman and Zarqa. She pointed out that while wasta impacts men and women alike, “women generally do not have the same kind of social connections, the same access.” In other words, the labor market might not be innately exclusionary, but gendered dynamics can seep into social networks which then seep into hiring. Furthermore, nodding to a gender assessment and mainstreaming, Al Khateeb said that especially in ministries, “wasta has really deprived a lot of women even though they’re qualified and deserve to be in a certain position or to be promoted.”

Al Khateeb presented two simultaneous trends. On the one hand, she has seen a wave of acceptance of female independence and a normalization of women traveling and working, particularly from women themselves. On the other, “there’s also a wave of conservatism that is obviously not only in Jordan but in the region. So a lot of families are also becoming a lot more either religious, or protective of their children, especially females. So you can see both trends.”

Al Khateeb discussed the way in which religion impacts female opportunities, but not by preventing education. In fact, Islam highly regards education, especially the sciences. Rather, religion “affects the lifestyle that a woman is expected to
live...and this might include, for example, being out of the house...whether people think a woman should spend time out of the house, away from her family, travel alone, take a taxi alone...these everyday details are defined by religion for many people.” Therefore, Al Khateeb explained that perhaps “religion indirectly affects a woman getting an education or finding a job...It’s not because religion says women should not get educated but it’s how people apply religion in their life.” In discussing the landscape of NGOs in Jordan, Al Khateeb suggested that while there are countless initiatives to empower women, there is a gap in addressing the public in general. To Al Khateeb, a large part of the picture is the public perception of women. Part of furthering female inclusion in work and leadership requires a thorough cultural shift to an understanding that women are an important part of society and that their contributions to the labor market are imperative.

**Sadaqa - Amman, Jordan**

Sadaqa is another Amman-based initiative. Unlike the Open Society, a more umbrella grant-writing organization, Sadaqa tackles a specific barrier that women face. The initiative targets the double burden women face by advocating for the implementation of Article 72 in Jordan’s labor law. The Article mandates that enterprises with 20 or more women with ten children under the age of four are required to provide professional daycare services. Co-founder of Sadaqa, Reem Aslam, explained that the ministry of labor was actually supportive of their work.349

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349 Reem Aslam (Sadaqa), phone interview with author, July 22, 2018.
Sadaqa navigates the communication between companies planning on establishing daycares and the ministry of labor. Sadaqa also helps with providing technical assistance, floor map designs, and the number of children for which a facility accommodates. If the company is resistant to complying and pushes back, Sadaqa reports to the ministry of labor who will begin sending inspectors to enforce the implementation of the article. Aslam emphasized how critical the stances of those in positions of power within the Jordanian government are. Much of the implementation of inclusive policies for women depends upon the leaders of the ministries and their beliefs. While there is currently a general trust in the work of Sadaqa, there are always some who are more actively supportive than others. In fact, Aslam commented that it’s lower-level staff members, not the senior-level ones, who are more likely to push back.

Aslam described access to daycare as “a global issue,” stating that “that’s why [in] many of the advanced or developed countries, daycare facilities are usually provided by the government or at least subsidized by the government. This is something that Sadaqa has been lobbying on with the government of Jordan - that it needs to be seen as a public good...the government needs to provide incentive for the enterprises that are providing the daycare facility....” Aslam talked about how even the language of the article itself is slightly discriminatory, and that the ILO has been pushing for amending the article to become gender sensitive, as it currently holds assumptions that childcare is exclusively female labor. Plus, Sadaqa has worked to remove the number of 20 employees, as it allows small enterprises to skirt the
regulations by employing just under the minimum number of women. To increase companies’ accountability, Aslam expressed the need for required gender audits, enforced by the government. When Sadaqa began, Jordan had 24 daycare facilities in the workplace, and predominantly due to their work, there are now 90. Last of all, Sadaqa has looked into establishing incentives for employers to be compliant with Article 72, whether in the form of an award system or a tax break.

Besides daycare provision, Aslam listed low minimum wage and gendered pay gap as other obstacles between women and work. Aslam stated that “it’s not really feasible for [women] to work because when you get paid 220 JDs and you have to pay for daycare and you have to pay for your transportation and of course extra costs like clothing, food, and so on.” Specifically, in the private education sector, the pay gap is quite large. According to Aslam this often causes women to leave the workplace. Another obstacle Aslam sets forth was the lacking public transportation system. Ultimately, while Sadaqa has a laser-focused approach to counteracting the obstacle of the lack of daycare, Aslam was sure not to overlook the weight of cultural perceptions and norms, especially male hesitance to women working and male abandonment of feminized duties like house work. This cultural dimension is compounded with more concrete and perhaps more visible barriers like transportation, pay, and daycare.

Stand With the Teachers - Amman, Jordan
As Aslam mentioned, gendered pay gap is especially prominent in the private education sector of Jordan. Salma, a freelance organizer, has been part of a campaign that began in 2015 and translates to “Stand With the Teachers.” One catalyst for this initiative was ILO studies on pay equity by subsector. These studies revealed that private education has significant pay gaps along with other employment and labor violations. Stand With the Teachers began with 12 founding teachers and ultimately paired with a community organizing cohort called Ahel. At its core, Stand With the Teachers advocates for teachers’ rights. Specifically, according to Salma, the campaign works to “protect their rights to call for the implementation of the collective contract for teachers, the minimum wage, maternity leaves, everything that has to do with labor rights for teachers in the private sector.” In laying out the chronology of the initiative, Salma talked about how between around 1953 and 2013, teachers were battling to re-register their union against a resisting government.

What Salma referred to as a collective contract was the result of a series of negotiations between the Students’ Union, the Teachers Syndicate, and the Ministry of Labor. Salma added that “the first collective contract was implemented in 2015 and the terms by law of collective contracts are renegotiated every two years.” Public schools, on the other hand, by default abide by the collective contract and labor laws. Salma emphasized that private schools are prominent in Jordan, especially in rural areas where there is not easy access to public schools. Salma stated that in Jordan, “there is more supply than demand in the number of teachers. There are so many

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350 Anonymous interview with freelance organizer, August 1, 2018, Amman, Jordan.
reasons for this. Some of it has to do with the official process of becoming a teacher, which is not really that complicated. Any graduate can just go and become a teacher. Some of it has to do with social aspects and some of it has to do with the convenience of school teachers’ lives.” Because there are constantly graduates looking to become teachers, many become tolerant to certain employer violations. She explained, “most teachers endure these violations because they need a job and if they don’t want the job, the school owner tells them ‘you can leave if you want. I can find hundreds of other teachers who are interested to work and endure the violations without any issues.’”

In a way, the significant surplus of teachers makes them dispensable to the employer. The overwhelming majority of teachers, especially in the private sector, are women. Often times, the private school environment is not mixed gendered, which is especially appealing to women and their families. Additionally, working hours are reasonable. One of the demands of Stand With the Teachers is to enforce the established minimum wage for teachers, which is currently a monthly rate of 220 JDs plus 10 JDs per month. Salma added that one of the main demands is “to figure out a mechanism...to ensure that [pay] is monitored because many...school owners make [teachers] sign a receipt...stating that they’ve received the official wage, but under the table they give them in cash less, let’s say 150, 120.”

The campaign has been applying pressure to the Ministry of Education to revise their bylaws regarding the licensing and renewal of licenses for private schools. Specifically, the emphasis is on the inclusion of an article that “demands that
every school has to provide a record of its bank transfers to the teachers employed at their school to the teachers’ bank accounts and that way they can’t give them under the table a different amount or salary.” This has been a huge success of the campaign, as the bylaws are currently being reviewed and will soon be implemented.

Additionally, Stand With the Teachers can serve as a mediator between teachers and schools. This entails helping to solve disputes, especially for female teachers who file complaints or inquiries regarding their rights. Ultimately, Stand With the Teachers tackles the host of barriers that women face not in their transition from school to work, but rather once they have joined the labor market. It does not seem that these violations within the private sector are deterring women from the appeal of this line of work. Nonetheless, acknowledging the hardships women face once employed is still an important piece to the puzzle.

**High Atlas Foundation - Marrakech, Morocco**

Founded in 2000, High Atlas Foundation (HAF) is a Moroccan organization which partners with public, private, and civil society sectors along with local communities to work on initiatives such as improving economic viability in villages and women’s empowerment workshops. HAF began working on projects with women in 2003, and in 2016 they partnered with a program called IMAGINE, part of the Empowerment Institute of the United States. A staff member from HAF attended an IMAGINE training and now conducts the empowerment workshops with rural women in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Program Manager Errachid
Mountassir discussed the challenge of building trust within communities when it comes to implementing these empowerment workshops. He said that “we start first by integrating [the women’s empowerment programs] with the Quran.” In line with the Open Democracy article on Jordan, there’s a need for HAF’s programs about empowerment in Morocco to be compatible with - rather than in contrast to - current belief systems. Incorporating the Quran with these programs lends them legitimacy in the eyes of the beneficiaries and their families. Similar to the work of Education for Employment in both countries, family buy-in is critical.

Initially, women and their families were wary of such programs, but once religion was integrated, people became more eager to join the full four-day trainings. In terms of developing rapport with communities, Mountassir added that in some of the communities, HAF had conducted programs to help farmers plant trees and secure a more reliable income. This was a helpful point of access before introducing the female empowerment programs. Mountassir discussed that the main goals of these workshops are to advance women’s capacities and skills along with their knowledge of their own rights, similarly to that of the Jordanian Women’s Union. These rights are especially important when it comes to marriage and divorce. After beginning these programs, HAF staff began to notice incremental change, and women were starting to create their own cooperatives.

One in particular, a pastry cooperative, began with eight women and now has thirty-five. HAF is in the midst of expanding their programming, and has been

beginning these efforts in the east of Morocco with 25 cooperatives. Part of the aims of these programs with female cooperatives is to equip women with the ability to be part of self-reliant entities. In other words, the goal is for the cooperatives to only rely on their female members instead of consultations with local authorities. This partly means being able to see their selling processes to completion. HAF’s women empowerment programs are mostly geared toward women who have minimal education.

When asked about the way in which HAF conceptualizes empowerment for women, Mountassir emphasized self-reliance and confidence instead of strictly economic independence. HAF also often welcomes women to join the organization for conferences and meetings in cities like Marrakech to expand their network and meet other cooperatives and donors. Generally, Mountassir said the agricultural sector of Morocco, particularly harvesting, is accessible to women. However, Mountassir talked about how women are rarely community leaders or presidents. Within cooperatives, however, they are more easily able to gain acceptance as leaders. Importantly, education is not a prerequisite for such leadership within a cooperative. Instead, Mountassir explained that there are government or civil society trainings women can undergo in order to move straight into leadership positions.

**Droit et Justice - Rabat, Morocco**

Founded in 2009, Droits et Justice is a non-profit that aims to advance the judicial system and promote the rule of law in Morocco, especially for vulnerable
communities like women, children, and asylum seekers. One of their initiatives is regarding child marriage in rural areas. In 2016, Droits et Justice launched a project that tackled discriminatory laws toward women, both through awareness raising and legal assistance. According to executive director Sofia Rais, the child marriage project included similar components such as “lobbying, awareness on consequences of child marriage, awareness among the communities, the judges, the religious leaders.” In order to raise the awareness of judges, Rais discussed how Droit et Justice organizes events they call debates. They bring a series of speakers in order to disseminate as much information and statistics as possible on the health and psychological impacts of granting child marriage authorization. “We call it debate to be nice,” Rais admitted.

Rais added that Droits et Justice spreads awareness and legal information to communities’ religious leaders and female members. Rais explained that, “there are women that don’t know what the family code is in the rural areas. But that’s due to cultural barriers as well. Women don’t read, don’t write, don’t know.” While Droits et Justice does not work on employment laws specifically, Rais did bring up sexual harassment at the workplace as a barrier between women and work. Rais said that even though the law has evolved in its protection against harassment, its application and execution are a different matter. “People don’t know still about it. That’s why we have just finished a legal video explaining what the people can do about sexual

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352 Sofia Rais (Droits et Justice), interview with author, August 6, 2018, Rabat, Morocco.
harassment,” Rais said. Rais’ comments imply the importance of both actual and legal literacy for women.

Another of Droits et Justice initiatives is regarding the separation of assets after divorce which is linked generally to females’ access to finance. Rais also addressed female access to health insurance. She stated that “We know that women have very great difficulty accessing the health insurance and so that’s also a barrier. For instance, if a guy has work the woman is automatically insured through him [does not] necessarily [have] her own insurance...So I think the health sector is one of the components to be looked at...” Later she added that “if women have access to health and the employers are honest about covering that, a lot will change.”

In regard to the relationship between marriage and work, Rais noted that “in Morocco the men tend to [be] more likely want to marry a woman that works...There are a lot of women that do work, single moms that do work, divorcees work and in rural areas usually when they don’t have access to education, they...end up having a choice between either sending off their kid [to be married or work] as a maid in a different city. They work or they bring money in a different way.” This point is crucial to one of the main facets of the story that this thesis presents. In Morocco, a woman is expected to work and thus working, not necessarily education, becomes beneficial to her marriage prospects and intertwined with her social status.
Norms

While it is difficult to precisely trace the origin of cultural norms, it is important to allow feminist movements and discourses surrounding gender equality to enter the picture when discussing female labor. Specifically, it is central to this thesis that there have been stronger, politicized, sustainable efforts to reform patriarchal legal codes, namely the Moudawana, that restrict women’s economic power and independence in Morocco as compared to Jordan. While one cannot assign causation between Morocco’s more politicized feminism or more robust legal reform and Morocco’s higher rates of female labor, these factors are nonetheless important in establishing the cultural landscape within which certain norms operate. They contribute to cultural understandings of women as financial agents and economic contributors, and thus potentially to the more prominent cultural acceptance of female work in Morocco as compared to Jordan.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis sought to detangle the different moving plates often streamlined by development discourses surrounding women in the global south. Specifically, it addressed the puzzle of a highly educated Jordanian female population excluded from the labor market as compared to the relatively lower levels of female education but higher levels of female labor force participation in Morocco. Through engaging in this comparative analysis, the aim was to better grasp the nuances of the intersections between gendered schooling and gendered labor in both countries, along with a series of metrics for female (dis)empowerment. Part of examining the facets of this (dis)empowerment entailed determining a series of barriers that exist between women and work.

The conclusion of this thesis is rooted in a careful reckoning of the cultural perception of female education. In Jordan, with an educational system that has close to equal access, education for women has become widespread and normalized, even expected. Even with high rates of female literacy and enrollment across primary, secondary, and university level education, less than a fifth of Jordanian women are in the workforce, making Jordan’s level of female economic participation hover at one of the globe’s lowest. Clearly, the spread of education for women is not a panacea for other metrics of gender equality such as rates of labor. In Morocco, on

the other hand, there are significantly lower levels of literacy and education for women at all levels. Even so, female labor force participation is higher than that of Jordan at 24.96%. There is a constellation of factors that contribute to these educational, labor, and gender landscapes.

In Jordan, one important dynamic is that it seems many ascribe a certain value to education in and of itself for women. Since female education has become somewhat of a norm, there is not necessarily the expectation that it will be a precursor to work, an investment, or a means to an end. This is not to say that education and work are viewed as completely dissociated entities, but rather that to some extent, there is a degree of social capital for women that comes along with obtaining a degree. There are various permutations of how this might play out in relation to cultural dynamics. I suggest that while there is a widespread acceptance of women learning, there is not a matching degree of acceptance for women working. This alone, however, cannot be the complete story, and its implications as a singular explanation would reify the generalization that women of the global south have families who serve as their primary obstacles.

In actuality, there are also cases in which a single male income is financially inadequate to support a household, thus incentivizing female labor and families’ acceptance of said labor. Ultimately, I contend that a cultural embrace of female work has yet to match the financial demand for it. Additionally, a part of the puzzle is that

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the service sector driven economy of Jordan is strained and simply cannot absorb the highly educated population. In Morocco, on the other hand, agriculture is the sector in which women are concentrated, and perhaps better incorporates a less educated demographic of women.

Furthermore, it is important to look at the point of comparison between Jordan and Morocco when it comes to education as related to marriage. In Jordan, education can be advantageous for one’s prospects in the marriage market, which is connected to the social clout that education carries. Within the cultural context of Jordan, rooted in tribal networks, education holds a certain empowering weight for women that it simply does not tend to hold in Morocco. Fida Adely spells out the way in which we must veer away from using female employment as a litmus test for the value of female education in Jordan. Her ethnographies reveal the ways in which educational spaces can serve as spaces of both discovery and security. Education can afford women an important degree of societal respect and status, particularly through marriage prospects, and thus schooling marks a significant turning point in the transition into adulthood despite not guaranteeing inclusion in the labor market. This logic problematizes the tendency to instrumentalize education, specifically for women, as needing to result in a woman’s departure from her community of origin. Such instrumentalization, too, overlooks nuances of family support systems by suggesting that the familial unit is innately a hindrance to female mobility.

357 Adely, 35.
As for Morocco, Katja Zvan Elliott delineates the way education can delay marriage as well as the powerfully negative stigmas surrounding single, adult, educated females. Leaving one’s community to pursue education could threaten to taint one’s reputation. In Morocco, the detrimental stereotypes of women who leave their home for school make it such that there are perhaps hidden social obstacles, costs even, to education. Both Adely and Zvan Elliott, in different ways, add texture to the quintessentially linear development narratives that often present schooling as a stepping stone for work and work as a stepping stone for advancement.

The first empirical chapter of this thesis analyzed labor. It began by using a feminist lens to deconstruct the gendered element of what we deem valuable work, and specifically identifying how women in Jordan and Morocco spend their time. The chapter proceeded to outline the economic landscapes, labor markets, and foreign aid structures of Jordan and Morocco. One finding was that general youth unemployment in Jordan is higher than that of Morocco, and that the services sector of Jordan cannot accommodate women as can the agricultural sector of Morocco. Plus, Syrian and migrant labor in Jordan pose a unique degree of competition for women seeking work.

The second empirical chapter centered the voices of women, drawing from the narratives of individuals in both countries, from their perspectives on empowerment to their transition from schooling to work to their personal aspirations. These vignettes illuminated factors that an economic discussion does not incorporate.
including the sometimes cosmetic value of education for women, the relationship between work and tribalism, and the potentially gendered element of said tribalism. Generally, ethnographic interviews become especially valuable in an effort to get to the root of women’s perceptions of their own education, their definitions of empowerment, and their way of engaging with the world around them.

The third empirical chapter looked at the two educational systems side by side, assessing their degree of accessibility, their post colonial legacies, and their relationship to national identities. Among the findings were that along with the education system of Jordan having more equal enrolment between the genders, education in Jordan is viewed as more of a social norm or expectation for women in Jordan as compared to Morocco. This chapter also delved into the Jordanian and Moroccan branch of an organization called Education for Employment, reiterating that Jordan seems to have a greater gap between acceptance of education and acceptance of work for women.

While the entire thesis weaves in a discussion of cultural norms, the last empirical chapter attempted to take inventory of these norms, specifically by tracing the feminist movements of both countries as well as the NGOs that have emerged. From making sense of cultural landscapes, one finding was that Morocco’s more politicized veins of feminist discourse and more adamant legal reforms have perhaps contributed to a landscape in which, as compared to Jordan, women are seen as agents within the economic fabric of the country. This could help pave the way for
Morocco’s stronger cultural acceptance of female labor as well as stronger incentives for women themselves to work.

Overall, this thesis draws predominantly from the fields of comparative politics, political economy, and feminist theory. When it comes to perceptions of education, social capital plays an important role and would not be included in conventional discussions of labor. In this way, this story is not just about education but the social perception of education. Simultaneously, when it comes to market demands, social capital and gender norms play an important role and would not be conventionally included in an economic discussion of the market.

One central implication of the argument that this thesis presents is that the various facets of development are more disjointed and less linear than one might expect. High levels of acceptance of women entering school do not guarantee high levels of acceptance of women working. Conceptions of social capital and status differ between cultural contexts and mean that women and their families have varied ways of perceiving the purpose and outcome of education. Ultimately, this reiterates the notion that women of the global south are not passive recipients of a Westernized definition of progress or empowerment. Rather, they exist within complex and varied cultural networks, norms, and systems that interact with female education in different ways.

This thesis is situated amidst development theories, economic and labor theory, and feminist theory. Using Zahidi’s work on female labor in the Arab world as an entry point, this thesis problematizes the narrative which suggests that the
normalization of female education is followed by the normalization of female work. It also complicates this logic of economics trumping culture. In a way, the economic potential of women working is a powerful incentive, both within a single household unit and on a national scale in terms of indicators like GDP. Indeed, many interviewees in Amman pointed out that the cost of living is just too high to rely on only the man’s income. That said, this demand for female labor does not necessarily make the labor force accommodating for women, nor is it evidence of a complete cultural acceptance of female work. Thus, the thesis also speaks to Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom* and the discussion of reconfiguring the metrics we use for human development to better prioritize human rights. Additionally, the thesis is in implicit conversation with Michael Ross’s theory in "Oil, Islam, and Women" that countries with economies rooted in oil have specifically restrictive patriarchal norms. Jordan and Morocco are two countries with economies that are not based in oil but that have significantly different levels of female labor force participation. Thus, the thesis presents dynamics that indicate oil and exclusionary patriarchal constraints are perhaps not as intertwined as Ross suggests. Furthermore, the thesis problematizes Ross’s theory by setting forth the cultural dimension of perceptions of female education - not just economic factors - which are central to discussions of female labor.

In terms of feminist and anthropological theory, the thesis relies heavily on the work of Diane Singerman, Homa Hoodfar, Saba Mahmood, Fida Adely, and Katja

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359 Zahidi, 7.
360 Sen, 3.
Zvan Elliott among others. Each one presents a framework in which women of the global south engage with formulas that Western development discourse prescribes for female empowerment, and these formulas become clouded, complicated, and sometimes inverted. These frameworks lay important groundwork for this thesis through their exploration of the culturally constructed notions of social capital, prying open the assumption that work and school are the most direct routes to fulfillment and empowerment.

This thesis spurs potential questions for future avenues of scholarship. What is the exact relationship between nepotism in hiring and female labor force participation? Furthermore, how does tribalism play into gender discrimination in hiring? What are the short-term and long-term results of gender-sensitive reforms in school curriculums? How do cultures in the region differ in degrees of acceptance of daycare, and how does this impact the feminized double burden? Lastly, in what ways has the model of the female cooperative impacted female labor force participation?
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