

2 The Women's movement in Jordan

Women's lobbying for change in state policy has had a long history in Jordan. In fact, the first female public work in the kingdom goes back to the early 1940s. In this chapter, we will provide a brief historical overview of the development of the women's movement, whereby the diverse factors determining this developmental process are highlighted and discussed. The chapter closes with a surveying of the involvement of external and internal factors, specifically governmental, UN, and international NGO sponsors, in programs related to women's legal status and their participation in political life.

2.1 The Life Cycles

According to many scholars, women's public work in Jordan has its early beginnings in the 20th century (Department of Publications 1979; al-Tall 1985; Nafa' 1999). The establishment of the first women's organization in Jordan goes back to the year 1944, when some women started the so called (Women's Solidarity Society) with queen Misbah (The wife of King Abdullah (the first), and the mother of King Talal) as the honorary president. The so-called Women's Solidarity Society focused on helping those in-need by providing financial aid.

Furthermore, the emergence of women's action in other Arab countries has influenced women and women's public work in Jordan. Huda Sha'rawi a women's activist from Egypt, paid Jordan a visit in 1944. While meeting with King Abdullah (the first) she asked for his permission in establishing a women's union branch in Jordan following along the footsteps of women in Egypt and many other Arab countries. The first "Women's Union Society" was established directly hereafter (1945), and this time with princess Zain Al Sharaf¹ as the active president. This society represented a slight difference from the first Women's Solidarity Society. It had an office, so that members did not need to meet in houses, and it focused for the first time on fighting illiteracy among women. Apart from fighting illiteracy, the organization followed the same strategies (implemented by the Women's Solidarity Society), such as offering

¹ The Wife of King Talal and the Mother of King Hussein.

help to the poor, the refugees, and orphans basing on charity concepts. Later in 1949, the two organizations merged and were then dissolved in the same year because of some conflicts between the members (Nafa' 1999). In general, women's initiatives during this period involved meetings and seminars aimed at raising women's awareness in health and welfare issues and to assist them in attending to their children's needs.

The arrival and integration of large numbers of Palestinians who had been active politically against the British Mandate in Palestine prior to 1948 has had a major impact on the history and development of civil society organizations and the women's actions. The Arab-Israeli Wars have shifted the work of both Jordanian and Palestinian women to another sphere, whereby the focus (this time) was on dealing with the war outcomes, i.e. dealing with the refugees' problems, and the Palestine question. Their work appeared as a voluntary, cohesive action. Moreover, while women's activities on other fronts might have been suspect during this period, efforts aimed at addressing the Palestine problem were much more likely to be tolerated and thus served as a focal point around which women might rally to work. On the other hand, the preoccupation with external issue combined with the rivalries between various political groups led to an ignoring of social developments in Jordan itself.

Until the war took place in the region, the state did not interfere directly in social work or societies; on the contrary, the state and political system were open to interact with diverse political power, in what Brand (1998) refers to as the first liberalization phase in Jordan (Brand: 36). During the war, there was an ardent need for the regulation of voluntary work. The Social Affairs Department was established in 1951 for this reason. Among the main responsibilities of this ministry was the supervision of voluntary work as regulated by the Charitable and Societies Law (which forbids political activity by its subject organizations). Between 1951 and 1979, more than 340 charitable organizations were established throughout the kingdom, only 32 of which focused solely on women's activities (GFSCJ 1999). These groups were generally comprised of some wealthy women who, as a way of filling free time, provided assistance to elevate poverty or to support orphanages and similar social categories.

Most of their time was devoted to parties and elaborate meetings, with little energy spent on 'serious work' related to the woman's question (al-Tall 1985).

The establishment of the Arab Women Federation (AWF) on June 17, 1954 marked a qualitative change in the type of women's organizations active in Jordan. As in other Arab countries, women were caught up in the ferment of the 1950s and were actively helping the disabled Palestinians, so that the entire atmosphere was one of political activity. Emily Bisharat, (the first female lawyer in Jordan) was elected president at a founding meeting held in Amman, which was attended by some 800 women (al-Tal: 56).

The main goals of the AWF were; eliminating illiteracy, raising women's socioeconomic level, and developing friendships between Arab women and women around the world in order to improve the situation at home (126). The degree of woman's involvement in broader national issues was clear from the union's slogan: Equal rights and responsibilities, Liberating Palestine, and full Arab Unity (151).

Branches of the AWF spread all over the main cities in Jordan, and the membership grew into the thousands. Activities focused on increasing women's political awareness. The main activity conducted by this federation was the demand to change electoral Law. In early November 1954, the AWF presented its first memorandum to the prime minister requesting a change in the electoral law, so as to give women the right to run for office and to vote in municipal and paramilitary elections. Some political parties and professional associations supported this quest.

The government took the matter under advisement and the legal committee in parliament recommended that an amendment be discussed. However, when the proposed changes were published, they stipulated that only educated women could vote, which caused an outrage, since any illiterate male had the right to vote and run for office. Women were not satisfied with the changes done renewed and repeated their petition. Shortly thereafter, several other meetings, letters and protest to the relevant authorities were carried out. The AWF then sponsored a women's week in order to discuss the issue of changing the law. Participants, among them representatives of the political parties, agreed on a number of issues, which were

forwarded to the relevant authorities: Equality between women and men in political, representative, and municipal rights, equality in all levels of education; schools for girls and improved conditions in rural areas².

In the realm of more broadly political activity, women were, among other issues, in the forefront with demonstrations of support for Palestine, and standing against Zionism,. In the context of the emergence of the Arab nationalism, mainly in 1956, the federation sat up a media campaign demanding that women receive first aid training. The authorities agreed and officers from the Jordanian army trained female volunteers³.

In the meantime, women continued to send their memos each time there was a cabinet restructuring, and finally the government agreed to examine the electoral law. In cooperation with other political parties⁴ and other women's societies, the AWF held an historic festival on February 5, 1956, which was well attended despite having had snow. With its conclusion, telegrams were sent to the king, prime minister, and to the president of the senate.

The war of 1967 and the defeat, turned again the attention to the question of Palestine and the Israeli occupation. At this point, the nationalist as well as the political context have defined what is urgent and has to be stressed and what is not and thus can wait. Women's issues within these circumstances were delayed; and women engaged in actions related to Palestine issue and defined again by the social context and the male nationalists. Nevertheless, not all these direct and indirect actions lasted long as parliamentary life was suspended in 1967. Political parties and their activities had already been banned since 1957. Democratic liberties were no longer in existence, and a policy of repression was applied throughout country for many years. All these

² Personal Interview with Nafa'

³ Personal Interview with Nafa'.

⁴ Political situations during this period were very opportune to calling for an active role of women in politics. The political system at that time was open to all forms of radical work; political parties, however, supported women as they were full members of the parties. The communist party for example, identified women's political, social and economic rights from the beginning. The first political program of the communist party in 1951 addressed special attention to women in their main program, and stipulated that: "Supporting the liberation projects of Jordanian women, and seeking equality between women and men in all political social, and economic aspects is the main element of our social agenda" .(Nafa', Personal interview).

measures had left an impact on women's activities. The political crackdown counted the AWF among its casualties. Women in this case kept working secretly in many small societies, such as the "Arab Women Awake Bond"⁵, which was founded in 1956 by some female members of the communist party (Nafa')⁶.

What can be generally said in this context about women's action is that it focused initially on "national struggle". This focus meant that many other women's concerns were not addressed. Women's and other 'less important' issues had to take a secondary significance to the national problem for fear that the main stream action should not be diverted from that central concern. In other words, the focus on the Palestinian question led to a delay in the emergence of a national women's movement, which was concerned primarily with greater political change in the kingdom. For several years, women activists had limited options; to work with one of the underground parties or simply with the charitable society of their choice⁷.

One final point can be added here is that it is not clear that these actions were primarily initiated by grass roots women. The support these actions have gained from the nationalist movement allows some speculations in this respect. In fact, while women seemed to be encouraged by the parties of the left; the issue of supporting their political participation seemed also like being handed down from them.

2.2 Contemporary Developments

Up until 1974 no women's organization of any sort existed in the country. The first sign of impending change came on March 5, 1974 with a letter from the king regarding a franchise for women. The king's letter, which included a royal decree finally amending the electoral law allowing women the right to vote, came within the

⁵ In 1970, the WAB was licensed under the name of Arab Women Society, which has worked in the refugee camps until now, in addition to many other activities. This organization is now known as the Arab Women Society.

⁶ Personal Interview with Emily Nafa': the head of the Arab Women Society, and a member of the Jordanian Communist Party. In the Interview Nafa' argued that the Women's Awake Bond was put in action again and worked publicly in 1967 under the name of Arab Women Bond. The main office of the bond was located in the Lawyers professional association's head quarters in Amman. The activities of this organization were more political than anything else, for it has dedicated a considerable focus on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Nafa').

⁷ Personal Interview with Nafa'.

milieu of preparations for the UN Decade for Women, which was scheduled to begin in 1975.

In 1974, a pioneering group of women known for their past performance in women's voluntary work, along with some former AWF activists met under attorney Emily Bashrat⁸ to arrange a celebration for International Women's Day, and also to prepare for the International Women's year, which was declared by the UN to take effect in 1975. A preparatory committee was formed to celebrate the occasion. The committee was called 'National Woman's Grouping in Jordan'.

The committee re-instated the activities of the Jordanian Woman's Union, which was dissolved in 1957. On November 17, 1974, the union was re-established under the name of the 'Society of the Women's Federation in Jordan' (WFJ), as a popular organization officially recognized by the ministry of interior and one which embraced all female sectors. Emily Bashrat was elected as president of the union. The goals of the WFJ were familiar: To unify and organize women's activities and efforts and to serve as Jordan's representative on the pan- Arab and international levels. They intended to; raise women's educational and socioeconomic levels; to support women's rights to exercise their full rights as citizens, workers, and heads of households; and to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation within Arab and international women's organizations (Nafa'). In the first six years of the WFJ's activity, its membership grew from 100 to some 3000, with some 1,500 in Amman⁹. The federation opened branches all over the kingdom. The WFJ operated training, literacy centers, and sponsored services for children including nurseries. It also briefly published a magazine al- Rayadah, until the state publications department closed it without explanation. Among the federation's regular programs were weekly seminars, lectures, story or poetry readings, trips, fundraising dinners, and annual charity bazaars to sell the products of the various training centers.

⁸ Emily Bisharat was the first female lawyer in Jordan. She was known as a women's activist and she was the president of the first women's union that was established in the 50's and reestablished in the 70's. Although she is recognized by almost all Jordanian women's activists, there is no sign that she is actively working in respect to women at present.

⁹ A personal Interview with al-Saket in March 2001.

In the political realm the WFJ demanded the right to participate in discussions of the Labor Law, and the right to attend seminars and conferences in order to offer better presentations of women, whether in the field of education, labor, or political rights, and the adoption of Arab and international resolutions opposing discrimination against women. Yet, with the parliament inactive there was no opportunity to mobilize women to exercise their newly granted right to vote.

Another important highlight in the developmental process of the women's movement was marked in 1979, namely by the appointment of the first female cabinet minister. In'am al-Mufti who was appointed the Minister of Social Development. Running her office al-Mufti initiated a project that aimed at incorporating all women's activities into a single organizational framework that would function under the control of the ministry. Her efforts revealed the initiation of a new women's union¹⁰.

In 1980, a meeting headed by Mufti was held and included a range of female activists, who were thought to form Jordan's delegation in the upcoming United Nations Women's Decade meeting in Copenhagen¹¹. At this meeting, the idea of the new women's union was presented within a paper entitled "The Ministry of Social Development- Women's Organizing". The women activists involved in these plans were again invited to a meeting on September 5, 1981. The General Federation for Jordanian Women came as a conclusion to this meeting and was considered operative from that date. The newly established federation included many small societies and charities as members.

The plans to establish a general federation for women's organizations was the first step, whereby the state began to limit the WFJ. As will be explained later, the WFJ received a letter from the Ministry of Interior dated October 26, 1981 in which it ordered its closure. The WFJ's activists decided to fight the order. Ironically the high Court of Justice –due to bureaucratic conflicts during the period of martial law- did not look into the case and in fact ruled against the Ministry of Interior¹². Hence, the WFJ was considered operative again, yet under a new name " Jordanian Women's

¹⁰ Personal Interview with al-Saket: The Jordanian Women's Union.

¹¹ Personal Interview with Emily Nafa'.

¹² Personal Interview with al-Saket

Union". In the meantime, the GFWJ was recognized outside Jordan by the General Federation of Arab Women, yet was relatively isolated on the internal level. Consequently, the state had to consider other measures in order to limit women's action after the GFJW failed to do this function.

The 1980s was also a significant phase for the general political developments in Jordan. The atmosphere of liberalization projects launched in the late eighties helped to enhance the influx of many civil societal and women's activities. Moreover, this stage was favorable for the progress of many women's organizations, or at least in refreshing their actions. In addition, this stage witnessed the beginnings of the democratic experiment in the Jordanian society, the call for equality and the respect of others views. This liberalization opened the door to energizing women's NGO, which are concerned with national political and social issues affecting women. Many issues were also addressed in this period such as; domestic violence, abortion, and the changing of the nationality law, all of which were not generally discussed before the liberalization. This period has witnessed also a great competition; not only between the independent JWU and the GFJW, but also between the JWU and those initiatives and activities launched by Princesses Basma.

Meanwhile, there has been an increased interest in the women's question on the international level, and this has left a positive as well as negative impact on the women's struggle in Jordan (as will be discussed later in more detail). The UN, international organizations and local human rights NGO's constantly pressure the regimes in Arab states to improve the state of human rights in general and women's rights in particular. As Jordan has signed the international convention on eliminating discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1980, and ratified it in 1992, several measurements were underway in order to fulfill the recommendations emphasized by the convention. According to the convention those states signed have to provide reports describing what has been done in respect to enhancing women's status at both the state and civil society levels. In this connection, the national measurements took many forms. Most importantly was the designation of Princess Basma to head the national delegation to Beijing and supervise the preparations for Jordan's participation in this event. Each country was supposed to have a focal point organization in order to

serve as coordinate to NGO preparations for Beijing. Discussions at the level of preparations had resulted in the establishment of the National Commission of Women's Issues, which included the creation of the National Strategy for Women, which was also the main focus of the official report that was presented in the conference. The princess role in this context included also heading the National Commission, which has been housed within the Queen Alia Fund¹³, and is also administrated by her¹⁴.

The preparations for Beijing included various women's activists and organizations. Jordan's position to all the issues discussed at the Beijing conference was noted to be within the framework of the 'Arab' traditions and culture, and in keeping with its Islamic heritage. In order to manifest the importance of cultural heritage, the delegation to Beijing included one Islamic Action Front (IAF) female member (Fa'ouri) yet, she was not included in the preparation of the national report¹⁵. Moreover, the princess –shortly after her return from Beijing- held a meeting with the IAF MPs to review the outcomes of the conference. Observers noted that no other meetings were held with deputies from other parliamentary blocs or parties (Brand 1998). Such an action could be interpreted as that the state seeks an alliance with Islamists in this specific realm (women's concern). The function of such an alliance, as one might argue, is on one hand to secure more representation for the Princess and her initiatives at the sociopolitical level as well as to provide them with the necessary legitimacy representing and defending women's issues. On the other hand, it can also be partly understood as an attempt to marginalize and limit the role of other independent women's organizations, stressing the frame of the princess initiatives' that respect both heritage and religion..

Another remarkable development in this period was the number of workshops; seminars and conferences devoted either entirely or partly to women's issues. While many of these activities had been funded and encouraged by foreign aid agencies, in many cases they have also been extensions of the activities of existing organizations.

¹³ Queen Alia Fund is now known as the Jordanian Hashmite Fund.

¹⁴ Personal Interview with Amal Sabbagh in April 2001.

¹⁵ Pwersonal Interview with Dr. Amal Sabbagh, the Head of the National Commission of Jordanian Women.

Media coverage of women's meetings, whether chaired by the princess or sponsored by one of the major women's organizations, has been prominent and has played a role in sensitizing people to women's concerns.

To summarize, three main developmental phases of the women's movement are to be distinguished. The first phase represents the early formation processes of women's organizations. This phase starts with the establishment of the first women's organization in 1944 and ends up with the application of the martial laws. Women's organizations during this phase were merely small societies, which were active in providing social services. Changes in this respect were evident in the mid-1950s with the establishment of WFJ, which was considered more organized and having an agenda for women. Yet, the main action in women's favor during this phase was not evident until 1959. What can be generally said about women's action during this phase is that despite the active demands of women's political rights, no real mobilizations of other women's concerns were available. In fact, women's and other socially related issues were considered less important, when compared to the main goals of the nationalist movement, or to the Palestinian question. The second phase represents a transformation phase at the level of women's organizations and actions. This phase characterizes women's action in the period between 1973- and 1989. Yet, we may describe this phase as being of a transformatory form, for women during this phase were allowed to establish or reestablish their efforts after almost two decades of no real action except that of providing 'harmless' social services. This phase has also witnessed the first intervention attempts from the state's party in women's actions, namely that of the establishment of the so-called General Federation of Women. As mentioned earlier the main aim behind the establishment of the GFJW was to serve as the only umbrella of women's actions and organizations in the kingdom. The post liberalization phase (the phase after 1989) opened the door for diverse changes at the level of women's interests and organizations. At the level of activism, this phase has witnessed an active role from the state in women's issues and actions. The state's intervention during this phase was represented by the active involvement of Princess Basma and her initiatives in the realm of women's concerns. This form of state feminism has provided a relatively conservative approach to women's advancement. This made the establishment of alliances between this form of feminism and the country's traditional 'giants' easier, namely among the Islamists and the tribalists. In fact, the independent women's action still has to struggle hard in order to mobilize any of their interests. After all, the most significant development during this phase to be registered is the fact that diverse new issues have openly been discussed, such as violence, abortion, and legal

reforms. However, the last few years have carried out diverse promising changes in respect to the women's status and action in the country. The year 2002 has registered significant improvements in the legal system especially in women's favor. It has also pointed out an active involvement of the new queen (Rania) in the field of women's issues, after claiming an active involvement in charity and social development fields practiced through her NGO (known as the Jordan River Society).

Her active enrollment in the field of women's issues was evident through her active participation in the 'Amman Summit for Arab Women' (November 2002), which included the participation of several Arab first ladies, and activists from all over the region. In November 3, 2002, the queen announced some adopted amendments on the laws concerning passports, nationality and retirement (Jordan Times, November 03, 2002). These amendments "will give the Jordanian woman equal rights as granted by the constitution" (Jordan Times, November 03, 2002). Moreover, similar changes were also proved by the king who later approved in 2002 amendments to the law articles regulating the phenomena of the so-called honor crimes. Yet, how significant are these new developments for women's action and status in Jordan? And how can they be explained? We argue that there are diverse factors that play a significant role in shaping the form and direction of these developments in the realm of activism and women's interests.

2.3 External and Internal factors shaping the contemporary developments of the women's movement

We argue that our study of the women's movement is to be considered as an attempt to situate the development of women's action and the women's movement within the mainstream of political and social transformation processes proceeding in the Jordanian society. From the general historical overview provided above, we have learned that the development of the women's movement in terms of size, organizational forms, structure, and work focus has been subject to diverse internal and external factors. Among the most important of these factors are: 1) The political transformation in Jordan and the development of the political system; 2) the international interest in women and women's issues represented by the UN initiatives and activities; and, 3) the development that happened at the societal level namely with regard to some changing patterns in women's lives (in the fields of education, employment and active participation in Public (political) life). Next, we will briefly

discuss the role of each factor, in order to get a clear idea of the general context wherein the women's movement performs its actions and conduct its projects.

2.3.1 Political Developments Since 1989

Due to the application of the economic structural programs riots in southern Jordan triggered in the late 1980s. These are believed to have forced among other reasons the regime turning to a limited form of democratization. For the first time since martial law was imposed in the 1950s, the government lifted the ban on political parties, loosened press restrictions and allowed Parliamentary elections for the Lower House¹⁶.

The aggravating economic crisis and inability to pay back foreign debts compelled the government of Prime Minister "Zaid Rifai"¹⁷ to resort to the International Monetary Fund to reschedule Jordan's foreign debts. Consequently, the Jordanian currency was devaluated by 50% against foreign currencies, compelling the government to raise the prices of fuel and other basic commodities. This generated in April 1989 an outbreak of large-scale popular protests in Ma'an that rapidly extended to other cities and regions in Jordan (Jameel al-Nimri, 1994:62). The protests represented a political uprising raising demands and calling for the combat of corruption, the abrogation of martial law, allowing public liberties, and improving the living standards of the people (Jameel al-Nimri, 1994:59).

The 1989 elections indicated a new phase of political development in Jordan, as the following were achieved: The elimination of martial law, legal recognition and acceptance of the party pluralism that exist in the country, resumption of parliamentary life on the basis of a free and competitive periodic election, expansion of power in the civil judiciary. One of the most significant achievements in this context is the establishment of the Supreme Court, which could now look into appeals by citizens and institutions against the administrative decision made by the government. The promising political transformation has resulted in a democratic

¹⁶One year before launching the project of democratization in Jordan, namely on July 30, 1988, the Jordanian government decided to disengage Jordan's administrative and legal link with the West Bank. This decision followed an Arab summit conference held in Algeria, and resulted the renewal of the recognition of the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and their right of establishing an independent state. Meanwhile, the king dissolved the 10th House of Representatives, which represents the constituencies of the two banks of the river Jordan. Nevertheless, in early October 1988 the king issued a decree postponing elections until further notice.

¹⁷ Rifai was Jordan's Prime Minister from April 4, 1985 – April 27, 1989

elections, which in turn enjoyed a wide participation of diverse political fractions in the country, namely the Islamists.

However, to the political transformation process belongs political openings and closings. In fact, the development of Jordan's political opening was negatively influenced by several regional events, which left their imprints on the contemporary history of the country. The first were the consequences of the second Gulf war (August 1990-February 1991), which led to the weakening of Jordan's relations with the Arab Gulf countries. What resulted was that these countries closed their markets to Jordanian exports, and the collective return of Jordanian and Palestinian workers and expatriates, estimated at 90,000 people from the Gulf (Jordan Times November 24, 1991). In conclusion, the impact of the second Gulf War has escalated the economic crisis in Jordan; causing more demands on the government as well as more pressure on people, whose demands on the government increased in turn. The second relevant issue in this concern is related the launching of the peace process in the middle east in late 1991 directly after the second Gulf war, and the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement on October 26, 1994.both events (the Gulf War and the peace treaty played significant role defining the course of further political developments. In fact, responsive to the societal reaction with regard to these issues, some gradual and partly reversal measurement were under taken by the state. The application of reversal measurements such as constricting civil rights and the expressing on of free public opinion (Brand 1999:55) led many to describe the political opening in Jordan as: "a negotiated transition" (Springborg: 3),"a regime survival strategy" (Wiktorowics 1989); or "defensive democratization" (Robinson 1998: 389), all referring to the state's strategy to maintain the dominant political order. These terms highlight the transition's limited nature and the maintenance of tight control by the state over the direction of change.

Despite all these semi-negative descriptions of democracy in Jordan, the political opening at this level allowed the emergence of various civil society organizations, particularly (as we will see) various women's organizations. These organizations were able to mobilize diverse women's issues that were taboo in the Jordanian public space in earlier phases. In fact, while independent women's organizations (as we will see in

the coming chapter) had to struggle with authorities in order to mobilize their interests, their actions were confronted by real competition of active governmental organizations. Moreover, still these organizations suffer by state intervention and control over them. As we will soon see, these organizations, according to laws, are to be established for public work, which includes no “Politics”. The practice of politics (left- politics) would risk the existence of the organizations. The legal framework (discussed in detail in chapter five), which regulates women’s movement activities, gives a clear perspective in this respect. Social and economic problems have however shaped the course of work in these organizations. The state’s withdrawal from many areas due to economic problems opened the door for many NGO’s to emerge in the Jordanian public sphere and to work actively covering the gaps which the state’s withdrawal left behind.

A new phase of political transformation in the country was evident in 1999. The late King Hussein Died in November 1999 and was followed by his elder son Abdullah. The succession of King Abdullah II promised a return to a greater political liberalization. In fact, the press law of 1999 offered a greater media freedom than 1997 and 1998 versions of the law. However, the ascent of the new king to the throne was also accompanied by diverse national, regional and international events, which have had also significant negative impacts on the development of the genuine democratization process. The outbreak of the second Intifada in late September 2000, the September 11, 2001 restraints, and the continuous American threats of a war against Iraq, were the main determinant factors defining the course of further political development in Jordan. These events led to pressure and unrest among Jordanians of diverse background who have attempted to make their political voices heard through demonstrations and public debate. Some of these action went undemocratic, or even seemed to support undemocratic actions carried out by diverse groups all over the world. In actual fact, while some demonstrations aimed at representing some critical voices of aware citizen; some others abused of the political moments and heated the crowd in some anti-democratic manners.

The government’s response to this growing debate has, yet, been radical and went to restrain political activity of many kinds. In this context, diverse political

measurements have been undertaken. In June 2001, the parliament was ‘constitutionally’ dissolved; and the elections (normally to take place in November every four year) were postponed. Moreover, a series of temporary laws related to regulating freedom of speech were put into power, in order to keep regional tensions from overflowing into the kingdom. The application of these laws (as will soon be explained) were justified by the fact that these are urgent situations, and in order to protect the security of the state, it would be then dangerous to wait for Parliament to reconvene.

2.3.1.1 The Parliament dissolved and the elections postponed

In June 2001, the King dissolved the Parliament, which had served four years. In light of the previously described circumstances (the second Intifada, and the threats of War on Iraq) the King postponed the elections scheduled for November 2001 until September 2002, and again to the year of 2003 (Jordan times, August,25 2002). The King then approved several temporary laws related to broadening the authority of State Security Courts, and restricting public gatherings (Schwedler 2003). The “temporary” emergency laws were passed by the government and then approved by King Abdullah in the absence of Parliament.

Again, the context of new regional international happenings has forced the government to adopt such measurements. The government seems to have intended to prevent ‘violent’ demonstrations in support of the Palestinian Intifada, Iraq, or even to demonstrate against the war in Afghanistan. In fact, since September 11, 2001, no demonstrations have been allowed and a number of people were arrested at the end of September and in the beginning of October 2001 for holding gatherings to memorialize the first anniversary of the Palestinian Intifada and to protest the war in Afghanistan (Schwedler 2003).

However, the new elections are now planned to take place in June 2003 with a wide participation of oppositional figures and the Islamists who decided to boycott the election of 1997. Moreover, the elections will take place this time with a wide participation of women, who gained according to the new election law a quota of 10 seats in the Parliament (Jordan Times, January, 23, 2003).

2.3.1.2 The application of temporary laws

Since assuming power in 2001, the government of Ali Abul Ragheb passed about 90 temporary laws (Schwedler 2003). These laws came in response to the diverse earlier viewed national, regional and international happenings. In this context Jordan and the Jordanian leadership were viewed in very negative terms in some Arab media; namely Al Jazeera news station¹⁸ (Jordan Times, August 8, 2002). In addition, some other national opposition-figures and journalists have charged the government of Abul Raghieb as being corrupt. The government aware of its image declared some urgent temporary laws that aimed in the first place (as viewed by Jordanian officials) to regulate the work of anti-Jordanian media inside the country. In this context, all activities that 'contradict' the views of the state are inclusively restricted or suppressed (Bustani 2001)..

The constitution, however, allows for temporary laws only in urgent situations to protect the security of the state, when it would be dangerous to wait for parliament to reconvene. In light of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States the government passed on some new laws supposedly aimed at combating terrorism. The laws have partly restricted freedoms of expression, association and assembly. The current temporary laws that tackle public liberties include the temporary elections law for 2001, the temporary law amending the state security court law for 2001, the temporary general gatherings law for 2001, and the temporary law amending the penal law for 2001. The temporary law amending the state security court law for 2001 gives the security forces a period of 7 days to detain an individual before referring him to the general prosecutor. And it gave the prime minister the authority to refer any case he wants to the State's Security Court (Bustani 2001). This increases the power of the government on the expense of civil society actors, and might lead to a mishandling of power.

The temporary general gathering law for 2001 bans any general meeting, or gathering, except if it had a written permission from the government to be applied for 3 days

¹⁸ In august 2002, the Jordanian government pulls plug on al-Jazeera. The move came after the airing of a show considered an affront by the country's royal family. Al-Jazeera the Qatar-based station's correspondents are no more allowed to operate in Jordan. The dispute is over a talk show that blasted the royal family for complicity with the West and allegedly betraying Arab aspirations in Iraq and the Palestinian territories (Jordan Times, August 8, 2002).

earlier of the event. The law considers the decision of the government (whether positive or negative) final. It also empowers the government to dismiss any gathering by force if the event diverted from its specific goals. The law also considered those applied for the event legally responsible if there was any disturbance to public security or order or if any damage occurred to individuals or private or public property (Bustani).

On October 8, 2001, the government amended the Penal Code, enacted a new “Anti-Terrorist” law, and introduced a restrictive Press Law. The new “Anti-Terrorist” law stipulates that “anyone who commits an act which undermines the political regime in Jordan or incites others to do so, and anyone who acts individually or collectively to change the economic, social or fundamental situation of the society can be sentenced to hard labor”. It also instructs that “ anyone who “slanders” the King or other members of the royal family can be sentenced to three years imprisonment (Bustani). The law also provides for imprisonment for writings or speeches that “undermine national unity, incite others to commit crimes, sow the seeds of hatred and division in society, disrupt society’s basic norms by promoting deviation, spread false information or rumors, incite others to destabilize or organize demonstrations or strikes in contradiction to the law, or commit any act which undermines the dignity and reputation of the state” (Schwedler 2002). According to this law, the penalties for press violations were increased to a maximum of \$7,000 and three years in prison (Schwedler). A vivid example of the new Press Law’s application is the case of Taujan Faisal, a prominent journalist, women’s rights advocate and former parliamentarian (1994-1997). Taujan Faisal (as will be discussed in details in the coming chapter) was- among several other journalists- imprisoned for criticizing the governmental policies and performance.

The most troubling aspect of the temporary laws- as seen by many observers- is the extent to which violations of a wide range of laws are now referred to the State Security Court (Schwedler 2002). Any activity that potentially threatens the integrity of the state –a broad notion that state agents may interpret as they see fit - is trailed under the penalties of the penal code. Acts that threaten state security now include outspoken journalism, illegal public gatherings (of six or more people) and any

criticism of the royal family and the government (Schwedler). The law amendments caused also a huge civil societal reaction, namely that of the amendments to the law of the State Security Court. Lawyers association for instance took a one-week action in protest of the government's recently passed temporary laws. They argue that these amendments give the premier the right to legislate and incriminate. This is considered " a violation of the Constitution and against the powers of the legislative and judicial authorities" (The Star July 06, 2002).

2.3.1.3 The Campaign of "Jordan First"

According to the definition of the National Commission established for the purpose of creating a national campaign called Jordan First, "Jordan First" is "a comprehensive and developing project to enhance elements of power in Jordanian society," (The Star, November 1, 2002).

The national commission, which included 31 members representing diverse social strata in the country, was established in late October 2002. In a message he sent to his prime minister (Abul Ragheb) following the killing of the American diplomat in Amman, the King called on the Jordanian people to seek for crystallizing "a social contract through daily practice of our priorities", calling on the opposition to "play its role concerning the government's policies and not to oppose the state's unwavering principled stance"(The Star, October, 2002).

The campaign focused mainly on providing the government's vision through media. In fact, the concept of the slogan "Jordan First" is being observed everywhere on the roofs of buildings, on public transport vehicles, and in addition to advertisements in newspapers. In addition, diverse statements made on Jordanian TV by commission members (who include current and former ministers, senators and lawmakers as well as academics, professionals, business people and independent Islamists) reflect how differently each of them sees his mission, which is perfectly healthy and natural so long as Jordan comes first (Jordan Times).

Five committees were formed in order to carry out the concept behind the 'Jordan First' slogan and bring it in into action. These committees include: "The Constitutional Court

Committee” comes first and aims at laying the foundation for establishing a constitutional court later this year. This committee will have to prospect the possibilities of having such a court in Jordan that would not defy the Constitution. The second committee is the ‘Political Parties Law Committee.’ It is responsible for drafting amendments to the current parties’ law in order to guarantee their participation in the decision-making process. The committee will also study the subject of mergers among political parties to enhance the democratic process in the Kingdom. This committee consists of 18 members; it also includes former ministers and experts in political studies. The government also assigned ‘The Women’s Quota Committee’ to conduct an extensive study on the best way for Jordanian women to enter parliament. More than half of the committee’s 16 members are women.

The ‘Anti-Corruption and Nepotism Committee’ aims to form a national code of ethics for all Jordanians to instill the principles of transparency and citizenship among Jordanians. Former ministers, journalists, and university professors are included in the 16-member committee. The final committee focuses on the “Professional Associations and Civil Societies”. It is the biggest and tackles one of the most controversial issues in the Kingdom. This committee will establish the mechanisms to regulate PA activities in a way that will not affect their role in the development of civil society.

However, shortly after it was launched, the campaign faced many national as well as regional critiques. Fahed Alfani in an article published in the Daily Star summarizes several reasons for which the "Jordan First" catch phrase is being misinterpreted and misunderstood. He argues that the fact that the slogan was proposed at a time when significant events emerged in Iraq and Palestine, is leading some to believe that its purpose was to abandon the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples under the pretext of looking after Jordan’s interests (Daily Star, 2002). Schwedler (2002), however, disparages the campaign by arguing that it “was surely chosen so that no Jordanian could oppose the campaign without appearing unpatriotic” (Middle East Report: 23). For her, “anyone expressing support for Palestinians or Iraqis, for example, is not putting Jordan first”. Similarly, “anyone critical of state policies at this "time of war", is not putting Jordan first” (24).

Yet, several Jordanians (as the above noted Alfani) express support for the campaign, both publicly and privately. They point to the economy, which remains in a crisis despite recent jumps (and likely future increases) in US aid to the kingdom (Daily Star 2002). The problems of Palestinians and Iraqis certainly deserve attention, they argue, but Jordan needs to attend to its own needs first. Moreover, the campaign raised a

significant issues used as one of the main "taboos", that of national 'Jordanian' identity. The National Commission in fact, demanded the elimination of questions about the "original hometown" from all governmental application documents. This demand had always been raised by many Jordanians especially those Jordanians with Palestinian origins. This question, which is also asked in security stations, courts and other government institutions, contradicts the principles of national unity according to the new "Jordan First" thinking.

In this context one might argue that Jordan First is one of the main steps necessary for forcing civil society in Jordan to set its own priorities which comes for the most part from the national context. In fact, besides its active involvement in regional issues and conflicts, civil society now has the chance to create a national agenda that covers first and foremost the needs of people living in Jordan who suffer from active integration, poverty, and partial political exclusion. The women's movement in this respect provides the best example for being preoccupied with regional and international issues and with saving the women's agenda for later phases. The lack of focus on women for so long time had led women to support the agendas of diverse political fractions and generally prioritizing political issues at the expense of women's issues. Yet, when the time was convenient for demanding a women's agenda, women activists found themselves in a dilemma having to fight for issues they should have fought for long time ago¹⁹. Issues like violence against women and political participation are a few examples of such issues that should have occupied the women's agenda since the commencement of their activism in the 1940s.

Now let us look through in more details concerning the content of the diverse changes registered in women's favor in this phase. Namely, in terms of reform laws.

2.3.1.4 Jordanian women benefiting from the absence of the conservative parliament

Jordanian Women in the context of these reversal measurements are believed to have benefited from the liberal thinking of the royal family, and the absence of the

¹⁹ Personal Interview with Emily Nafa' in March 2001.

conservative parliament. The Arab Women Summit held in Amman in November 2002, brought along with it different improvements in respect to women's legal status in Jordan. The summit brought together figures active in the field of the advancement of women across the Arab World. The first ladies from the Arab World, representatives of women's movements, non-governmental organizations, as well as some key international figures joined to openly discuss the challenges facing women in the region in order to further activate their role in the sustainable development.

The summit aimed at coordinating Arab efforts towards ensuring equality between men and women in the Arab community. A strategy and an implemental plan of action for the next two years has also been discussed in order to enhance women's political participation and their contribution to the economic development of their countries.

Jordan's participation in this summit has resulted in several significant improvements in women's favor. In November 3, 2002 the queen made the announcement during the opening day of the summit in Amman, which was dedicated to improving the conditions of women: "I am pleased to announce that the council of ministers has adopted amendments on the laws concerning passports, nationality and retirement" (Jordan Times, November 03, 2002). These amendments "will give the Jordanian woman equal rights as granted by the constitution" (Jordan Times, 2002). Yet, no specific date was mentioned as to when they will go into effect.

As interpreted by women activist, the amendments grant Jordanian women (married to foreign nationals) the right to pass on Jordanian citizenship to their children²⁰. So far, however, the Jordanian women were prevented from passing on their nationality to children born from a marriage with a non-Jordanian, while Jordanian men could give their nationality to non-Jordanian wives and their children. The amendments also authorize women to apply for a passport without the permission of her husband, as was the case. Jordanian women who reach retirement age will likewise be able to obtain their pension in addition to their husband's pension in case the latter is deceased. In the past, working widows who reached retirement age had to choose between their pension and the husband's (normally obtained only the highest one).

²⁰ Personal interview with Lamis Nassir, the director of the Human Forum for Women's Rights

In previous related actions, Abdullah approved on December 14, 2001, an amendment to the law granting Jordanian women the right to divorce their husband as long as they abandon any claims for financial compensation (Jordan Times, 14, Dec, 2001). Like most Islamic states, Jordan's civil code only allowed men to demand a divorce. The Jordanian King has approved (in the same context) amendments on the marital status law, prepared by the government. The amendments permit the Jordanian woman to appeal for divorce, and were viewed by the Jordanian woman activist in the area of defending woman rights and member of the royal committee for human rights as " a positive step" towards giving the Jordanian woman all her due rights (Jordan Times, 14, 12, 2001).

According to the amendments which were issued by the Jordanian dailies, if the woman says before the court that she cannot " live with her husband", the judge can divorce, while the Husband is responsible for any financial compensation. The amendments also included " the raising the age of marriage to eighteen years. Before it was fifteen years for women and sixteen years for men. Moreover the amendment included notifying the first wife of the second marriage and notifying the second wife that the man has a previous marriage Jordan Times, 14, 12, 2001).

Also in this context, the government recently introduced an amendment to article 340 of the sanctions law which availed those who committed crimes against women in cases linked to " defending the honor" in order to get alleviated sentences. The Jordanian King approved this new amendment. In fact, the Jordanian parliament refused by the end of 1999 a draft law proposed by the government to amend article 340 of the sanctions law. Then, members of the Jordanian parliament believe that the cancellation of this article will lead to " low morals in the society". Aim at

“Jordan First” carries also some promising developments in women’s favor. As mentioned, a committee was established in order to discuss the possibilities of adopting a quota system that aims to enabling women an active political participation. In this context, one may argue that the government has invested the authorities given by the constitution in the absence of the parliament, which is known for its conservative attitude. Yet, what role or impact did the active and intensive work of

diverse female activists have in the context of these developments, is a question to be answered in the coming chapter; more precisely within the context of analyzing forms of female activism in Jordan.

2.3.2 The International interest in women's issues

The role of international interest in women's issues, concerning the development of the women's movement today, is twofold. On one hand, there is the international mobilization of women's issues at the UN level. Under this category comes all the international conventions in the realm of women's rights and interests, such as the CEDAW and the Plan of Action developed in the context of the Beijing Conference in 1995. On the other hand, there is the international aid and its impact on assisting the mobilization of women's issues. While the former is believed to have had a significant impact on the identification of women's issues, the latter assists in their mobilization and politicization efforts.

2.3.2.1 The role of the UN international conferences and conventions

The issue of the advancement of women and the development of their status by considering them as effective partners in development and social progress has become one of the most important issues on the agenda of international institutions and bodies such as the UN. In fact, this issue, with its various dimensions and ramifications, has been on the agendas of successive international conferences, whether governmental or non-governmental since the mid-1970s. The documents of international women's conferences contain recommendations and plans of action, which cover all women's issues. Declarations of principles have been issued obliging communities, institutions and countries to advance the causes of women and to strive for development, the achievement of equality and justice by all available methods and means including planning, policy formulation, the preparation of special programs and following-up implementation. This process began with the Mexico City Conference to mark the International Women's Year in 1975. This was followed by the World Decade for Women 1976-1985 announced by the United Nations. In this significant decade, the international community adopted the Mexico Declaration on women's equality and their participation in development and peace and the international plan of action to

implement the objectives of the International Women's Year. Moreover, a mid-decade Conference was held in Copenhagen (1980). The women's decade ended with the 1985 Nairobi Conference, which evaluated the progress and achievements of the international community in implementing the objectives of the World Decade in the areas of equality, development and peace. This conference resulted in the drawing up of a comprehensive document entitled "The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for Women's Progress to the Year 2000" which is used by governments and non-governmental organizations as a basic reference document for the international community in the advancement of women, their rights and full and effective participation in national development and human progress.

Moreover, several other conferences held in the 1990s has stressed women's issues. Some of these are: The International Conference on Education for All (1990); The International Conference on the Environment and Development (1992); The Conference on Human Rights (1993); The World Conference on Population and Development (1994) and the World Summit Conference on Social Development (1995). Women's issues were also the central theme of the Fourth Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing, September 4-15, 1995. In this conference, the international community re-affirmed commitments at the national and international level, and emphasized the importance of implementing the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women.

On this basis came the invitation to follow-up the implementation of the International Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women, which was adopted by the 1995 Beijing Conference. Countries participated in the conference were asked to translate the directives and recommendations into action by preparing specific national plans of action including projects and activities which focus on national priorities in the sphere of a comprehensive and continuous social development, the advancement of women, and their integration into the development process.

Reflecting the impact of this international interest in the development of women's issues and concerns can be argued in two ways. On one hand, the international interest has assisted in redefining women's interest at the national level, providing national

activism with a wider feminist oriented vision of women's issues and interest. On the other hand, the mobilization of women's issues, through providing specific funds related to the Women And Development WAD approach, was adopted by the UN in the 1980s.

However, not only were women's organizations and NGOs subject to changes in light of the international interest in women's concern, but also the demands for mainstreaming gender targeted the states in the first place. As Beijing approached four women were designated at the Upper House of the Parliament: Layla Sharaf (1989, 1993, 1994) and Na'ila Rashdan (1993), Rima Khalaf and Subeiha Ma'ani (1997). Taujan Faisal (whose case will be discussed in detail in the next chapter) was elected to the Lower House of Parliament. Shortly thereafter, Umaymah Dahan was designated as the first advisor to the prime minister on women's issues, and, in late 1996, the first woman judge was appointed by al-Kbariti²¹.

Yet these developments, did not touch the societal level, for none of the 17 female candidates who ran for the November 1997's elections were successful, including Faisal, who was considered one of the main reasons (as we will see in the next chapter) that no woman won a seat.

2.3.2.2 International Aid and the role of the international agencies

The economic crisis, increasing unemployment levels, and increasing poverty has discredited the state as an institution to carry out solely the projects of national, social and sustainable development. As an alternative to the state, most of the international aid agencies have emphasized the active involvement of other social actors, and therefore, directed most of their grants to NGOs in order to carry out specific projects related to sustainable development, and democratization. Moreover, the international aid plays a significant role in mobilizing diverse issues, whilst financing several projects related to women and civil society concerns.

In the case of Jordan, diverse international institutions, NGOs and agencies are active in providing financial aid to projects and programs implemented by women's

²¹ al-Kbariti was Jordan Prime Minister in 1996-1998

organizations and other NGOs. Some significant examples of these institutions are the German institutions (such as the Konrad Adenauer, Friedrich Ebert .etc.), the Amidst, USAID and many others. The most significant contribution of USAID, with concern to women's issues, was their participation in the drafting of the National Strategy for Jordanian Women discussed in detail in the next chapter. Shortly after the establishment of the Jordanian National Committee for Women (JNCW), princess Basma asked USAID to provide a 'women in development' team to work with the committee members in preparing a women's strategy and plan of action²².

The Amideast, as another example, started to show more interest in human and women's rights in the 1980s, a step a way from its more traditional concerns of education and training. The first step in this direction, in the case of Jordan, was made by a joint project with the Business and Professional Women Center (BPWC to be discussed in the next chapter). The Amideast funded a number of their seminars, publications, and outreach projects. They also supported BPWC's review of its legal consultative services with a focus on engaging in preventative work. The institution also founded the Women's Research Center, a body established in order to conduct studies of the personal status law.

The German institutions also have shown active engagements in this realm. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), sponsored in late September 1993, in cooperation with the GFJW and the Women's University (Amman) and under the auspices of Prince al-Hassan, a three-day conference on the " Role of Jordanian Women in the Process of Democratization". It was intended to examine the various civil society institutions of Jordan and to explore what Jordanian women might accomplish through them in order to better participate in the political process. It was also intended to be a boost for the GFJW, which had been suffering from internal problems for more than three years. Moreover, in late December 1995 in Irbid they organized a workshop with the National Commission for Jordanian women, which was aimed at training women in democratic leadership, group work, and problem solving. In addition, Freidrich Naumann Stiftung FNS hosted two seminars on the Beijing Women's Conference, one in 'Amman in mid- January 1996 and another in early March in Irbid. The seminars

²² Personal Interview with Amal Sabbagh in April 2001.

were aimed at promoting the role of women and enhancing their participation in sustainable development.

The European Union has also played a significant role in financing several activities of women's organizations and action in the kingdom. In an actual news letter published by the Euro Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA) the European commission set several conditions for the forms of sponsoring actions and cooperating with Jordan. For them any "cooperation with Jordan should principally consist of a program of structural adjustment which shall provide the necessary budgetary support in order to stabilize the serious macroeconomic imbalances which exist and to promote structural economic reforms while taking into account the most sensitive social sectors. Other operations may also be undertaken such as the development of risk capital to promote enterprises. In the social sphere, professional training measures may be undertaken, as may activities in favor of the environment" (Official Journal of the European Communities 1996). Therefore, projects sponsored by the EU were more in the fields of social and political development. Examples of such cooperation are the project of "the empowerment of Jordanian women in leadership and decision-making (1997)". This project aimed at raising awareness among women regarding their legal rights and obligations and at enhancing their status and role within the family and society. The project was implemented in cooperation with the Jordanian National Committee for Women and the Princess Basma Women's Resource Center. The targeted group included the 819 women coordinators and some potential women activists (Eurocom 2000).

In addition, Meda-Democracy is about to spend 187,000€ in order to enable the Jordanian National Forum for Women and the Jordanian National Committee for Women and Princess Basma Women's Resource Center can organize seminars and conferences²³. These conferences will be attended by 120,000 women, who will be informed about their rights and legal obligations and thus their role in political and economic life can be enhanced. It has also sponsored the actions of the Human Forum for Women's Rights, which received a MEDA Democracy grant of 187,000 € to carry out a public education campaign on women's rights and to set up a family counseling

²³ Personal Interview with Lamis Nassir in March 2001.

center. Activities for the implementation phase were research-based with provision for a series of workshops and seminars leading to the publication of conclusions and proceedings (Eurocom 2000).

Other small grants were also provided from different resources. The embassy of the Netherlands for example has sponsored a project conducted by the JNFWC entitled "Raising political awareness among women for the 1999 municipal elections (1999). The project aims at the political empowerment of women and consists of three phases; pre election, during election, post election. During these phases, a number of awareness sessions on the electoral process were carried out. A number of training programs have been conducted for potential candidates in the electoral districts.

However, the argument that there is a lack of national financial resources seems to be the main used by many civil society organizations that depend on international support. Therefore the issue of foreign financing of the women's and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is raising a controversy in Jordan, where Islamists and leftists alike are crying foul at what they see as new western attempts to control the country. The IAF's secretary general Abdel Latif Arabiyat said that the lack of local money could not justify handouts from abroad" (Interview published in Agency France Press September 11, 2000, and cited in Mekki 2000)²⁴. Women activists in this respect rejected all these charges and describe them as being nonsense. They argue that the criticism of foreign donations is just "a pretext used by certain institutions to muzzle NGOs that are more active than they are themselves"²⁵.

Apart from the these arguments, one cannot neglect that this aid has some negative impacts on the development of the women's movement and other local small societies and organizations. The international aid has also assisted with the creation of a new category of civil society organizations that are 'grant seekers'. In fact, in seeking international financial aid diverse programs have been created, each to deal primarily with the sponsor's field of concern. One might argue in this respect that the extent of the government's (and some Royal figures with their NGOs) recent interest in women

²⁴ This was a statement made by Abdel Latif Arabiyat the party's secretary general. The interview is published in Agence France Presse September 11, 2000 (See Mekki 2000).

²⁵ Personal Interview with Asma Khadir, a female lawyer and a women's activist in Jordan

is explained by external NGO's and by other aid agencies concern with women. NGO grants often have a WID or later a WAD (Women and Development) component, so potential recipients must show some semblance of interest in women's concerns if they hope to continue to receive financing. Moreover, the availability of money for political programs has in fact led a number of women's and other groups to propose projects that are more political. Indeed, in the spring of 1996 the Noor al-Hussein Foundation (A royal NGO active in the field of development, run and supervised by Queen Noor al- Hussein), which had not previously been involved in the programs related to women in politics, launched its first political training program for women, in large part sparked by the fact that Friedrich Ebert had money for such a program (Brand:68).

Moreover, despite the active involvement of the international agencies in promoting and supporting actions of civil society, the range of their beneficiaries is still very limited. In fact, it is only the big, well organized, and experienced NGOs who are the main subject of foreign aid. In fact, the international aid provided to such institutions emphasizes their image as the sole representative organization of women in Jordan, pushing the country's few , grassroots and struggling NGOs even further to the margins.

2.3.3 Transformation at the societal level

Since 1921, Jordan has experienced tremendous economic, social and demographic changes, which fundamentally have altered its demographic map and affected the size, composition and distribution of the population. The size of the population has increased from 225,000 in 1922 to almost five millions in 1999, representing an annual growth of 3.8 percent. This increase is due to several reasons, mainly the two waves of Palestinian immigrants to Jordan in 1948 and 1967, and the higher rate of natural increase. The average population growth in Jordan is therefore high in comparison with that of developed and developing countries as well as in the Arab non-petroleum countries, having doubled in less than 17 years.

As for the composition of Jordan's population by gender, there were 107 males per 100 females in 1979. This number, however, fell to 98 males per 100 females in the

year 2000 mainly as a result of the progress achieved by Jordan in curative and preventive medicine (General Statistics Department, 1999). The society in Jordan has also enjoyed a transformation in many other aspects, mainly at the educational and family level. The proportion of educated members of the population rose, particularly among females, whose entry to the labor market rose accordingly.

Reflecting the societal transformation on women's public participation, and comparing the results of the 1998 census with the figures of 1979 reveal some interesting results concerning the development of women's general status in Jordan. The number of females in Jordan is currently at two million, and the females of working age constitute 48% of this total; this rate draws the attention the youthful composition of the population and the high rate of dependency. Moreover, the rate of fertility of the Jordanian woman is 4.6 births per woman, and in spite of the high decline in the general average for Jordan compared to 1979, it is still among the highest birth rates in the world (being even higher in the rural areas and some governorates). This rate draws attention to the size and long duration of the family burdens of women in the reproductive age, and to the required size of the necessary health services to meet the reproductive needs, in addition to its effect on the high rate of population growth. Moreover, family size has decreased (the average family size is 6.2 persons) due to the decrease of women's fertility, which is also a result of female education and employment. In addition, the family structure has been obviously affected. The extended family is no more the common form but rather the families today tend to be more nuclear. Women are participating more in the family's economy through employment outside the domestic sphere. Khairi (1989) has conducted a study on the changing forms of families in Jordan, and has pointed out the phenomenon of feminizing in the Jordanian family, which came as a result of men's migration to the Gulf countries, the number of households that are headed by women has increased to 10% in 1999 from less than 3% in 1974. Khairi, also points out the change of authority in the Jordanian family. He agrees that today women (as mother and elder sisters) have more authority in the Jordanian family, and through time have gained more access in decision making through the absence of the father and the big brother (Khairi, 1989).

However, this statistic does not reveal the reality of the effect of the extended family (i.e. the tribe) on the upbringing and lifestyle of the individual, especially in rural areas and some governorates. There has been a decrease in the effect of the extended family, and this has been accompanied by a decrease in the safety network and social care that the family provides for the individual, without being replaced by a network of national care services. This has led to a rise in the rate of divorce, abandonment, singlehood and widowhood cases among women who, in most cases, do not have a means to support themselves or their families.

Yet, the main observed changes in women's lives are those related to education, employment, and political participation:

1) In the realm of Education: Although Jordan enjoys good education indicators compared to neighboring countries, and has progressed in this respect during the last fifteen years; still, 17,5% of women in Jordan are illiterate (PBCW 1999:15). The main improvement in female education has been the increased rate of those who have completed the secondary and preparatory education and who in 1998 constituted about 46% of the total number of educated females (20). While the rate of those who hold degrees of first diploma and higher is approximately only sixteen percent of the total, there is a difference in these indicators according to regions. In fact, illiteracy and limited education are mainly concentrated in some rural areas and governorates. Jordan faces another educational problem in that the education system did not contribute by providing work opportunities for the educated females, including those who obtained technical diplomas, because (as one might argue) of defects in the educational structure.

2) The realm of Employment: Women's participation in the labor force is only around sixteen percent of the total labor force since the highest rate of those at the working age are "housewives" outside the waged labor force. However, women involved in waged labor constitute ten percent of the total labor force, against six percent registered as unemployed, meaning that the rate of unemployment among women is higher than 38% (21). The situation has improved compared to 1979, where the rate of women in the labor force was only 7.5% of adults, considering that the rate of 16% for

a country like Jordan is rather low (22). The negative dimensions of these low rates of participation in the labor force are not only reflected on women. The low rates of participation are also reflected on the dependency ratio to male adults, which results from the youthful composition of the population. In fact, the limited participation of women almost doubles the dependency rate on males. This doubles the size of the economic burden of the population in a country with limited economic potentials and high development requirements such as Jordan. It is therefore clear that women's participation is a national necessity before simply being an issue restricted to women.

However, despite the improvement in the method of calculating women's participation in the labor force, there are still some problems in estimating the real amount of working women, as well as in calculating the number of unemployed. The rate of participation estimated at 16% in fact represents only those who are of working age, and may be as a result of the routine statistical treatment, the other 86% are considered as "housewives", that is they do not work- nor wish to work. There is also a probability that the figures of those who actually work do not include the number of those who work in the informal sector. As for the officially unemployed, they are concentrated in the age category of 15-39 years, which reflects the tendency to consider those whose age has exceeded forty and do not work as being outside the labor force, especially if not educated. This conceals the fact that large numbers of older women, especially within the poor classes need to work in order to support their families. For those who are considered officially unemployed, most of them are from the age category 15-39, are educated, including those who underwent vocational training, but for skills that are not needed. Those who work in the organized sector are concentrated in the posts that are traditionally for women, i.e. the sector of administration (and defence), which absorbs 66.5% of the total female workers.

The economic problems that Jordan was subject to during the last decade has led to an increased number of people living under the poverty line, without providing a safety network and social care which would enable them to meet their basic needs. Women constitute a large category of the poor, especially a category suffering from social problems such as divorce, abandonment, singlehood and old age. Several of them are responsible for providing a living for their children. In spite of the fact that

the term “poverty” reflects the economic dimension of their situation, it does however conceal the fact that this category also suffers from health problems, illiteracy, limited education, and the culture and style of living that deprive them from the ability to overcome their reality.

The Jordanian Constitution stipulates that men and women are equal, especially concerning their right to work. During the last fifteen years, several laws that protect the rights of the working women were enacted including the recognition of her right to maternal leave. The civil service regulations also stipulate her equality in work and promotion. In spite of improvements in the field of law-making, still the actual benefits from equal rights are limited and are not reflected in the daily state of affairs with the majority of women, particularly the most vulnerable. Most women do not even endeavor to benefit from such opportunities, either due to being unaware of their availability, or because taking advantage of such opportunities involves new costs and risks. However there are still laws, which need to be reviewed, particularly in the personal status field.

3) The realm of political participation and participation in decision-making positions: A slight change, symbolic sometimes, has occurred in women’s participation in decision-making positions. Especially since one woman has won a seat in the parliamentary elections, and women ministers, judges and members in the Upper House of Parliament have been appointed. However, women are nearly absent from the positions of decision-making in the administration and local leaderships levels, as well as in the financial, economic and politics sectors. In fact, there is still some hidden resistance against women reaching these positions. Remedying this problem and breaking these serious and manifold obstacles will require an intensive effort including intentional corrective and political intervention.

To conclude, Jordan introduced major changes in women’s affairs, particularly in health and education and to a lesser extent, in the employment and legislation fields, whereas progress remained limited in decision-making and participation in public life. The limited success in the realm of politics and legal reforms characterizes the societal reaction to changing patterns of women’s lives. These changes in women’s lives

although providing new work materials for the women's movement, still represent the new conflictual grounds between the women's movement and the conservative powers in the Jordanian society.

General discussion

In our previous discussion, we have viewed the impact of three main factors on the development of the women's movement in Jordan. In general, we have noticed that each factor played a two-sided role, positive and negative. Where the first factor of political transformation offered women's actions and organizations unlimited windows of movement and action in the liberalization periods, there was no sign of women's action in times of political repression²⁶. Women had benefited from the limited spaces of freedom offered in the 1950s, the 1970s and the late 1980s, yet a clear identity of their own was not available until the 1990s. The contemporary women's movement, as we will see in more analytical details in the coming chapters, today represents a diverse collection of social and political actors. The open political atmosphere has offered them the chance to mobilize new issues, which were most of the time taboo in the Jordanian public space and were not openly discussed in earlier periods. Yet, the women's movement has also benefited from the state's interest in women's issues as well as from the contribution of the royal family in this respect. In fact seeking to be portrayed as liberal and open, the royal family has sported most of the actions targeting the enhancement of the women's issue. Yet, the real intention behind such support is open to diverse interpretations. Through legitimizing their actions by commitments made before the international community, diverse actions- as we have seen- have been undertaken in women's favor. Thus far, their interference in and supervision of actions targeting women can also be seen as an attempt aimed at controlling the development of civil society organizations, particularly those of women's organizations, as well as trying to prevent any future conflicts that might result between women activists and the conservative groups in the country, for they comprise the traditional alliance of the state and the main supporters or threat to its legitimacy.

²⁶ Similar results can also be found in Brands analysis of the impact of political transformation on women's status in Jordan (Brand 1998: Chapter Four and Five)

Moreover, the international interest and aid has also influenced actions and projects conducted by the women's organizations or other civil society organizations which targeted women related issues. The international interest in human rights, women's rights and citizenship rights, and the great pressure on Third World states to practice good governance and recognize the needs of their people has provided civil society organizations and the women's movement in particular with base-concepts necessary for legitimizing their discourse with regard to these diverse issues. States where governments have signed international conventions regarding respecting human rights and more precisely women's rights, find themselves obliged to provide evident results as well as to work with the various independent NGOs active in these fields. In other words, the international discourse on women's rights provided the women's movements with new core-concepts, the methods and tools to politicize them, and more importantly the legitimacy to work on them. This explains why diverse issues – such as violence, reproductive rights, and political rights- are now becoming the subject of discourse, where in the near past they were extreme taboos or working on them was very limited and risky. Finally, the international aid assisted in providing the necessary financial aid for mobilizing women's issues and running projects, yet, pushing -at the same time- to the margin some small NGOs and grassroots organizations struggling in women's favor.

Finally, the changing patterns of women's lives in the fields of education and waged labor has assisted in the creation of new realities, new demands and social problems. These provided new work materials as well as new ground for the women's movement to set up projects. The women's movement, hence, should articulate these changes should try to mobilize women's new emerging concerns, and politicize their issues. However, these new realities occurred in a traditional conservative society, which is as we might argue, not ready for such intensive involvement of women in public life. The economic crises and the image that the state tried to label itself with at the international level (as being modern) left no turning back. Yet, the society and the conservatives in the state resisted any changes in favor of women in the fields of political participation and legal reform. Moreover, they have set some conditions for women's participation in public life, namely related to women's dress and conduct.

The role of both the state and society as obstacles facing women's contemporary actions will be discussed in detail in chapter five. In the coming chapters, we will examine in detail the general characteristics of the contemporary women's movement. Activism will be the subject of the next chapter.