

## **5 Limitations and problems facing the women's movement in Jordan**

In the previous chapters, we discussed the various developmental aspects of the Jordanian women's movement in terms of organizational forms as well as work agendas. We have also seen that these developments have been affected by diverse factors, among which is the new atmosphere of political transition. Yet, while we have seen that the process of democratization has encouraged the emergence of diverse women's organizations with diverse interests and forms, there are some other factors, which hinder or at least have slowed the women's movement and consequently their desire for women's advancement or liberation. In this respect, we argue that these limiting factors are twofold. On one hand, they are derived from the general legal and political atmosphere, wherein women's organizations, as well as many other civil society organizations, work. On the other hand, they are of a social form and are derived from the general preoccupation with gender issues, which has two main determinants, namely tribalism and Islamism.

Under the first category of these limiting factors, we will again analyze the role of the state. This time, we will have a look at the general body of legislation and laws framing the work of women's organizations. Moreover, we will analyze the general impact of the state's intervention in women's actions, namely, through the establishment of so-called state feminism and the role of the princess.

### **5.1 The Role of the State**

The state's role as an obstacle facing women's advancement in Jordan and can be seen in two main ways. First, through the diverse laws which frame and regulate women's organizations and actions in Jordan. In this respect, one might argue that the laws that are regulating women's action are old and to some extent are limiting women's actions in social services. Secondly, the state controls women's actions through (as we have seen) the establishment of state directed organizations which are supposed to function as an umbrella of control. Under this category also comes the role of the princess and her initiatives in the realm of women's concerns.

### 5.1.1 Legal Framework of women's action

Several aspects of the Jordanian legal system indicates that Jordanian civil society organizations (CSOs) enjoy one of the most favorable political environments in the Arab world. Important examples given in this respect are the National Charter on Civil Liberties (Mithaq) written in 1989 by a committee which included major Jordanian civil society groups. Here they set guidelines for political activity, and affirmed the state's commitment to rule by law and political pluralism. Moreover, the Jordanian constitution guarantees the freedom of assembly and speech to all citizens within the limits of the law. Chapter 2 (Articles 5-23) of the constitution, which deals with the rights and duties of Jordanians, stipulates through Article 16 (Clauses No.2) that: " All Jordanians are entitled to set up political organizations and parties provided that their objectives are legal, their means peaceful and their status do not violate the provisions of the constitution" (Constitution of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan). This means that civil society organizations are entitled to practice "peaceful " political action within the limits of law. Yet, the interpretation of what is 'peaceful' and do not 'violate the provisions of the constitution' is a right preserved only for the government. In fact, extensive authority has been mandated to the related governmental bodies overseeing these political practices. This authority enables such bodies to immensely restrict freedom of action and jeopardize public involvement in political life. Moreover, related authorities have sufficient jurisdiction in order to refuse licensing to a new civil society organization or to dissolve an old one, often through an irrevocable decision. In fact, some legal texts grant security agencies the authority to interfere with an organization's membership, meetings, and all other aspects of the organization's life that they deem necessary in maintaining security. Such a practice, as one might argue, has deprived social organizations for decades from enrolling socially, politically and culturally active people within their ranks.

However, women's organizations are organized under the *Law of Social Organizations and Bodies No.33 of 1966* and its amendments. According to this law, women's organizations are considered as charitable bodies . Moreover, the term " Social body" has been defined as: " Every body comprising seven or more members, and that offers social services, whether educational, cultural, training, charitable or

artistic” (al-Khateeb 1977). This definition embraces women’s organizations, social centers, art and drama groups as well as private musical and cultural institutions, provided that their objectives are confined to “offering services to the community without seeking profit for dividing it among its members, promoting personal interest or advancing any political goals” (32). It should be pointed out that despite the fact that this law applies to all such organizations, numerous governmental bodies oversee its application. In other words, this definition obviously applies to all types of organizations and bodies that are of a social, cultural, or other character, which should in letter as well as in spirit exclude any political activity.

As for procedural matters provided for in the law, with regard to setting up charitable and social organizations, the law clearly points out that written approval by the minister of social development is mandatory for an organization to obtain a license. The law sets the following procedure for registering charitable organizations, social bodies, and associations: “Initially, seven or more people should present an application requesting registration of whatever social or cultural organization they intend to set up to the relevant government department. The related department bureau should refer the processed application with comments to the head of the department within 30 days as of application date”.

The minister is entitled to make whatever decision he sees suitable within three months of receiving the application with comments. The law states that charitable organizations and other social bodies have no right to challenge the minister’s decision before a court of law, but evidently leaves the whole matter in the hands of the executive. If applicants receive no reply to their application after three months, then they are not asked to present new documents concerning the application’s legal inadequacies. The organization is then entitled to commencing its activities as if it had been normally registered.

Once registered, an organization assumes the status of a body corporate and is empowered to advance lawsuits or carry out all the activities provided for in its statute. It is worth noticing here that the jurisdiction granted to the minister, or those who stand for him in making an irrevocable positive or negative decision affecting an

organization's formation or dissolution, has frequently led to an arbitrary practice. Records testify to the shutting down of far too many organizations and bodies for, regional, fictional, or even personal reasons.

This practice eventually led to a large scale public apathy and disenchantment with political and social activism, thus leaving the door wide open for personal- interest promoters and political entrepreneurs. The social organizations and bodies law No.33 stipulates that the relationship between ministers on one hand and, the charitable and social organizations on the other hand, is based on a co-operation and partnership in providing social services and improving their standards. The director general of a department, or any authorized ministry official, has the right to visit the offices of an organization or association. They can then examine its records to verify whether its funds are being spent properly and check whether its performance of duties are generally in line with law provisions.

The law specifies that the administrative board of a charitable or social organization should keep their information and paperwork as follows: Organization statute; names of board members for every electoral period and the date of their elections, names of all organization members; their identity; age and date of affiliation; minutes of general assembly and board sessions in consecutive order; detailed revenue and expenditure accounts and an account of immovable assets. Every "charitable" organization or association should notify the director general of the supervising governmental department of changes or modifications affecting its position or statute, and of partial or total change to its board. Proposed amendments or changes in statutes become effective only after approval in writing by the minister of social development, who in turn seeks the advice of the city governor.

Every charitable and social organization or association is to present to the minister an annual report detailing its activities and expenditures, together with financial resources and any other information it is asked to make available. They are also required to have their accounts and books examined at least once a year by a licensed auditor. Two certified copies of the auditor's certificates should be sent to the director

general and another to the supervising department within one month from the date of issue.

However, the fact that such regulations are part of a set procedural system does not rule out bureaucratic abuse, which has frequently jeopardized timely response to applications by organizations seeking a license. It is to be noted that the law itself has left much room for personal interference through the minister or those acting on his behalf.

According to the same law, charitable organizations and social associations are also dissolved according to a certain process. In this respect, the minister is entitled upon recommendation by the director general, and after consulting the concerned department, to give directions for the dissolution of any organization or association, in many cases, namely: If he is convinced that it has violated the provision of its statute, failed to serve the purposes for which it was set up, suspended its activities or failed to carry them out satisfactorily; refused to allow a government official to attend its meetings or search its premises and examine its records and documents; funded activities other than those mentioned in its approved plans; violated any of the provisions of this law, or upon a two-thirds majority vote by its working membership in favor of its dissolution.

Moreover, and according to the same law, not only the must organization, but also every single activity, be regulated and observed by the state. Women's, as well as many other civil society organizations, must request the permission of the related state institution for every intended activity. In other words, there is no room for spontaneous protests and actions, even if these efforts are not of a political form and do not target the mobilization of the society against the state.

A firms laws and legal procedures were not the only strategy the state has applied in order to seize the role of civil society and that of women's organizations in the country. Having individuals as the head of civil society organizations, which somehow represents the state (such as royal family members), can also hinder the action of women's organizations.

### **5.1.2 The Role of the Princess**

The previous revision of the forms and structures of women's organizations has pointed out that the form of leadership plays a significant role in the organization's success or failure. One may argue that directed women's organizations (the government's and the princess's initiatives) are shown as gaining more successes during a short period of time. They started to show up in the public space during the 70s and have been able to achieve many gains for women in different fields. Other independent organizations, despite having a longer history which goes back to the 50s, still have limited success and are surrounded in controversy being rejected from society and charged for being disloyal to the country and its people.

Yet, the main reason for the success of directed organizations is related, on one hand, to the clear agenda that these organizations have retained. These organizations were from the beginning set up for pragmatic reasons to work only on women's issues, whereas other women's NGOs were mixing women's issues with other issues like childcare, elderly care, the disabled, etc. On the other hand, the success of these organizations is often related to the leadership that they have, namely the princess. Princess Basma is supervising many women's organizations directly or indirectly. Due to her supervision, women's organizations are acting as a network; and consequently they are complementing one other in development, political and social women's issues. Her presence provides them with the necessary buffer from direct confrontation with the state or society. Her public appearance exudes a warmth and modesty that has endeared her to many Jordanians. Her active involvement in female related issues was evident in the 1990s, and became more obvious during the initiation of the National Strategy for Women (noted above), and the national preparation for the Beijing Conference in 1992. Chairing the two main woman-oriented organizations (PBWRC, JNWF) illustrates her intention to play a major role in the realm of 'women's issues' in the kingdom. Until 1992, with her involvement as a patron to draft the national strategy for women, the princess had kept a low profile in public life. Her most noticeable involvement was as chairwoman of the Queen Alia Fund for social development, which was established in 1977 and targeted the development of self-sufficiency among women, and especially in rural areas. If a member of the royal

family was to take on a prominent, national role regarding women, she was definitely the candidate, especially since Queen Noor (the Queen of Jordan and the wife of King Hussein) was not originally Jordanian, and Queen Rania came later in 1999 and is trying gradually to claim the role.

By the end of 1995, namely with the establishment of the Jordanian National Committees Forum, Princess Basma had clearly taken the mantle of leadership in the women's movement. Yet, the fact that a state official is supervising women's actions and organizations indicates a broader problem, that of the state's insinuation of itself into what should be solely a civil society activity. In fact, the origin of Princess Basma's interest in women's issues is open to speculation. Her engagement in this concern is partly seen as a mechanism developed by the state in de-politicizing and controlling women's actions, forcing them in the direction of providing social services. In fact, some independent women's activists have complained that organizations run by the princess, as is the case of those run by the royal family, are privileged. On one hand, they are the only organizations that are allowed by law to mobilize financial resources from foreign sources, and at the same time are not asked to provide an annual financial report to the related ministry. Not forgetting that such organizations are protected arenas from governmental intervention, and the parliament has no authority over them.

In conclusion, it is clear that the state is still interfering in diverse ways concerning women's organizations in particular, as well as in civil society in general. This interference is forcing civil society and women away from politics. This de-politicizing process has been carried out by the state, as we have seen, in several ways. On the one hand, by direct or indirect supervision of the state's representatives in several civil society organizations in general, not to mention women's organizations in particular. On the other hand, by the limits and restrictions of laws. However, such de-politicization processes influence the main purpose of civil society and its organizations targeting the state and its institutions, all of which aim at democratizing them. Yet, we have argued that the 'project' of social movements and that of women's movements in particular, is to de-traditionalize and democratize not only the state and its institutions, but also the civil society and the public space. In this respect, we will

focus next on two main challenging forms of civil society organizations in Jordan, namely, that of tribal culture and institutions, and that of Islamic groups and political parties. We argue in this respect that these aspects of Jordanian civil society comprise the main challenging limitations facing the women's movement.

## **5.2 The societal reaction: the role of Islamism and Tribalism**

It is now widely known that the various forms of institutions in any society are maintained and constructed by a certain system of beliefs and thoughts surrounding the issues of gender spread through out the society. This system of thoughts is responsible for determining the various roles and images of both men and women in society. Feminists in general have paid much attention to the role of societal preoccupation with gender, and speak of its significant connection in any process of politicizing women's and gender issues. In Jordan, the societal concern with regard to gender finds its roots along two main sources: First, in the norms and traditions of the "Arab Culture" which is in this case tribally based, and secondly, in the norms and regulation of Islam, for Islam is the main religion of the country .

The term "Tribalism" refers to an expanded family (tribe) association and/or a community that understands or defines itself in respect to specific inscriptive features as one group. However, this group- feeling finds its roots in a common past, in which the Bedouin-life and economic forms (as inhabitants of the Badiya (the desert)) were the main determinants (Fathi, 1994). In other wards, it represents a Bedouin culture. However, tribalism in Jordan have been challenged, transformed and changed overtime through many factors such as the development of cities (Urbanization), the socioeconomic outcomes of the oil boom, and the social consequences of the Arab-Israeli conflict (the population aspect). Moreover, it might be argued that these challenges had a huge impact on tribalism as a life style and as a socioeconomic system. In fact, being affected by these challenges the tribe as a life style has virtually disappeared. This means that tribe members are no longer living in the badiyya, working on micro-scale trade, agriculture, and shepherding, as well as they are also no longer practicing their seasonal migration. Today, tribal members live in big cities and



have jobs in an urban public space such as state institutions, the Army, and the private sector. These new developments, which Jordan has enjoyed over the past few decades, has forced new realities at the social level, mainly with respect to gender order and gender relations in the society.

Yet, one might argue that despite these developments at the material level, tribalism as a culture has never disappeared and has never been absent from the daily life of its members. What proves this is the practice of tribal based actions in many aspects of life such as that of conflict resolution, the establishment of family and tribal leagues, and the involvement of the tribe in local politics. One main evidences of the existence of tribal based action in Jordan is the never-ending domestic violence against women, namely the phenomena of so-called honor crimes. Such actions illustrate the gender hierarchies within the tribal context, and consequently the life forms, and spaces offered for women within it.

New changes through modernization, urbanization, and the spread of education have influenced both men and women in society. Jordanian women (as tribal members) have won new ground and achieved many goals due to several factors such as: The absence of males (who went to work in the Arab Gulf during the oil boom leaving empty spaces for women to work in the waged labor market); the wide-ranging benefits of the processes of urbanization and the extension of education and educational facilities; the consequences of the economic crises and finally the wider participation of women in the labor market. This new ground has created new realities for the society, within which the traditional aspects of culture have had to grow accustomed to.

Yet, the tribalism preoccupation with gender role and relations is somehow contradictory. On one hand, tribal based families are no longer challenging women's basic or higher education, and are no longer hindering their working side by side (with males) in the waged labor market. On the other hand, tribalism in some certain aspects, namely in the realm of politics, underestimate women's abilities and qualifications. In other words, while tribalism accepts women's active participation in the public space, it still wants to keep such participation under control, and in fact

under male's control. So if women are to work outside the domestic sphere, and to attend schools and universities, this process has to be controlled, forcing women to follow certain instructions of dress and conduct. This special focus on women's dress and conduct in the public space implies, in many cases, the wearing of the head cover or so –called 'Hijab'. Yet, this wearing of the head cover must not necessarily be Islamic (wide long clothing which do not show the body's details). In fact, women can wear normal cloths (Including stretched jeans, and t-shirts) wear makeup, but at the same time are asked to keep the head cover. In respectto conduct outside the home, women (of tribal background) are not allowed to have relationships with men. They are however, allowed to have male colleagues (at work or at the university) and friends as long as this relationship remains formal and within the limits of the work place or university, and does not turn sexual. Yet, while the former form of gender relations is tolerated in the society, in other words it bows to the inevitable, the later is subject to high social punishments such as lost of reputation or even of life (honor crime).

This focus on women's conduct and dress can be explained with the tribe's general preoccupation with women's sexuality. The tribal culture is a culture of 'honor', which stands for, in the case of its male members, being generous, brave, and being able to control/protect his private space including that of women. In the case of female members, honor is often associated with virginity. In fact, a woman's whole potential, capacity, and qualifications are (often) reduced to her sexuality.

In this context, women in Jordan, as in many other Arab countries, are seen as sources of sexual attraction and their seduction is perceived as responsible for the male's inability to resist them. Thus, in an adulterous situation, it is the female who is guilty in seducing the male, whether it is a case of rape or assault. Because of the traditional view that women are the inferior sex, it is their sexuality that must be contained and controlled by the men in the family. Dana Dajani (2000) cites a view of a Syrian female English teacher concerning sexuality. The young woman emphasized that the "society makes us believe that we must pretend to be inexperienced and timid and that sex is there to fulfill our husband's needs and to conceive children. In fact, I've actually found sex to be gratifying experience to the woman as well as to a man"

(Dajani 2000: 10). This quote emphasizes how society controls women's sexuality; it also illustrates how it dictates their thoughts.

Other women may share this woman's point of view, however women in the Arab world live in fear of losing their family honor, and even these thoughts may induce their behavior. Therefore, speaking out may be deemed dishonorable and 'unwomanly' and would be taken as a sign of female sexual consciousness. However sexual pleasure is thought of as the 'males' domain, and their sexual experiences are thought of as a symbol of 'pride' and 'manhood', which are ideas linked to male honor. In contrast, a man who has not had premarital sexual relations is often portrayed as impotent. The female sexuality in this connection is labeled as uncontrolled and dangerous. Mr. Trad Al Fayez, a prominent tribal 'Sheikh' in Jordan, has summarized the view of tribal culture concerning women's sexuality by saying: "a woman is like an olive tree, when its branches catch woodworm, it has to be chopped off so that the society stays clean and pure" (Jordan Times 16/2/2000).

However, the state has recognized the significance of the tribe in Jordan for its existence since the beginning. In fact, the state saw itself in need of establishing a peace with traditionalism, in order to maintain a degree of legitimacy. This establishment of peace within traditionalism and tribalism has many forms. First, the late King Hussein used the terms of (al 'hl) the Family and (al 'ashierah) the tribe very often in his speeches. The term 'al Diwan', which is a term used to describe the place where the tribe members meet and discuss their tribal issues and matters, is used in a similar manner to describe the office of the king and the offices of the rest of the royal family members. In addition, in the late nineties prince Mohammed Bin Ghazi was appointed as "the King's Consultant of Tribal Issues" and he still keeps this position at present. Also, tribe heads were invited to the Palace every now and then to spend time with the king, and for special occasions such as in Ramadan (The fasting Months), or in Eid (The Feast after Ramadan). Finally, a special scholarship is dedicated by King Hussein, and has now become a tradition, to those tribal members who wish to pursue a higher education at the governmental universities. However, one might argue that the state's interest in the tribes has many significant consequences on women's lives and actions. In fact, this enhances the societal preoccupation with

gender which is male oriented. Consequently, the state does not challenge the various actions performed in the domestic sphere. The severity of domestic violence, for instance, is not challenged, although it exists in and articulates the heart of patriarchal structures of the tribe. In fact, this was the very reason why the state and the palace were unable to move in the direction of eliminating law article 340, which by one way or another enhances honor crimes in the country.

The second source of societal preoccupation with gender in Jordan is that of Islamism. In this respect, one might argue that the regulations of Islam are widely practiced and respected in the Jordanian society, especially concerning marital, familial, and women's issues. However, the regulation of Islam as a component of the societal preoccupation with gender in Jordan cannot be treated in the same way as tribal norms and traditions in their relation to the state. The state in Jordan is a relatively liberal one, and its connection to the tribes has a political and pragmatic background. The same cannot be said about Islamic groups. In the beginning the state did not seek the support of Islamic groups, as they did not have the same significance as the tribes. Yet, the state started to realize the significance and power of Islamic groups, namely the Muslim Brothers (Ikhwan), mainly after winning 22 seats in the 1991 parliamentary elections. As an immediate response, the state has succeeded in passing a new "One man, One vote" election law. And by this succeeded, as we will see, in limiting the Islamists influence and presence in national politics.

The Islamic concern of women's issues in the Jordanian context is concentrated again on their dress and their participation in the public sphere. However, while tribalism rejects dealing with women's issues outside the private sphere (the protected arena from state intervention), the Islamists have tried hard to politicize the issues of gender relations, that is through removing it from the domain of personal choice and into that of public scrutiny and policy. The application of fundamental Islamic regulations at the political level was evident for the first time, when five Islamist deputies (Muslim brothers), in the newly elected parliament, received portfolios in the government. In this period, the Islamists of Jordan were preparing ground for the politicization of women's dress and conduct.

### **5.2.1 Muslim Brothers' (MB) preoccupation with the issue of Gender Relations in Jordan**

The MB preoccupation with gender relations and women's issues in Jordan is not new. The Jordanian society has experienced the MB visions of gender relations in 1991, namely during the time when MB members were in power as Ministers. Receiving the portfolios of two main Ministries in Jordan, the MB introduced for the very first time, and at the national level, their project in respect to women's participation in waged labor and education. Though they did not limit women's choices in work or education, the stories highlighted below show a conservative vision of women's rights and gender relations. Our focus here is on politics which MB implemented while running two of the main ministries in Jordan, namely the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development. In the period between January-June 1991, a period during which the Islamists were still riding high from their 1989 legislative success.

In 'Abdullah 'Akaylah's first meeting with ministry employees, following his appointment as Minister of Education, he informed women that he did not want them working in sensitive and important places. He also ordered the "cleansing" of the Ministry by segregating the sexes, and began firing some of the higher ranking employees and then replacing them with Islamists. His retiring of 14 such people was approved by the cabinet, even though at least seven were still productive, and one was a woman (the only female to reach a high post in the ministry) (Jordan Times, May 23, 1991). 'Akaylah also introduced a series of measures to 'islamize' education: He moved to ban male sports instructors from working with female students, while his colleagues in the parliament submitted a proposal to ban mixing sexes in all educational facilities, namely in sports facilities and public swimming pools. None of this, however, elicited any public reaction. Then on April 30 'Akaylah issued a decision forbidding fathers to attend their daughters sports and cultural events. The minister argued that the young girls were often scantily clad for such events and that they therefore would not have total freedom to display their skills without embarrassment if males were present. This time, parents reacted swiftly and angrily forming an ad hoc of sorts (Brand 2002: 9). One legislator was approached by a

concerned parent for help with drafting a petition protesting the measure, which was then circulated and quickly attracted more than 5,000 signatures.

Similar stories are recounted about the Minister of social developments, Yousuf al-'Athm. In the first place, during his brief term in office he began by segregating offices by sex. He also decided to conduct separate meetings with male and female staff. Yet, when he met with female staff, he reportedly did not discuss work-related matters. Instead, he admonished them about their style of dress, telling them they should wear less makeup, that he preferred but would not require Islamic dress, and then requested that they not wear high heels which would click as they went up and down the stairs. He then proceeded to bring women preachers from the Awqaf Ministry to preach to the Muslim women employees; attendance at the weekly sessions was mandatory. The Muslim women were reportedly annoyed with this requirement and complained that the woman preachers were deficient in their knowledge of Islam. Al-'Athm also reportedly denied one woman his approval in going abroad based on his concern regarding the poor morals of foreign men and women.

Yet, these policies as well as others were stated clearly in the first platform introduced by the MB during the election of 1989. However, recent developments show a significant shift towards a less conservative agenda, namely with regard to women's public role. The new agenda was presented by the platform of the Islamic Action Front IAF (the MB's political party established in 1992) running for election in 1993.

The electoral outcomes of the 1993 elections revealed a 50% reduction in the Islamist presence in the parliament. The Islamists during this period undertook no new legislative initiatives. However, the law on segregating sports facilities was finally sent back to the house after the senate introduced several changes. The senate has deleted the clause stipulating that the Ministry of youth segregates sexes at public pools, but the house insisted on reintroducing it. However, the deputies did agree that the law would not apply to hotels, public beaches or clubs, since these facilities fell outside the realm of jurisdiction of that ministry. The Islamists seemed most concerned that the newly booming business of sport clubs be regulated, but also that

swimming pools be included. In the end, 37 of 64 deputies present voted for the bill; and, in what was becoming a tradition on such issues, many of the liberal deputies simply 'absented themselves' from the vote (Jordan Times, may 30, 1994)).

With respect to the 1997 elections, the Islamists, namely the IAF decided to boycott the elections and participation in the government. During this period, the IAF took an affirmative opposition with regard to many issues, namely in regard to the new elections law (one person, one vote), the peace process with Israel, and the IMF structural program for the economy. Some Islamists, who did not agree with this decision participated in the government of al Majali, resulting in a clear division within the IAF and the MB, as will be discussed later. Those who participated in the government were asked to leave the party. A prominent member of the MB and IAF, namely Al Emoush, was asked to leave the party after receiving a portfolio in the government of Abdel Salam Al Majali 1998. He however, decided to set up a new Islamic Centric political party.

Yet, in preparation for the new elections planned to take place early next year (2003), the IAF has decided to take part. This time with competition from some independent Islamists, and the breakaway brothers who have already established the new centric political party. Preparing for the new elections, and concerned about its image, the IAF has made several changes in the party and at the leadership level. The outcomes with regard to the internal elections of the Shoura Council revealed that the majority was for the moderate reformist trend, whereas the extremist trend had receded. Moreover, the women's sector in this party was able to reserve six seats for the very first time (The Star, July 15, 2001).

One may argue, moreover, that this new developmental trend within the IAF includes more than just integrating women within the Shoura Council, the highest legislative body in the party. In fact, these development trends indicate the application of a two-fold strategy with regard to women's issues and gender relations, which is considered significantly different and less conservative when compared to the MB and IAF preoccupation with women's issues in earlier phases. First, the MB encouraged women's representation in one of the highest executive councils of the IAF, as six

women won seats in the Shoura Council, for the very first time in the history of the MB and IAF, as well as the history of the Islamic movement in the country. Second, the strategy of integrating women within the Shoura council is being supported by increasing signs of emergence of an Islamist Feminist discourse directed and supported by the MB and the IAF, and carried out by some female members of both the MB and the IAF.

Next, we will go through a detailed description of these new developmental trends. Then we will try to explain this argent 'less' conservative preoccupation of the MB and IAF with gender relations. Finally, we will try to see how sincere they are with these developments and the project of gender democracy.

**First: supporting women's representation in leadership positions: Six women winning seats in the Shoura Council of the IAF**

The Islamic Action front party has elected members of its Shoura council in 22 of its branches earlier this year, the women's sector in this party won 6 seats out of 93. The Shoura council functions, however, as a small parliament. It is the highest legislative body in the party. The responsibilities of this council include electing a President for the council. They also elect the members of the executive bureau, which is composed of thirteen members, besides electing the new secretary general of the party. The Shoura council will also elect the supreme court, which is composed of 6 members and the central court, which is composed of 5 members, these are responsible for interpreting Islamic Laws and justifying the IAF politics (Robin, 1994).

Commenting on the elections of the Shoura Council, where six women won seats, Hamza Mansour, the General Secretary of the IAF said: " The IAF by-laws stress the significance of women's participation in all fields. Their success is a natural development though still below aspirations" (The Star, March(2002)). In addition, responding to the question if the Party is willing to put forth a woman candidate to represent them in the parliamentary elections, the GS claimed: "Our selection of Candidates is not governed by tribal or geographical areas. We have our own mechanisms. If a woman is competent and has confidence of the general assembly, she would be proposed as our candidate" (The Star, March (2002)).



In conclusion, compared with other political parties in Jordan, the IAF is in the forefront of integrating women within high posts of the party. Women's representation in political parties in Jordan is generally very weak. Some resources put women's participation at about 5% (al Jariabi , 1997: 4). Only 4 out of 26 Jordanian political parties have women in their leadership. Yet, this integration of women within the councils of the party, was not the only mechanism implied by the MBs. Next, we will go through a second mechanism, namely the support of an Islamic feminist discourse carried out by female members of the group or the (Akhawat).

### **Second: Supporting the emergence of a new Islamist feminist discourse: From a discourse of morals to a discourse of rights**

Signs of a new feminist discourse with an Islamic vision have been evident in Jordan since the mid nineties. Female members of the MB and the IAF participated actively in the various female related activities taking place in the Jordanian public sphere. Their mission is to provide an Islamic vision for the various issues related to women's lives and issues. Despite being controlled by the MB' vision and ideology, this new discourse employs modern feminist notions and terms, revealing a good knowledge of the feminist discourses taking place in the country as is elsewhere in the world.

By reinterpreting the various notions and terms widely used by feminists, Nawal Fa'ouri, a member of the IAF, always tries to provide the Islamic version of feminist terms and notions like gender equality, as well as women's human rights. For her the Jordanian society, under the slogan of "Islam is the Solution", should go back to the original regulations and norms of Islam, where women's rights are reserved and their active participation in the public sphere is required (Fa'ouri 2002). Al Fa'ouri insists that Islam encourages women to express their views concerning the various matters in the family as well as in the public sphere of the Islamic state. Doing this, she is moving the focus of discussion away from being concentrated on women's sexuality, and the moral issue, towards being concentrated on women's rights and what rights Islam reserves for women.

This new discourse is significantly different from any previous discourse of related issues made by the MB in the early 90s. The discourse of women and gender related

issues was then mostly linked to the issue of cultural authenticity and to western and Jewish morally corrupted designs. The country's old conformation with Zionism provided the most immediate and concrete embodiment for this external threat, Tariki (1998) quotes Abu Ghanima, a prominent MB ideologue: "The Jews, as the Holy Qur'an has depicted them, are both corrupt and corrupting. Today, Jewish corruption is eating away quietly at the Arab body. But when relations between Jews and Arabs are normalized, this will become a licensed corruption, and the Jews will be at liberty to spread their moral corruption. Most sex films and depraved magazines are owned by Jews, so it is they who control the manufacture of sex and prostitution in the world at large (al Ribbat 58(1992):11 Cited in Tariki 1998).

How do women figure into this cultural confrontation? First, it is clear from Islamist writings that moral corruption is reduced in essence to the relaxation or abandonment of traditional morals relating to the interaction between women and men, on one hand, and to the improper dress, appearance and conduct of women on the other. Secondly, and this is also clear from Islamist writings, women bare the worst of the burden in the war against cultural contamination. It is then women, who are targeted by alien designs: If they want to rescue their society and their culture from falling into depravity, they must return to God and to their religion. The women's page of the Ikhwan newspaper states: "This is a vicious, many-sided battle we are waging [against the Jews 'and Hebrew civilization), and you, my sister, must rise to the occasion ...This is a war. ..being waged against a nation (umma)...whose women look up to Khadija, A 'isha, Fatima and Asma as models. ., My sister, if you avoid the path of God you will ,contribute to the success of the conspiracy, and you will be an obstacle to the liberation of Palestine. ..How can God's victory prevail when women adorn themselves openly and mix with men, and when defiance of God's law continues day and night? The enemy relies on you, my sister, to strike at this nation from within, as if the stabs we receive from outside were not enough. We do not presume that you would accept this" (al- Ribbat 45 (1991) Cited in Tariki 1998).

The new female discourse seems to move from these male structured arguments, that link women's liberation projects to western and Israeli projects aimed at distracting the society thorough morality. It rather deals with women's issues from a feminist

standpoint, revealing the original Islamic view. The new discourse demands the Jordanian society to return to Islamic regulations and norms, which recognizes women's legal, political, and social rights. Yet, what has forced such developments within the MB group and the IAF party?

So far, we have explained the changing aspects of the MB society and the IAF with regard to women's and gender related issues. Yet what we will try to explain here, is why this shift comes now and how sincere are the Muslim Brothers to this new project of Gender Democracy. We argue that there are several factors framing these latest developments. On one hand, and as has been demonstrated in chapter 2, women's lives in Jordan have changed significantly since the late 1980s. In fact, new life patterns and women related issues came to the surface in the aftermath of Jordan's participation in the International Women's conferences, and Jordan's Agreement on eliminating forms of discrimination against women within the general framework of implementing the CEDAW. On the other hand, there are the internal conflicts and contradictions within the Islamist Movement in general, and the disagreement of many of ex- MB members with the MB and the IAF policies and strategies in reform.

Since 1989 the MPs are developing their political as well as ideological program and strategies. In an attempt to express politically their rejection to the new elections Law (One Person one Vote), the MPs decided to boycott the Jordanian elections in 1997. This decision was supported by many other political parties in Jordan. Moreover, the MPs have also decided to boycott participation in the Government, as well as receiving portfolios by the government in that period. The decision to boycott resulted from several disagreements among the members of IAF and many other independent Islamists, who believe that their project of reform should go through the government and the governmental institutions. However, IAF members were loyal to the boycott decision, until Al Emoush, one of their leading figures, accepted a ministerial position in the government of Abdel Salam Al Majali, 1998. His approval was considered an indirect violation to the decisions made by IAF, the Brothers, and other oppositional political parties, which started to boycott the 1997 parliamentary elections and not to accept any governmental posts. Al Emoush and some other members were forced out of the MBs group. As a result, those who were driven out or resigned from the Islamic

movement sought to form their own independent party. Hence, they set to work on an agenda and on political programs.

Preparations were in full swing to establish a new Islamic centrist party. The party, which was licensed last year (2001) by the Ministry of Interior, has created much debate about its role in the Islamic Movement of Jordan. The breakaway members justify the establishment of the party arguing that there is only one dominant Islamic organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. They believe that the Brothers impose their rules on members of the Islamic Front. They (Brothers) always make the decisions and members of the IAF simply implement them (The Star March 2002).

The new Islamists look to their party and their platform to take an active part in the political life of the country and to participate in parliamentary elections. However, they point out such a decision will need the approval of the majority of its members. Many of the new party's members are dissidents from the Brotherhood and the IAF and are known as doves or moderates. The new party also includes three women as founding members and has elected two of them to the shoura council.

These conflicts and contradictions, as one may argue, have prepared the ground for competition between the various currents of Islamic movements. Especially if we want to consider that the establishment of the new ICPP would risk the relationship between the Jordanian government and the MB, as it did affect the image of the IAF and the MBs who were described as hawks or extremists. The new ICPP is believed to be highly supported by the state, which seeks to find a proper alternative to the Islamists.

To summarize, the IAF front, concerned about its image, has set new strategies namely integrating women and electing moderate and reformists members to represent their party in the coming phase. Such strategies, as one may argue were, are affected by the establishment of the new party and aim at guaranteeing strong representation of the IAF in the coming elections. However, these various external factors are not the only limiting factors of women's public action. There are diverse other factors which are related to the internal structures of women's organizations and their general performance in the national public space. In this respect, we will also discuss

limitations and problems such as the representational level of women's organizations, and the question of autonomy.

### **5.3 Autonomy question: A movement mobilizing resources or resources mobilizing the movement**

Autonomy is a hard question concerning women's organizations and the mobilization of women's issues in Jordan. The analysis of the general structures of the women's organization draws attention to several problems concerning the autonomy issue. In fact, and as we have seen, several women's organizations are neither totally separated from the state, nor are they financially independent from outsiders. Moreover, many women's organizations are members of the GFJW, which works directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development; or are supervised and run by the princess, who represents by one way or another, the state. These women's organizations (members of the Federation or supervised by the princess) are privileged. First, because they are more recognized by the state and the state's institutions in respect to the 'woman question'. Secondly, because they receive some financial help and support from the Federation, which in turn is financially supported by the state. However, other organizations that are not members of the Federation, such as the Jordanian Women's Union, suffer continuous interventions of the state as well as from serious financial problems.

In respect to the financial aspect, and in order to run their projects, the women's organizations seek financial support from different resources, which are in many cases international. In this process of seeking financial support, women's organizations find themselves forced to establish alliances with foreign institutions with many diverse interests. This international alliance might take many forms. It can be of a technical cooperation and an exchange of experience, purely financial, or even a mix of both these forms. On the other hand, women's organizations find themselves forced to deal with diverse 'national' charges concerning the real intention behind the international interest of their work. This issue of international support continually opens up speculation, and hence many women's organizations are charged with being disloyal to the own country and culture.

However, even in this respect women's organizations have to compete with other forms of organizations in gaining a share of these resources. In fact, the main receivers of such grants and aid (in Jordan) are those NGOs active in the field of development and run by the royal family, namely the Noor al Hussein Foundation run by Queen Noor, and the Jordanian Hashmite Fund run by Princess Basma. Yet, while these organizations are not asked to provide annual financial report to the government or to the related state institutions, other women's organizations (namely independent ones) are forced by law to provide an annual financial report, which shows their financial resources as well as expenditures.

Moreover, studies in this respect have proved that not all forms of organizations and projects receive international interest and consequently financial support (al Atiyat, 1998; Hammad, 1999). The international actors provide aid only upon specific agendas and interests. The organization subject to financial aid has to have at least a clear organizational structure, infrastructure, work facilities as well as a qualified staff. It also has to provide an attractive work agenda. In fact, it is only these issues that are related to democratization, women's empowerment, and gender mainstreaming that receive the most attention and foreign aid. In this respect, women's organizations are being charged by basing their agendas on themes that are interesting to the sponsors and not necessarily derived from real needs, interests, and the demands of Jordanian women.

However, one might argue that there are several reasons behind the financial problems facing women's organizations and consequently their dependency on foreign resources. Women's organizations in general suffer from the problem of not being self-financed through their own projects and programs, member's fees, and other unconditioned and national grants. In fact, women's organizations are in very limited cases able to mobilize national resources in the favor of women's issues. We might argue in this respect, that women's organizations are also not interested in national resources, for the international aid in the first place provides them with not only money, but also the possibility of networking and know how through exchanging experiences. Secondly, the international aid provides more money, which guarantees the coverage of all activities. This might not be the case of a national grant.

To summarize, it is not only the form of organization that determines the financial aid amount and source, but also the work themes and methods. One might argue in this respect that the directed women's organizations, with their clear organizational structure, branches around the country, clear working agenda, and qualified staff (being able to hire qualified people) are more able to attract national as well as international sponsors. Independent women's organizations generally lack creativity and the sufficient confidence to attract internal sponsors, and therefore tend to imitate the big royal NGOs in their work themes and methods. This however, takes us to a second point of discussion concerning the general problems facing women's organizations, namely that of performance and lack of competence.

#### **5.4 Problems related to the general performance of women's organizations and lack of competence**

Several problems can be submitted under the category of problems facing women's action in Jordan. In fact, despite the significant developments at the level of activism and work agendas, there are still some classic problems related to the general performance of women's organizations in general, namely that of work methods and strategies.

So far, we have seen that the activities of the majority of women's organizations are restricted to a standard set of courses in sewing, stitching and cosmetics, in addition to some literacy classes, as well as a few awareness lectures and kindergartens. Even these programs, and for several reasons, are not always sufficiently filled. This form of project is believed to suffer from serious diverse structural problems. On one hand, the organizations suffer from the problem of marketing their products at the national as well as in international levels. While it is known that marketing such products should not seek profit, still the prices of the products produced by women's organizations are very high for normal middle class Jordanians, and the international markets for such products are limited. On the other hand, these programs produce yearly, if not in shorter periods, a huge number of trainees who cannot integrate effectively in the waged labor market due to the high rate of unemployment in Jordan,

which is (24%). Hence, there is an obvious lack of competence especially at the level of small societies. Such a lack of competence hinders these local women's organizations from bringing about effective and innovative projects fulfilling the great ambitions which are reflected in their written platforms, such as awareness, empowerment, a social sustainable development and the raising of the standard of women lives at all levels.

Furthermore, women's organizations are working on what is called 'practical' gender issues, and in very limited cases on 'strategic' women's issues. What is meant by the 'practical' women's issues is those issues which are related to women, within the context of their daily life, daily roles, and to some extent how they touch the women's productive and reproductive roles, as mothers, wives and workers in the waged labor force.

What is lacking is the work on women's strategic interests, understood as those related to the women's image and roles within the context of the whole culture. Working in this direction would mean targeting cultural structures that are discriminating against women, or within which women are subordinated and presented as humans with limited capacities and abilities. In other words, this means having a 'feminist consciousness' of a sort, which enables women activists to clearly formulate the 'woman question' and issues in the country.

Moreover, most of the programs and projects implemented by women's organizations suffer from being traditional or by enhancing women's traditional roles. In fact, development and empowerment oriented programs and projects implemented by women's organizations focus on economizing traditional handicrafts such as sewing, tricot, weaving, or improving skills related to secretarial and clerical professions. Such a focus does not try to break new ground for women, or to establish new arenas whereby they can practice nontraditional activities, prove their abilities, and consequently change the general social image concerning them and their role in the society. In other words, women's organizations focus on social and economic agendas that do not seek to target the "oppressive" contexts wherein women live.



Yet, two main reasons stand behind working and focusing on traditional fields in enhancing women's status in the society. In the first place, women's organizations have to seek the permission of a related state's institution for every single action they intend to make. Interviewed women activists view the process of gaining such permission as being too slow, complicated and bureaucratic. In fact, the related state institutions have to make sure that the intended action is by no means of a political nature, or violates the constitution or (as previously explained) laws framing women's organizations. Secondly, and as we have explained earlier, working on female related issues is normally limited by cultural and religious restrictions. In fact, the cultural contexts wherein women's organizations perform reduce their work to providing such social services; otherwise, their programs will have no participants only those who still seek men's permission for participation.

Another problem related to the general performance of women's organizations is the form of members' participation in the decision-making processes of the organizations. As we have seen by analyzing the various data collected in this respect (chapter 4), the development of new projects is often limited to one person. Women's organizations and those that are successful tend to have a leading figure with a prominent public life who is the nucleus and center of activities, the source of new ideas and who dominates the organization.

Moreover, despite the fact that Jordan does not lack enough specialized experts in the field of developmental issues, the existence of these specialists in women's organizations is believed to be rare. In a study conducted on women's organizations and sustainable development, Hammad (1999) found that women's organizations lack professionals in planning and design who comprise only 12.3% of the general experts active in women's organizations, while more than 34% of the organizational staff are technical and financial experts. Moreover, women's organizations lack the active participation of their members, whose participation might not sufficiently be encouraged by the heads of the organizations. The members (by being also the beneficiaries) often lack the willingness or self-confidence to take responsibility through leadership. One might argue that this unwillingness is affected by several factors, namely that of a members socioeconomic background such as educational

level, experiences, and reasons for joining the organization (see chapter 4). In fact, the majority of members has a limited education (most of them did not exceed the level of high school), and lacks the organizational and professional experiences necessary for design and planning, which seem to be possessed only by the heads of these organizations.

To summarize, women's action in Jordan has much in common with many other Arab and third world women's movements. The so-called Third World feminism states that they are far more concerned about the political and economic issues than those related to sexuality and reproduction rights, these being in the meantime 'irrelevant issues' (Tong, 1998:226). Therefore, women's advancement –for them- includes women's active participation in national plans of development. This however, explains the focus of women's organizations and activists in Jordan on a political and economic advancement agenda, and not on their sexuality and their right to control their own bodies.

### **General Evaluations**

There are two main obstacles which face women's action in Jordan. On one hand, there are those derived from the general sociopolitical atmosphere wherein women activists work. On the other hand, there are those derived from the general performance of women's organizations, in terms of work methods and strategies. However, by the general results learned in this chapter, we can argue that we are now able to draw a general map of the determining factors of success and failure with regard to women's actions and organizations in Jordan. In the first place, the experiences of women activists show that those who are most successful in conveying their message to average men and women are those who represent their argument within the framework, which clearly respects Islam and existing societal structures. In other words, any intended action concerning women is to see success only if it acknowledges the fact that the Jordanian society is conservative and more comfortable within the approaches that respect the general culture, norms and traditions, than with those efforts that aimed at sexual liberties, and the demanding of women's rights concerning their own body.

Secondly, the leadership type plays a significant role in providing the necessary protection from state intervention as well as a buffer from societal reactions. For instance, being highly respected and beloved by the people, the princess has led all her initiatives and the organizations she supervises by her to success. Success in this respect means that the government adopted the policies and legal reforms recommended by these organizations. These reforms were adopted by the state institutions and did not raise a negative societal reaction. As an example we consider the legal reforms recommended by the JNCW (one of the princess initiatives), in terms of very controversial laws, namely that of divorce and citizenship.

Thirdly, the ability of the organization to mobilize financial support, as well as the financial resources for the organization, plays an important role in its success or failure. Large well-organized societies and NGOs are able to mobilize more funds and to run projects that are more ambitious; whereas small organizations in their fight for survival are unable to develop creative ideas and projects.

Basing on a feminist operational analysis of the women's movements, namely the one introduced by Molyneux; women's organizations in Jordan were classified into three main forms: 1) Directed; 2) associative; and 3) the independent organizations and actions. It was clear through the results of this study that working on women's issues or being a woman-oriented is not, the only criteria distinguishing women's movement organizations from other forms of women's organizations. In fact few women's organizations, namely the National Campaign to Eliminate Honor Crimes, succeeded in meeting the protest criterion. Finally, women's organizations failed also to fulfill the third criterion, which concerns the autonomy. It was evident that all women's organizations (except the National Campaign) depend financially on national as well as international financial resources.

Can we then speak of a women's movement in Jordan after failing to meet the theoretical criteria of a social movement? This question is easily answered, in fact, there were significant shifts in the history of women's public work in Jordan, small protests are taking place every now and then demanding more rights, and the public sphere is being filled with various women's issues. The period from the 70es until the

present is presenting a significant shift towards women and women's rights. Seeing this shift optimistically, one can argue that Jordan is witnessing signs of an active civil society, and an increasing confrontation between the conservative and the secularist forces with respect to women's issues.

As a general conclusion, we may argue that women's work, starting the 70es can be characterized as signs of a 'new' women's movement. All forms of action before that represented normal forms of organizations and small societies, although run by women, did not target women as their focus, and in turn did not aim at improving the women's situation. In fact, women activists in Jordan learned through these organizations the various politics of know how, for these organizations were partly mobilized by the political national movement in the 50's and 60's, and were schematizing the struggle of this political movement against Israeli occupation to Palestine as a main ideology, and were dealing with war victims as the main category of work.

According to the very different types of women's NGOs, their interpretation of their own role in society ranges from being mere charity organizations to that of being an actor in building up a civil society. Most NGOs define their relationship to the state as one of filling the gap in social services left by the state, and by this cooperating with and supporting state institutions. A minority of influential NGOs on the contrary defines a more critical role in participating in the democratization of a not yet democratic state. It's not only this group which strongly supports a reform of the NGO-law 33 of 1966, which in their opinion gives the Ministry too much control over their activities, thus hindering them from performing effectively.