University of Naples L'Orientale
Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Department
Ph.D. Program - XXXV Edition

# THE *POSITIVE* HONOR:

# THE EMERGENCE OF NEW FORMS OF MASCULINITIES

# IN CONTEMPORARY JORDAN

**Ph.D. Candidate:**
Marta Tarantino

**Tutor:**
Professor Ersilia Francesca

**Co-Tutor:**
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**A.A. 2021/2022**

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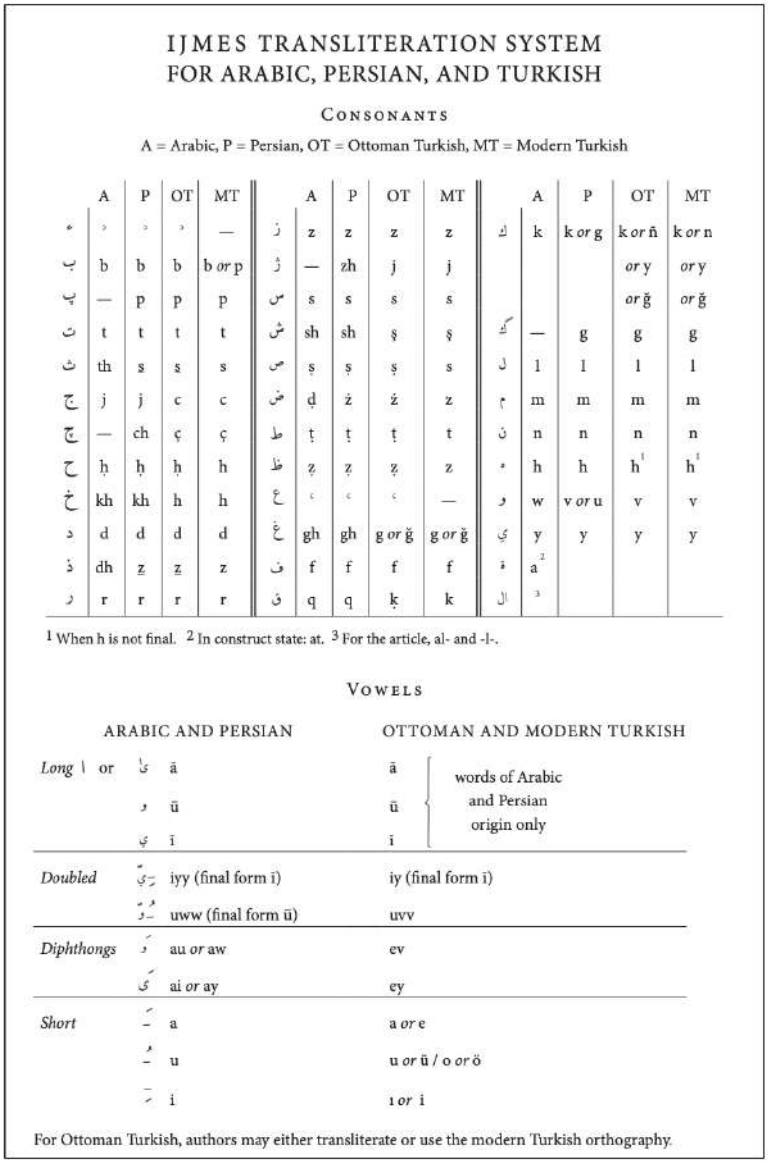
# Notes on Translation[1]



## IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

### Consonants

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

| | A | P | OT | MT | | A | P | OT | MT | | A | P | OT | MT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ء | ʾ | ʾ | ʾ | — | ز | z | z | z | z | ك | k | k *or* g | k *or* ñ | k *or* n |
| ب | b | b | b | b *or* p | ژ | — | zh | j | j | | | | *or* y | *or* y |
| پ | — | p | p | p | س | s | s | s | s | | | | *or* ğ | *or* ğ |
| ت | t | t | t | t | ش | sh | sh | ş | ş | گ | — | g | g | g |
| ث | th | s | s | s | ص | ṣ | ṣ | ṣ | s | ل | l | l | l | l |
| ج | j | j | c | c | ض | ḍ | ż | ż | z | م | m | m | m | m |
| چ | — | ch | ç | ç | ط | ṭ | ṭ | ṭ | t | ن | n | n | n | n |
| ح | ḥ | ḥ | ḥ | h | ظ | ẓ | ẓ | ẓ | z | ه | h | h | h[1] | h[1] |
| خ | kh | kh | h | h | ع | ʿ | ʿ | ʿ | — | و | w | v *or* u | v | v |
| د | d | d | d | d | غ | gh | gh | g *or* ğ | g *or* ğ | ي | y | y | y | y |
| ذ | dh | ẕ | ẕ | z | ف | f | f | f | f | ة | a[2] | | | |
| ر | r | r | r | r | ق | q | q | ķ | k | ال | ʾ[3] | | | |

[1] When h is not final. [2] In construct state: at. [3] For the article, al- and -l-.

### Vowels

| | ARABIC AND PERSIAN | | OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Long* | ا or ى | ā | ā | words of Arabic and Persian origin only |
| | و | ū | ū | |
| | ي | ī | ī | |
| *Doubled* | ـِيّ | iyy (final form ī) | iy (final form ī) | |
| | ـُوّ | uww (final form ū) | uvv | |
| *Diphthongs* | ـَوْ | au *or* aw | ev | |
| | ـَيْ | ai *or* ay | ey | |
| *Short* | ـَ | a | a *or* e | |
| | ـُ | u | u *or* ü / o *or* ö | |
| | ـِ | i | ı *or* i | |

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.

[1] The translation and transliteration system codified and used in IJMES, the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/IJMES_Translation_and_Transliteration_Guide.html

# Introduction.
## *Young masculinities at the crossroads: tradition, honor, and gender equality*

The dissertation here proposed focuses on two crucial subjects of investigation: on the one side, the Middle Eastern youth generation, and in particular, its male component born between the end of the 90s and the first decade of the new millennium – commonly referred to as Generation Z[2] – and representing today an interesting source of debate and transformation within the MENA region; on the other, tribalism (*'ashā'iriyya*), here understood not so much in its political aspects of a pre-modern mode of governance, but more as that *romanticized* set of values, principles, costumes, and cultural habits through which the belonging to an ancient sub-national identity is claimed. These two elements, although apparently distant, will be put in relation and analyzed under the lens of gender equality and related activism within the specific context of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In this sense, the Jordanian case study represents a remarkable and pragmatic example of both the aforementioned matters: this is indeed characterized by a large youth population living in the country, in which "by 2030, the share of 15–25-year-olds is likely to grow further and may represent the single biggest age group";[3] conversely, its heavy traditional society is also marked by a substantial tribal component. With this premise, problematizing the youth category and their activism for gender equality within the traditional and patriarchal Jordanian context appear as the novelty element of the research, as few if nothing was produced on these specific subjects in the country. In particular, the final goal of this investigative effort is to understand how new generations of young boys and men and traditional cultural values interact with each other within a contemporary Arab State and what changes this interaction produces in terms of gender equality and civil society's development.

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[2] *Generation Z* is approximately made of young boys and girls born between 1995 and 2010 – compared to millennials, who are generally born between 1981 and 1994; these individuals are digital natives who are now in their early 20s and have already experienced – at the edge of their adulthood – global economic crisis and Covid19 pandemic. For a comprehensive understanding of *Generation Z* characteristics, see: "Who is Gen Z and How Will They Impact the Workplace?", Western Government University, online. Retrieved from: https://www.wgu.edu/blog/who-is-gen-z-how-they-impact-workplace1906.html#close [Last Accessed 12/09/2022].

[3] UNICEF, "Youth: A Successful Transition to Adulthood for Every Child". Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/jordan/youth# . [Last accessed] 08/09/2022.

The importance of addressing masculinity (*rujūla*)[4] in its socio-cultural declination lies in two reasons: first, men and masculinity globally, and particularly in the Middle East, have often been analyzed by scholars and social theory of gender in a marginal, always correlated way, focusing almost exclusively on their side role as partners, brothers, fathers or Islamic terrorists. Alongside, the nationalist discourse largely made use of the father figures of the nation's image to consolidate its existence. In this regard, Massad (1995) described how:

> […] the metaphor of the nation as a mother- or fatherland, the practice of defending and administering it with homosocial institutions like the military and the bureaucracy, and the gendered strategies of reproducing not only the nation and its nationalist agents but also the very national culture defining it, were all constitutive of nationalist discourse.[5]

In general, as explained by Flood (2011), male subjects have been put under the lens of analysis as naturally prone to the role of perpetrators of injustices at the expense of women and other vulnerable groups, with few if no understanding of individual and collective experiences of contemporary masculinities, men needs and desires, as well as consequences of patriarchal constraints on their health and psychological wellbeing. In this sense, during the last decades, Arab Muslim men from the Global South[6] have been particularly subjected to a specific kind of scrutiny promoted mostly by western Academia and mass media, especially in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001 and the Arab Revolutions of 2010/2011 (*al-thawrāt al-'arabiyya*), also referred to as "Arab Springs". As soon as the United States declared war on al-Qā'ida terrorist organization and its affiliates in Afghanistan and around the world in response to the attacks that put at stake their political balance, a

[4] To describe "maleness" in the biological sense the Arabic language employs the term *ḍhukūra*. Differently, the gender role as performed in society, namely "masculinity", is described by the term *rujūla.*

[5] Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 49(3), 1995, p. 468.

[6] The term refers to low-income, developing countries from the Asian, African and Latin region that have experienced colonialism; differently from "Third World", which stresses the economic, developmental aspects of the countries involved by the definition, Global South put an emphasis on geopolitical power relations. For a comprehensive understanding of the term, see Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell, "The Global South", *Contexts*, Vol. 11(1), 2012, pp. 12-13.

far more subtle, undercover battle started both on the streets and on the Internet and Western mass media. Within a few hours, every openly Muslim man, whether a father or a son, became a threat and a possible target of revenge and violence.

Similarly, in more recent years and particularly with the end of the Arab Springs of 2010/2011, Arab Muslim men have been scrutinized as subjects in constant "crisis", no longer able to financially provide for their families and therefore in a critical and fallacious relationship with their masculinity. The power behind those "discourses" – in Foucault's words, those "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak"[7] – provided and constantly recreated by media revealed itself and continued to show up until today, shaping a stylized character in the collective imaginary that equates 1) all Arab Muslim men with terrorists, and 2) being an Arab Muslim man with being at odds with their own masculinity. In this sense, as Amar (2011) well described, the revolutionary sparkle of 2011 created a space in which this discourse of "masculinity in crisis" was highly replicated:

> […] many observers initially responded to the emergence of popular uprisings that spread from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya and beyond in 2011 with shocked incomprehension. To fill this perceived intelligence gap, public analysts, bloggers, and media commentators drew, again and again, upon the bottomless well of vernacular Middle Eastern masculinity theories to resolve their questions.[8]

It is precisely this kind of "everyday etiologies of racialized Middle Eastern maleness"[9] that, by collocating Arab Muslim men in a space of internal crisis and economic frustration towards their role of bread-winners, fostered and reinforced un-critical analyses of masculinity in the Middle East and beyond, thus shaping the regional geopolitics to explain – at the time unintelligible – social changes. Conversely, little has been done to deeply investigate the role of men in achieving gender equality in highly traditional,

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[7] See Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, English translation by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, New York 1972.

[8] Paul Amar, "Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of "Men in Crisis," Industries of Gender in Revolution", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies,* Vol.7(3), 2011, p. 37.

[9] Ibid. p. 38.

patriarchal societies of the MENA region, with some exceptions for the Egyptian case study, as will be further described in Chapter four. Accordingly, in order to locate and better understand the meaning of the subjects involved in this research, Chapter one will dig into the current literature on gender studies, particularly the knowledge produced in and on the MENA region. Moreover, it appears correct, and above all necessary, to link the male subject of research with the global sociology of masculinity. In this regard, the new and interesting field of scientific debate currently emerging in the academic environment will be outlined, attempting at understanding possible future lines of inquiries related to gender and sexuality, in particular Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) and Queer Studies.

As seen, the research will be contextualized within the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Often under-analyzed and considered as a less interesting subject of study by academics for being *the most artificial* State in the region, Jordan actually can be seen as a formidable example of political and social reconfigurations of spaces and powers, given the presence of a considerable number of transnational identities and ideologies which constantly shape both the internal and foreign political agenda of the State (tribes, Palestinian citizens, Syrian refugees, Circassians).[10] In this sense, as Köprülü (2007) underlined, Jordan witnessed an "incomplete" state-building process, due in particular to the co-existence of these several identitarian realities claiming their role within the formation process, either in a supra-state form, like Pan-Arabism or Islam, or a sub-state one, like that of tribal belonging.[11]

Very often, scholars approached the study of this country by directing their interest toward globally post-colonial critical scenarios, in particular Palestine and Israel, focusing on the Hashemite country only as a marginal, related subject built upon Britain's economic and political interests (i.e., the defense of Suez Canal, or the open-air route with India). Many historians and identity politics scholars proceeded to highlight the need for a strict differentiation of what can be considered a true Jordanian and who, on the other side, is not, thus flattening the discourse and undervaluing the far most intricated and correlated nature of all the social groups constituting and

[10] See Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, Los Angeles 1991.

[11] See Nur Köprülü, *Consolidation of Jordanian National Identity: "Rethinking Internal Unrest and External Challenges in Shaping Jordanian Identity and Foreign Policy"*, Ph.D. - Doctoral Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2007.

characterizing the Jordanian society until today.[12] In general, once the object of study, the country remained generally enclosed in rigid categories used to explain its socio-political dynamics and the role it plays in the regional context of the MENA area. According to Maggiolini (2017), two main categories have been employed to look at and analyze the Hashemite country: 1) an historical, historiographic approach, focused on determining the causes of Jordan's success starting from its rulers' biographies; 2) an almost mythological perspective, through which the history of the country relied almost entirely on the intertwining of the direct Islamic lineage of its ruler and the unquestionable loyalty professed by the tribal components of society.[13] In both the aforementioned cases, the analytical categories appear useful but essentially reductive and simplified. In particular, the question of tribalism, considered the backbone of the State, and its role within the socio-political development of the country, is not an easy element to approach: as noticed by Alon (2007), the support granted to the ruling power by local groups can't be considered unconditional or unquestionable throughout the controversial history of the country, but must rather be analyzed under the historical lens of its constituency during the mandate period.[14]

With these premises, the choice of Jordan as a case study undoubtedly comes from the importance of its geopolitical role and its ability to endure within one of the most turbulent environments in the world, as it is situated at the center of several political and social crises, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian refugee presence,[15] and an endemic economic crisis which makes it extremely dependent on external donors. More recently, most of these matters have ultimately been exacerbated or worsened by the Covid19 pandemic, which aggravated the economic situation and tremendously broadened the social disparity gap, making it harder for civil society to endure and produce significant changes within the Jordanian context. Chapter two will therefore outline a reconstruction of the most salient episodes of the nation's history since the immediate aftermath of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire until today, in order to understand

[12] See Linda L. Layne, *Home and Homeland, the Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994.
[13] See Paolo Maggiolini, *Il Regno di Giordania: Frontiere e Confini nella Storia e nelle Istituzioni della Monarchia Hashemita*, Ananke Lab, Torino 2017.
[14] See Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan, Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern States*, I.B. Tauris, New York and London 2007.
[15] According to Oxfam, around 1.3 millions of Syrian refugees live in Jordan today. See OXFAM, Official Website. Retrieved from: https://www.oxfam.org. [Last Accessed 01/09/2022].

how social forces emerged, endured, and positioned themselves both in the past and today, within the modern configuration of the State. Particular attention will be given to the tribal component and its transformation during the last two centuries, allowing a subsequent contextualization of the role of tribes and their cultural heritage in the contemporary, neo-liberal, and globalized Hashemite country.

In this sense, the role that tribalism plays in guiding and shaping the performance of male gender roles will be described. In this sense, the extent to which traditional tribal values such as honor (*sharaf, ʿirḍ*) and shame (*ʿayb, ʿār*), exist within contemporaneity and intersect with the construction of masculinity at different societal levels and spaces – both physical and virtual – will be interrogated. In doing so, the research will start from family dominion (*ʿāʾila, ʾusra*)[16] and everyday public sphere, to juridical institutions and spaces of national discourse construction. Indeed, the "honor-shame complex",[17] a fundamental construct of tribalism, will be analyzed, as well as its role in fostering patriarchal and violent behaviors nowadays. In this sense, reflecting on the role of tribal values in modern Jordanian society will help unveil its influence and adjustments on gender-related matters, in particular with regard to juridical practices around gender-based violence (GBV) in its different forms, from intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence to honor-related crimes and harassment. Accordingly, Chapter three will focus on the role of tribalism and its legacy in the contemporary, neo-liberal, and globalized Jordan, a country well known to be one of the most developed and politically stable in the region, but more and more characterized by a growing tendency to censorship, internal securitization, and militarization.

Starting from this highly securitized and militarized transition currently underway in Jordan and in the MENA region as a whole, the country's analysis will be put in relation to both the regional and the international socio-political contexts in which is embedded, with the aim of understanding the unfolding of traditional values and gender-related matters on a larger, international level. In this sense, the last decades of the 21st century were characterized by the emergence of numerous international youth-led movements, often born and developed online, which epitomize the adherence to a unifying cause and translate it on a global scale. A pertinent

[16] See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986.
[17] See Jhon G. Peristiany, *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966.

example is the Fridays for Future Movement[18], an environmental initiative started in Sweden in 2018 thanks to activist Greta Thunberg (2003 - ) and later became "viral" globally; similarly, the *#MeToo* movement is another pertinent example of a youth-led and community-driven initiative able to overcome physical and social boundaries. This global mobilization was started by an always-growing number of women all over the world who joined an informal, online community to address the same subject, that of ending sexual harassment and *gbv*. By first rising up online, the group had the specific intent to report similar experiences of violence, taking advantage of the Internet to make their voices heard and impact societies globally. From the U.S. to Europe, from China to the Middle East the *MeToo* Movement gained more and more power and grew in activists, translating its slogan into several different languages and addressing sexual harassment in every cultural background. A fascinating example of how these initiatives bring along a crucial transnational potential comes from Egypt: following the first, original *#MeToo* hashtag created by Tarana Burke in 2007, the Egyptian-American journalist and activist Mona Eltahawy created her own Arabic version of the hashtag, the #MosqueMeToo, reporting her two experiences of sexual assaults occurred in 1982 during pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia[19] and helping thousands of Arab Muslim women to do the same. By showing the transnational, intersectional nature of the gender cause, this example represents, on the one side, the power of the Internet in bringing together not only people's opinion, but also their grief and disruptive power beyond geographical and cultural differences, while on the other put us in the condition to question the role of mass movements, the authenticity of these initiatives and the actual repercussions on society in terms of their different goals (climate change awareness, gender equality, freedom of expression and others). Accordingly, several regional experiences of cultural and social activism also for gender equality emerged in the last decade in Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Iran, Morocco, and others, with many of them directly promoting male engagement within their activities. Most of these peculiar initiatives, often animated by young actors, are indeed examples of non-violent opposition to autocratic regimes. Problematizing the youth category indeed

[18] Fridays for Future Movement, Official Website: https://fridaysforfuture.org [Last Accessed 08/09/2022].

[19] "#MosqueMeToo was about solidarity among Muslim women", Moha El-Tahawy, *The Washington Post*, 08/05/2020. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/05/08/metoo-around-the-world/#Eltahawy [Last Accessed 08/09/2022].

appears crucial for understanding the socio-cultural environment of the contemporary MENA area since the 2011 Arab Springs until today and locating it within the wider global context. In this regard, suffice it to say that the region has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 60% of its citizens under the age of 25 years old, as a closer view shows:

> More than 28% of the population of the Middle East is aged between 15 and 29. Representing over 108 million young people, this is the largest number of young people to transition to adulthood in the region's history. […] In the Arab countries' populations, young people are the fastest growing segment.[20]

In line with this global depiction, also the Jordanian youth generation collocates itself within the context of global cultural movements, giving birth to new forms of appropriation of spaces – both physical and online – around different matters. In particular, some of these experiences combine together women's demands for rights, recognition, and empowerment with men's participation in pro-gender equality movements, as well as other initiatives that physically, culturally, and emotionally try to constitute an alternative to the dominant hegemonic model.[21] By calling both men and women to act against *gbv*, these experiences aim at creating a "politics of alliances"[22] made up of young advocates, activists, and social movements that could have a real, tangible impact on everyday gender experiences for both men and women. In this context, escaping the pre-determined box of reading of men's subjectivities, until now seen as simply "a footnote to feminism",[23] means giving justice to a number of much more complex experiences of masculinity animating the Jordanian context today that cannot fall into one exclusive descriptive case – for example, the Muslim conservative father or the tribal

[20] YouthPolicy, Middle East and North Africa: Youth Facts. Retrieved from: https://www.youthpolicy.org/mappings/regionalyouthscenes/mena/facts/ [Last Accessed 10/09/2022].

[21] See the role of men in Iranian's protest against forced *ḥijāb* after Mahsa Amini's death: "'For me, it is a fight against darkness': How Iranian men are standing up for women, life, and freedom", *The New Arab*, 11/10/2022. Retrieved from: https://www.newarab.com/features/how-iranian-men-are-standing-women-life-and-freedom [Last Accessed 26/10/2022].

[22] See Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (2nd Ed.), California University Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2005.

[23] Ibid., p. 241.

violent man – thus shedding light on different realities involved within contemporary societies.

Furthermore, focusing on young Jordanian masculinities involved in gender equality activism appears nowadays necessary in the attempt to integrate the tremendous amount of knowledge on women and their gender role in patriarchal societies of the Global South, collected through decades of analysis and study from socio-cultural, historical, and political points of view. Being able to bridge together the existing theoretical space between these two sides of the same matter – namely, gender, its cultural meaning, and how it changes within modern, neo-liberal societies – means completing and integrating the understanding of crucial social dynamics, from street harassment to honor killings and female genital mutilations (FGM), from efforts towards gender equality to public policy makings, from pinkwashing strategies to LGBTQI+ movement claims, as well as the criminalization of deviances from the normative.[24]

The interest for marginalized subjectivities allows the exposure to a critical understanding of those experiences of gender performances that right now – while this work is being written – are re-interpreting what it means "to be a man" in a traditional, tribal country like Jordan and in the Middle East more broadly. With these premises, the fourth chapter will move the research further by employing an original approach based on the study of youth thriving for gender equality in Jordan. The research will specifically address the global initiative *HeforShe* Solidarity Movement and its local Middle Eastern branch, *HeForShe Arabic*, first appeared in Jordan in 2015 thanks to 24 years old student Layth Abu-Taleb. This operates in the country under the guidance of UN Women and works for a decisive alignment of the Hashemite Kingdom with Sustainable Development Goal No. 5: "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". [25] To do so, the movement directly calls young boys and men to commit against the persisting *gbv* and discrimination in the country, which nowadays is being further exacerbated by the economic crisis and Covid19 pandemic. Through the analysis of

[24] Here, the use of the term normative relies on the description employed by the philosopher Judith Butler, for whom it is something pertaining to the norms that govern gender and adopted as a fundamental discourse, in Foucault's sense, by governors and society.

[25] See the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015. Retrieved from: https://sdgs.un.org/goals. [Last Accessed 28/08/2022].

*HeForShe*[26] as a case study, the research aims at describing male activism and practices of resistance eleven years after the "quiet" Jordanian revolution, a country that despite being de-centralized by the Arab Springs' narration, is still profoundly influenced by the events of 2011.

First inspired and triggered by the Arab Spring, male engagement within gender equality activism in the country is now a different, new evolution of those events; indeed, the revolutionary sparkle here is no longer producing a direct, tangible change (i.e., square mass protests, clashes, fall of regimes) or – at least – that disruptive power has come to an end, making space for different and more democratic transformative scenarios and a less fetishized, romanticized lecture of its implications and actors. Undoubtedly, from the first decade of 2000, the Internet, social media, mass protests, and Arab revolutions had the merit to converge at one chronological crossroad, and the need of young generations to overturn oppressive, corrupted regimes opened the path for future but not yet totally intelligible transformations in the MENA region as a whole. Those who directly attended the protests of *Maydān al-Taḥrīr* (Tahrir Square) in Egypt and other countries or watched them on the screens are only a part of those who are joining the movements for gender equality in the Middle East and Jordan today, but it is not entirely wrong to assume that the existence of the latter couldn't be without the former. The Hashemite Kingdom indeed, although differently hit by the mass protests wave of 2011, well experienced the regional turmoil itself, with the peculiarity of a more "evolution instead of revolution"[27] approach promoted by its activists and protesters and a less tangible but equally worth transformation process that need to be deeply interrogated. In this context, although the protests of 2011 did not directly appoint gender equality as a primary matter, the activism of today around this subject can be considered as a direct consequence of those oppositions and revendications.

By interrogating gender equality activism as the practice of "moving from a state of equilibrium into a state far from equilibrium",[28] this research seeks to understand the effects of the new position young men and boys occupy in the Jordanian society and to what extent these subjects are giving

[26] From now on, the name *HeForShe* will be replaced by the acronym HFS throughout the thesis.

[27] Curtis Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State*, Columbia Studies in Middle East Politics, Columbia University Press, New York 2018.

[28] Marcelo Svirsky, "Defining activism", *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 4 (supplement), 2010, p. 168.

the word *honor* a new, counter-intuitive, and *positive* meaning. This concept draws upon Messerschmidt et al. (2018) considerations about *positive masculinities*, namely:

> […] those masculinities (locally, regionally, and globally) that contribute to legitimating egalitarian relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities […] constructed by nonviolent boys, who […] did not emphasize heterosexuality and accepted celibacy, embraced diversity in bodies and sexuality, were nonhierarchical, had no desire to be popular, and the boys were not misogynist.[29]

In order to describe the emergence of these new forms of masculinities, the inquiry will be oriented both on a community, movement-oriented level and on a more personal, intimate one, trying to avoid any redundant reading of male subjectivities. Moreover, the research will look at HFS activism through the lens of regional specificities but always put it in theoretical relation to neo-liberal, global dynamics, looking at its links with the broader international environment of activism. In conclusion, the emerging forms of activist masculinities constitute in this sense the element of novelty of this research, fundamental in the attempt to understand new directions in gender dynamics in the country and in the region as a whole. The choice to address HFS movement as a primary source of research comes from two crucial aspects:

1) HFS Arabic is currently the biggest movement directly promoting male activism for gender equality on a large scale in Jordan, with activists representing in this sense a significative sample to extrapolate interesting and effective insights from;

2) its international structure allows for the analysis of global-related aspects, in particular the relation between the global

[29] James Messerschmidt, Patricia Y. Martin, Michael A. Messner and Raewyn Connell (eds.), *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, New York University Press, New York 2018, p. 42.

activism for gender equality and the local Arab-Muslim environment of Jordan.

It is at the crossroads between modernity and tradition, between local and global, that the thesis here proposed wants to move: starting from the assumption that new generations of young boys and men from the Global South are now more than ever "connected" to their peers all over the world, it would be extremely interesting to understand more about a similar experience of interconnectedness canalized into gender-equality activism, what kind of links are built among the subjects involved, what knowledge is being produced and through what tools, to what extent the local experiences of maleness are reinforcing or contrasting patriarchal behaviors, and more crucially if and how regional specificities are brought to the surface in the process, both by activists and supporting international institutions. Accordingly, the present work's main research questions turn around:

1) whether traditional, tribal values – and in particular *honor* – are re-signified by the young male activists in a *positive* way;

2) the extent to which gender equality activism may actually improve the lives of those involved and the nature of this participation in terms of benefits and personal gains;

3) what is the real democratic potential behind individuals' and collectives' activism in favor of Jordanian society;

4) what is the meaning behind the growing presence of NGOs and international agencies in the country and its possible implications for the realization of gender equality;

Finally, it should be kept in mind that these alliances' formations represent a brand-new and still ongoing process in the region, which needs to be continuously and deeply investigated in the years to come in order to grasp and understand their long-term impact on the socio-political and economical context of the MENA region, rapidly and enormously changing nowadays.

# Methodology

## Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

The present thesis employs a qualitative approach to research the subjects of its study, namely tribalism and youth-led, male activism in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.[30] Indeed, the choice of qualitative over quantitative methods relies on several factors, mainly related to the context in which the work has been developed. Yet in 2006, Clark suggested how if on the one side, the practice of researching the MENA region was becoming more and more essential, in particular after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, on the other, in the years to come this practice would have simultaneously increased its challenges and threats in the face of researchers involved in the area – and more broadly in the Global South.[31] Factually, researching in the context of highly coercive and authoritarian regimes today has extensively become a relevant challenge for researchers, affecting their ability to produce effective results through the employment of quantitative methods. Several reasons may justify the lack of data available: 1) the structural inability on the part of the governments to collect, analyze, and store all the informations regarding specific topics (i.e., crimes rates, education system, health, population census); 2) the restricted or forbidden access to existing data on the part of authorities and intelligence services (*mukhābarāt*), often little inclined to openly share these informations with Western researchers.[32] Furthermore, this is in line with the growing tendency to militarization and securitization recently affecting the MENA region, as will be later shown in Chapters three and four. In this sense, the tragic history of Giulio Regeni, the young Italian Ph.D. student kidnapped, tortured, and finally killed by the Egyptian security apparatus, is a remarkable example of the growing danger and pressure experienced by scholars researching the field in the last decades.

In this complex context enveloped by a culture of suspicion, qualitative research represents an effective alternative and useful tool to

[30] The only quantitative tool employed was the Online Preliminary Survey on Masculinity, September 2021 – Google Modules; the survey aimed at understanding the general youth (both activists and non-activists) perceptions around the main subjects of this research.

[31] Janine A. Clark, "Field Research Methods in the Middle East", *Political Science & Politics,* vol. 39(3), 2006, pp 417-423.

[32] "En Orient, chercheurs et chercheuses sur un terrain miné", Laurent Bonnefoy, *OrientXXI*, 05/06/2022. Retrieved from: https://orientxxi.info/magazine/en-orient-chercheurs-et-chercheuses-sur-un-terrain-mine,5659. [Last Accessed 27/01/2023].

access difficult settings, discuss sensitive topics, and interact with informants. In addition, in the specific case of the doctoral thesis here proposed, besides the political-related issues connected to quantitative research methods, the qualitative approach has primarily served the scope of entering a space of information otherwise vague and not yet entirely unraveled by gender politics: the description of a new category of young masculinities involved in gender equality initiatives in Jordan. Accordingly, the main qualitative tool employed by this research was the semi-structured interview. By definition, a semi-structured interview is not a fixed set of questions, but rather "a conversation with a purpose"[33] which develops around an introductory framework of questions. Highly involved in anthropologic qualitative research since the 20th century,[34] this methodology of inquiry

> leaves both you and your respondent free to follow new leads. It shows that you are prepared and competent but that you are not trying to exercise excessive control.[35]

Alongside, other tools also served the scope of this research: indeed, throughout a period of around nine months I had the chance to follow and participate in several experiences organized by HFS activists, carried out in different environments (research centers, shopping malls, co-working spaces, informal settings like cafés and pubs) and through different methodologies (conferences, trainings, recreational activities), employing both participant observation and focus groups as privileged tools of inquiry.[36] Accordingly, more than one-to-one interviews, these two methodologies were fundamental in creating a safe space of mutual trust between me and my informants who, being at first often skeptical about the reasons behind my choice to investigate the HFS movement, eventually had the chance to know me better both as a young researcher and as a person. Undoubtedly, my positionality as a young,

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[33] Robert G. Burgess, *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*, Unwin Hyman, London1984, p. 84.

[34] Among the first to use this methodology was the British journalist and reformist Henry Mayhew in 1851.

[35] Russell H. Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (4th Ed.), Altamira Press, Lanham, New York, Toronto, Oxford 2006, p. 210.

[36] Lacking a specific official space for their initiatives, HFS activists usually meet in informal spaces or hotels to carry out their activities. Accordingly, also the focus groups happened in these specific settings, taking advantage of the possibility to gather all activists together at once and open with them the discussion.

Western, and female researcher informed the practice, as well as my interlocutors' positionality informed their experience with me. As will be further shown in the Appendix (see Notes on Methodology, p. 205) positionality indeed played a fundamental role in the final outcomes of this work.

Additionally, this current methodological description needs to be further broadened by the historical context in which the research developed. Indeed, the fieldwork started in September 2021, several months after the initially scheduled date. The delay was caused by the Covid-19 pandemic that hit globally at the beginning of 2020 and subsequently forced all countries to enact travel restrictions and internal curfews. This event, which had extreme repercussions on all levels of contemporary society, undoubtedly marked a turning point also for the whole academic world, and more particularly for the researchers' practice on the ground. Indeed, on a very immediate level, primary sources from the field became inaccessible, with libraries and online databases inevitably becoming the only available basin of knowledge to draw from. In this context, also the work here proposed saw a partial restriction of its initial contents. The effects of Covid-19 reverberated also on the informants themselves. In this sense, some of the HFS initiatives were canceled, in particular, the Tour Bus scheduled for 2021, as well as some volunteers no longer attended the activities of the movement. These elements, although not determinant for the finalization of the present work, nonetheless open important questions about the future of research, contemplating the partial employment of social platforms and alternative methodologies as significant tools of inquiry, in particular when approaching a research field already inclined to securitization and closure.

# Chapter 1. State of the Art

## 1.1. Gender studies: developments, transformations, and innovative subjects

When referring to the term gender, we talk about a complex, multi-faceted subject, which represents at the same time an extremely interesting as well as a highly contested field of research and debate in contemporary society: this is due to its frequent intertwining with indigenous religious contexts and public authorities of patriarchal countries involved in the process of analyzing gender-related issues and processes, but also to the extremely vague nature of its definition and interpretation, which during the centuries has continuously and drastically changed. First associated with biological sex and put in a fixed causal relationship with it, gender has been then referred to as the socially-imposed division of the sexes. In 1975, Gayle Rubin moved a step toward a new conceptualization by naming as "sex/gender system" [37] that part of social life which is the locus of female oppression, "the set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied".[38] By giving gender (and its system) a cultural meaning, Rubin stressed the need to move from fixed determinism/binarism which had been the basis for all definitions of gender and sexuality employed until that moment, to sex role theory, which first highlighted the socially constructed nature of gender. To put it in the words of the French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir as she suggests in her masterpiece *Le Deuxième Sexe* [The Second Sex], "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one".[39] By the use of the active verb, De Beauvoir returned a certain degree of agency to the female subject, who culturally bears in herself the significance of its gender as a cultural product, detaching females from the biological determinism referred to their sexual reproductive apparatus. From there, theorists of gender started to look at society and relationships under less deterministic lenses, setting the basis for a wider interpretation of sexes, gender roles, and sexual relations more recently leading to new theoretical frameworks, in particular modern

[37] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women". In: Linda Nicholson (ed.), *Second Wave. A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Routledge, New York and London 1975, p. 28.
[38] Ibid., p. 28.
[39] Simone De Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Galimard, Paris 1949.

queer theory. In the fundamental article *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis* (1986), historian Joan W. Scott addressed gender as a crucial category to be employed by historians, explaining how, according to inherent embodied sexual differences, the traditional social theory and its binarism fail to explain "how gender inequalities structure all other inequalities, or, indeed, how gender affects those areas of life that do not seem to be connected to it".[40] In her essay, she warns on how relying on a theory that rests on the single variable of physical difference doesn't allow to grasp real changes in gender dynamics, assuming also an always immutable, a-historical reading of gender itself. This contribution, considered foundational for research worldwide, pushed to employ the framework of "gender" with a new approach able to overcome simplistic analysis of women and men in society, considering also psychoanalytical perspectives in the study of social interactions among individuals and their specificities. The interest sparked by these theorizations intertwined with and draws upon thinkers such as Marx, Levi-Strauss, and Foucault, with the field of gender studies reaching a peak of interest, not only within but also outside the Academic environment.

## Gender Studies and the MENA region

From the beginning of the 21st century, growing attention was in particular devoted to *gbv*, women's and human rights, and reform processes of back-dated and traditional legislations all over the world, most importantly in developing or so-called Global South countries. This wave of concern has been ignited by decades of feminist movements and claims that, if in turn changed their methodologies and the generations involved as agents of change, eventually maintained their major demands, contesting and challenging governments and institutions around crucial subjects such as family law reforms, abortion, discrimination, development and gender equality. Looking back at the history of global feminist movements, the year 1848 represents a marking point for the advocacy of women's rights and gender equality: indeed, the Seneca Fall Convention held that year, led to the issuing of the 19th Amendment of the American Constitution, finally bridging together suffragists' movements from all over the globe and detecting all of their different instances at a first common intersection, that of the right to

[40] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91(5), 1986, p. 1059.

vote.[41] Despite initially confined to the Western regions of the U.S. and Europe, where a heterogeneous and allegedly international wave of protests and upheavals self-identified under the unique alliance of "global sisterhood",[42] the battle for gender equality and its disputing within the public arena also reached the more marginalized, still-colonized areas of the Middle Eastern, North African and far Eastern region. Here, indigenous women had started to organize their knowledge, questioning their position within Arab-Muslim societies through the creation of movements, associations, reviews, and feminist groups to give voice to developing countries' subjectivities and peculiarities. In the footsteps of Mary Wollstonecraft's masterpiece, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and for two centuries, this western-oriented feminist oligarchy continued to produce a tremendous amount of feminist literature, which unfortunately remained written almost exclusively in English, French, or German, thus providing again an opportunity for major segregation and colonization of knowledge of non-western countries.

Another crucial turning point is represented by the International Women's Year, held in 1975 by the United Nations, which marked a fundamental moment for the development of gender sensitiveness on a global scale. Revolved around three main topics (the end of gender discrimination and gender equality, the integration of women in development processes, and increasing women's contribution to world peace),[43] this global event represented the first stage for transnational outcomes produced by feminist activism in the MENA region and other areas of the so-called Global South. In this context, countries from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East had a chance to speak for themselves in a public arena and to put their rights, requests, and needs on the table of international negotiations. Nevertheless, several critics and complaints reported how the conference actually played a role in reinforcing once again the same pattern of colonial/orientalist

[41] The following considerations gave birth to a more structured article on the systematization of gender studies in the MENA region; see Marta Tarantino, "Gender and Masculinity Studies in The Middle East: Developments and New Perspectives for The Future of Social Theory", *Studi Magrebini*, Vol. 20, July 2022, pp. 80-100.

[42] "The International History of the U.S. Suffrage Movement", Katherine Marino, Origins, Current Events in Historical Perspective, online, 2020. Available at: https://origins.osu.edu/article/19th-amendment-suffrage-women-vote [Last Accessed 04/04/2022].

[43] See UN Digital Library, E/CONF.66/34, "Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 19 June-2 July 1975". Retrieved from: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/586225 [Last Accessed 18/02/2022].

maternalism exerted at the expense of developing countries in the past. Precisely in this sense, an open letter signed by Fātima Mernīssi, Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī, and Mallica Vajarathon [44] in 1978 condemned the attitude to constrict women from the Global South into a colonial perspective that did not take into consideration their specificities, taking advantage of the Women and Development Conference[45] held at Wellesley College in Boston in 1976. In the letter, the three feminist intellectuals argued that the Third World attendees "were reduced to being passive, accommodating audiences rather than participants", [46] forced in some ways to read, analyze and process information concerning their status as citizens of developing countries, while no papers or research was presented concerning American women, whether they black, white or part of minority groups.

Despite undeniably flawed and partially noncompliant with fundamental questions raised by Global South countries about gender equality, the IWY of 1975 marked the beginning of a new era in gender advocacy within the Middle East and North Africa region, putting women's inequality at the center of international political agendas for the very first time and giving a space for women voices to be heard both locally and globally. From that moment, public opinion and political stakeholders started to take women's rights and gender equality more seriously. In this context, although the representatives of North Africa and the Middle East still suffered a certain amount of marginalization within the political dialogue at the event, it should be more than fair to underline that those countries who freed themselves from imperial Western subjugation played a crucial role in putting at stake core issues – ranging from nation-building processes to racial discrimination and labor exploitation, from immigration to family law – informed and influenced by a battle for freedom and equality initiated a century ago in the MENA region, almost simultaneously with their Western counterparts and following similar pathways.

[44] Nawwal El-Saadawi – Fatima Mernissi – Monica Vajarathon, "A Critical View of the Wellesley Conference", *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, Vol. 4(2), 1978, pp. 101–107.

[45] See "Women and development: the Wellesley conference", Feminist Archives ISIS. Retrieved from: http://feministarchives.isiswomen.org/50-isis-international-bulletin/isis-international-bulletin-april-1977/654-women-and-development-the-wellesley-conference [Last Accessed 06/06/2022].

[46] N. El-Saadawi et al., *A Critical View…*, p. 102.

Indeed, stepping back a century, the first feminist review of the Middle Eastern world, *al-Fatah*, created in 1892 by the Syrian[47] feminist journalist and writer Hind Nawfal (1860-1920) appeared; later, the book entitled *Taḥrīr al-mar'a* (1899) by the lawyer and proto-feminist intellectual Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908) was published; both these works laid the foundations for further theorizations of women's role in society and sparking a wave of feminism in the Arab Muslim world, which from the early 20th century until now is still at the forefront of any practice of activism and discussion in the region. The enlightening writers and intellectuals of that period did not stand alone for themselves but were ascribed within the broader movement of Arab *nahḍa*, mostly translated as renaissance or awakening.[48] Actually, the term literally designates the movement of rising up; such a linguistic detail is not trivial but useful to highlight the totally peculiar nature of this period of Arab history, contrary to some formulations that understand nahḍa and its historical features as the translation of the European Renaissance[49] within the Arab world. Alongside Qāsim Amīn, several were the intellectuals and first ideologues of this spin for modernization within the MENA area.[50] In this context, Egypt stood as an exemplar among its neighboring countries for the incredible internal production about women's representation in civil society, rights recognition in the public sphere, and emancipation from private patriarchal impositions. The universalism of human rights was the theoretical background of revendication employed by the agents of this social and cultural revolution, who sought to merge together not only women's rights on their own, but also with democracy and socio-political equality. Some years later, in 1923, the very first movement for women's rights emerged in Egypt under the label of the Egyptian Feminist

[47] The term 'Syrian' is here used to refer to the geographical belonging to the Ottoman-ruled region of that time, in line with how the term was commonly used in al-Fatah and literature of the period.

[48] For a comprehensive analysis of this period, see Maria Ines Avino, Isabella Camera D'Afflitto, Alma Salem, *Antologia della Letteratura Araba Contemporanea. Dalla «nahdah» ad Oggi*, Carocci, Roma 2015.

[49] In *Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabī* (Critique of Arab Reason) Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabri (1935-2010) sees the *nahḍa* as an Arab translation of European Renaissance, thus relegating Arab culture to the position of 'derivate' of the European one.

[50] Yet a generation before Qasim Amin, a group of intellectuals wrote about the importance of women's emancipation and education as crucial for the advent of Arab modernity. Among these, Ahmad Ibn Abi Diyaf (1804-1874), who wrote the *Risālah fī 'l mar'a* (Essay on Woman) in 1856, Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), his son Salim al-Bustani (1848–1884), and Francis Marrash. See Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, University of Florida Press, Gainesville 2004.

Union,[51] led by feminist and nationalist Hudā Shaʿrāwī (1879-1947). The global vocation of the EFU was visible in its connection with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), formalized by the presence of an Egyptian delegation at the IWSA Rome meeting that same year. From that moment on, uncountable experiences of secular feminism in the Arab world[52] arose not only in that country but in the North African and Middle Eastern region as a whole, intertwining their requests for a reinterpretation of Qurʾān with those of nationalism and pan-Arab liberation from the colonial oppressor. As highlighted by sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti, the contradictory nature of this relationship between nationalism and feminism must be further interrogated. If, on the one hand, national narratives in the Middle East put women at the very core of the nation-building projects by giving them a specific agency as actors within these processes, on the other hand, she argues that when connected to nationalism, "feminisms are never autonomous but bound to the signifying networks of the contexts which produce them",[53] compelling feminists to adapt their requests to the theoretical and practical boundaries set by the nationalist discourse. This 'dominant' discourse, namely "a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance",[54] produced at the intersection between nationalism and Islamic feminism, determined from that moment on a specific direction for the following modern discussion on women's rights, gender equality, and their relation to Islamic values, which has prevented different departures from this matrix. A useful example of this is the work on gender and Islam produced by Fātima Mernīssi [55] who

[51] Born on March, 16th 1923 within the four walls of feminist leader and activist Hudā Shaʿrāwī's house, the Egyptian Feminist Union was initially formed by a small group of women from elite families, actively engaging in the battle for independence from British occupation. The presence of Egyptian feminists at the Rome meeting received notice in Egypt's press, as well as the public unveiling made by Hudā Shaʿrāwī and Sayzā Nabarāwī in the Cairo train station upon their return.

[52] The use of 'feminism in the Arab world' locution, refers here to the multiple experiences of revendication of women's rights which from late 20th century moved within the geographical framework of Arab countries; differently, by the use of 'Islamic Feminism', we refer instead to the intellectual reformist movement which starting from late 1970s in revolutionary Iran, attempted to review and reinterpret religious principles employed by jurists to justify patriarchal traditions through the Qurʾān and the Sunna.

[53] Deniz Kandiyoti, *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse and New York, 1996, p. 9.

[54] Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Northeastern University Press, Boston 1988, p. 185.

[55] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1991.

proposed a more radical academic variant of feminist discourse to detach patriarchal practices from Islam, removing any alleged correlation between these two aspects and overcoming the more lenient approach proposed by socialist feminism. In her works, she argued that not Islam, but its manipulation by male elites, lead to a form of oppression towards women justified by Islamic rules. The veil in particular embeds this misleading, as it is a sign of oppression and an empowering element in the Holy Qur'ān at the same time. Through the work of Mernissi, it is possible to detach from that Orientalist tendency within academia and beyond, which for centuries watched Arab Muslim women as a subject of oppression, deprived of any form of agency or ability to choose for themselves, and in the constant need to be "saved" by their western fellow feminists. Instead, it must be notice here how since the beginning of the 19th century, thousands of women embraced the cause of feminism in the MENA region, starting to translate gender instances coming from Western scholarships into more locally declined definitions of what practices of subordination and how the production of disparity should be addressed in the region, keeping in mind fundamental local peculiarities until that moment given for granted or underestimated when dealing with the history and politics of gender in Muslim contexts. Indeed, gender conflicts, the suffragist movement, and feminists' critics in the West were incorporated and used as a point of reference by feminists in the MENA region in a selective way and subsequently translated into the local/regional context.

With the advent of 20th century and during the nation-building phase of the Middle Eastern and North African region, there was a growing interest in the benefits of modernity and its discourses in various social fields, including academic scholarships, whose production of knowledge turned to late Marxist theories according to which gender inequalities directly flow from broader socio-economic structures. A kind of blind faith in expansive growth and the benefits of globalization swept also through the Arab world, with intellectuals and theorists suggesting that only through further developments could gender inequalities – as well as economic, social, and cultural inequalities – be overcome. Conversely, this belief was the spark for the second wave of feminism that started to challenge the notion of modernization and its beneficial effects, especially with regard to women in society. This second generation of feminists pointed out different and new areas of exclusion that have opened for women once again, criticizing and problematizing the unconditional belief in modernity and prosperity. During

the second phase, the discussion shifted ulteriorly and several scholars started to adopt a post-structuralist approach to describe the category of women, suggesting how gender inequalities were not explicable under a single circumstance, but at the crossroads of numerous social structures, categories, narratives, and practices. Strong on these considerations, scholars and their analysis moved beyond the long-standing dichotomy between men and women as addressed until that moment by Sex Role Theory[56] and biological essentialism, implying their inability to truly grasp the multifaceted and heterogeneous features of gender in an expanding and globalizing world.

During the same phase, taking advantage of the external economic support promoted by international cooperation and global interest in these new matters, gender studies saw a growing knowledge production among Middle Eastern scholars and universities, with several programs for gender studies starting in the MENA region as a whole, returning the interest in the region to its very significant agents, namely Arab-Muslim scholars and activists. The establishment of these institutions, both in and outside the academic environment, happened in a general context of structural adjustment programs for recessive economies and flawed governments, until that moment unable to cope with the growing expansion of the field. In order to respond to this new focus and desire expressed by stakeholders, several local, national, and international institutions as well as governmental centers addressing women's and gender equality were created. From 1990 onward, numerous faculties and research institutes emerged, all promoting gender equality and women's participation in public life, as well as deeper analysis and disentanglement of Western-centered production on those topics in the region. In this context, the Women's Studies Center at Ahfad College for Girls in Omdurman (Sudan) was created in 1966, alongside the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) within the Lebanese American University (LAU); the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) created in 1993; the Institute of Women's Studies at Bir Zeit University (Palestine) in 1994, the first-degree program in the region drawing upon the history of Palestinian women and their activism; the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies created at American University in Cairo. Alongside, the end of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st were also marked by a growing tendency towards the comeback of earlier feminist writers' essays, like the earlier mentioned Hudā

[56] See Anne R. Edwards, "Sex Roles: A Problem for Sociology and for Women", *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19(3), 1983, pp. 385-412.

Shaʿrāwī (1879-1947), Dorīa Shafīk (1908-1975) Zaynab al-Ghazālī (1917-2005), Sayzā Nabarāwī (1897-1985) and Injī Aflāṭūn (1924-1989). In the context of gender studies in the MENA region, this work of unearthing previous and fundamental works serves several purposes, including establishing a cohesive history of feminism, countering accusations about its alleged absence in the Muslim-Arab context, and finally, creating a safe space to discuss sensitive contemporary issues related to gender and sexuality.[57] On the other hand, the knowledge production on gender issues within the region not only reversed to such a re-discovery of a flourishing past but also towards new generations of intellectuals who, through different literary means – from novels, investigative journalism, non-fiction, art, and poetry – seek to describe women and their lives within the post-colonial, modern setting of their countries, addressing different questions from sexuality, family relationships, access to public life, law implementation, civil society, and religion.

The first and second waves of feminism started in the 19th and 20th centuries suggest that the requests made by the suffragist movement and its battle for freedom, justice, vote recognition, and female empowerment were unreadable outside the broader feminist context of other societies of the time, in particular that of Middle East and North Africa, where Arab Muslim women actively engaged in cultural and political revendications in relation to freedom, public space accessibility, family law reforms in matters of divorce, child custody, heritage and citizenship rights. Indeed, when it comes to feminism, the history of the MENA region is bound up with the history of the West, despite its role having often been under-investigated and remained hidden in favor of western productions. Although the undeniable damaging effects of colonialism, these only overshadowed or diluted changing dynamics that were already happening and understandable in other parts of the world, including in this group the progresses made on women and gender rights in the Middle East. In this multifaceted and uneven context marked by the end of direct Western influence under imperialistic perspectives and the need to emancipate women without stripping them off from their Islamic cultural background – as seen with Qāsim Amīn's long-lasting influence – the first phase of feminist studies in the Middle East took place. This season was characterized by efforts to establish the field of women's studies in an attempt

[57] See Marilyn Booth, "New Directions in Middle East Women's and Gender History". *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Project MUSE, online version, Vol. 4(1), 2003.

to dismantle the androcentric bias that permeated mainstream social science up until that moment. Since its beginning in the late 19th century, this transformative attempt has been characterized by a growing interest in women's roles in society, or to be more specific, in their absence as social actors in a still male-oriented world.

With the advent of the 21th century, the geographical focus shifted back to the Middle East and North Africa once again, starting a process of documenting gaps and deconstructing the univocal representation of gender in modern and developing society. Noteworthy, despite the growing presence of gender research institutions and faculties programs in the region, some scholars accounted for the extremely mediated nature of these subjects within the public sphere of Middle Eastern countries. Indeed, the alleged autonomy of these institutions seems often narrowed by their very nature, as non-governmental institutions and research centers are usually run by elitist groups connected to ruling powers and based on kinship relationships which, at the end of the day, determine to what extent these subjects play or not a crucial role within the arena of gender studies in the regional context.[58] Despite this, their presence in the field and connections with civil societies of MENA countries had a significant role in the further expansion of the field of gender studies in the late 21st century, which reached its peak with the 1975 International Women's Year, finally opening the path for the third phase of feminist production oriented towards new interpretations of both women, men and gender both locally and globally.[59]

### 1.1.2. The Emerging of Masculinity and Queer studies in the Middle East

Throughout the whole 20th century, gender studies engaged with several theoretical frameworks to discuss and explain inequalities, from Marxist socialist theories to liberal feminism, according to which the exclusive cause of subordination was to be found in modern countries' legal apparatus, as well as radical feminism, which accounted for a timeless and

[58] See Suad Joseph, "Gender and Citizenship in the Middle Eastern States", *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, Middle East Report, Vol. 198, 1996, pp. 4 -10.
[59] See Michael J. Ryan and Helen Rizzo (Eds.), Gender in the Middle East & North Africa: Contemporary Issues and Challenges, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder 2020.

universal notion of patriarchy. Shortly thereafter, many fields of study were involved in the process, from anthropology to sociology, economy, law, politics, arts, and culture. By the mid-21st century, academia grasped this growing urgency to problematize gender as the central analytical category, no longer focusing exclusively on women and their social roles but also investigating power relations both between men and women (in the private familial context), and within gender (namely, between groups of men), analyzing what consequences disparity implies for both groups, and how social, political, and economic variants inform those different performances of gender roles in society. Indeed, a significant shift occurred from the theory of women's practice and social role to a broader environment of disciplines that embedded not only studies on women's behavior and their role within the patriarchal society, but also critical studies on men and masculinity (CSMM), with respect to the so-called "hegemonic masculinity" model, as defined by Raewyn Connell (1987, 2005) and its alternative variants of emerging masculinities, inclusive masculinity, positive masculinities, and LGBTQI+ and queer subjectivities.[60]

Today, CSMM currently represents an innovative and fundamental sub-field of research, a branch of the more developed gender studies field, but equally crucial for a cohesive and consistent understanding of contemporary patriarchal societies. As well explained by Howson and Hearn, CSMM are "a discursive space in which is contained a set of tools capable of critically exposing, examining and evaluating the social conditions that produce and sustain men and masculinities". [61] Within this theoretical framework, researchers started to address the role of men in the modern family setting, the psychological consequences of their gender roles' expectations, men's sexual and reproductive health, queerness, and other original topics, leaving aside for a moment those issues and questions that had been addressed by feminist scholars in the previous past – exploitation, inequality, domestic/public violence, and policymaking – and that mostly essentialized masculinity as a side topic of women's matters.

In her *Gender and Power* (1987), the anthropologist Raewyn Connell sharpened the margins of contemporary studies on masculinities by broadening the space in which gender can be read and analyzed hand in hand

[60] See Kimmel 1987; Inhorn 2012; Amar - El-Shakry 2013; Anderson and McCormack 2018; Messerschmidt et al. 2018;

[61] Richard Howson and Jeff Hearn, *"*Hegemony, Hegemonic Masculinity, and Beyond*"*, *Routledge International Handbook of Masculinity Studies,* Routledge, London 2019, p. 42.

with the changes occurring in the globalized age.[62] First conceptualized in another Connell's essays, *The Concept of Role and What to Do with It* (1979),[63] "hegemonic masculinity" was later developed as

> […] the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.[64]

Connell's first attempt was to overcome the old traditional essentialization of genders as two fixed roles opposing each other, thus going beyond the biological essentialism provided by the sex-role theory which in part legitimates power exerted by men at the expense of women. Also, she aimed at underlying the failure of sex role theory in understanding power relations and those expressions of resistance to it, as well as changes produced by relationships both between genders and within gender. In the first case, the role of males and females in society is considered equal, missing the analysis of power relations between them; similarly, by giving primary importance to the dominant position of heteronormativity, the theory of intra-gender relations leaves behind and does not include in its analysis different expressions of masculinities and femininities which do not fall into the normative group, such as lesbians, gays, transexuals. According to Connell, the ultimate inability of sex theory consists in its definition of change as something that happens exclusively from the outside, not understanding its creation also within the internal realm of gender relations. In this sense, the reformulation operated by Connell represented a new way of conceiving male and female roles in society, overturning the studies as they had been developed for decades. What until that moment fell under the definition of normative, for Connell's was rather better understood by referring to it as *standard*: by the use of this word, she aimed at suggesting how gender roles are constituted through and within human behaviors rather than being

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[62] See R. Connell, *Gender and Power, Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Stanford University Press, Stanford 1987.

[63] See R. Connell, "The Concept of Role and what to do with It", *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 15(3), 1979, pp. 7-17.

[64] R. Connell, *Masculinities*…, p. 77.

precedent to it.[65] This theorization is in complete opposition to traditional biological essentialism, usually employed by radical feminists, for whom the notion of patriarchy had to be considered as a universal, timeless system of domination of men at the expense of women, justified by their alienation from means of reproduction. In *Masculinities* (1995), Connell ulteriorly developed the theory by simultaneously accounting gender as "social practice" – the behavior – and "social structure", where this, despite the name may let think about some form of fixity and rigidity, suggests that the gender order is now to be considered "not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable".[66] As a result, power and its common agents in a specific historical time – for example, men wielding power over women in patriarchal societies – may be contested and analyzed as they shift in response to changing situations (economic crisis, new disruptive social narratives and discourses, and cultural contaminations of values) and relationships.

Despite undoubtedly crucial in furthering the field of CSMM, Connell's work has been highly criticized by scholars who considered her theory based upon the same determinism she tries to overcome. For some scholars, problems are in her structuralist theorization of "power";[67] according to Demetriou, she operates a simplification when taking into account a strict dichotomy of gender in the equation of masculinity and male bodies, excluding by this assumption other forms of "doing" masculinity, despite in her text she tried to get over the idea of gender as "biologically determinant".[68] Furthermore, through the incorporation of Gramsci's conceptualization of internal hegemony, Demetriou (2001) addresses the absence of non-hegemonic masculinities from the formative process of hegemonic masculinity; in his reconsideration, the hegemonic group constitutes a "hybrid bloc" which is not in a strict antithesis with the non-

[65] Up until the 80s, studies on gender were based on 'Sex Role Theory', which was strictly related to a dual essentialization of genders in female/male poles. This dichotomy did not allow to grasp changes of power relations in modern society. For the first time since the beginning of a systematic field of studies addressing the social role women play in society, Connell puts at stake and challenges the binary conceptualization of genders as two marked blocks strongly opposed to each other, trying to overcome this dualization (theory of patriarchy, biological essentialism, sex role theory) and introducing a more structuralist and existentialist approach.

[66] R. Connell, *Masculinities…*, p. 76.

[67] See Christine Beasley, "Rethinking Hegemonic Masculinity in a Globalizing World", *Men and Masculinities*, Vol.11(1), 2008, pp. 86-103.

[68] R. Connell, *Masculinities…*, p. 65.

hegemonic, but rather "incorporates diverse and apparently oppositional elements".[69] In his article *Queering Masculinities – reformulating the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity*, Noël Schepp (2021) contests Connell's narrow and "binary conceptualization of power with the notion of power as possession"[70] which considers unable to understand changes occurring within the hegemonic order. Similar to Demetriou, Schepp suggests enriching the concept of hegemonic masculinity by incorporating different and interesting forms of masculinity experiences that do not necessarily fall within the causal relation of masculinity and the male body. In this sense, he rather suggests how:

> referring to a Foucauldian post-structuralist reading helps us to understand that the effectiveness of the norm is secured less in the form of a fixed subject position (of single dominant men) – which Connell's theory occasionally suggests by referring to the male place (locus) (Connell 2005: 71) – but rather through discourses that are taken up and reproduced by (masculine) subjects in their daily practices.[71]

He thus stresses the need to reconsider the Foucauldian concept of "discourse" and its role within the configuration of hegemonic masculinity: discourses indeed induce and orient hegemonic practices not so much in the form of a specific individual who wields power (i.e., a dictator) but more in the everyday experiences of masculine subjectivations where hegemonic masculinity "represents a discursive ideal that varies according to context and time and which individuals dependently fill with a specific meaning".[72]

Considering the conceptualization operated by Connell and its critical points, the idea of gender as a "social practice" not referring to a strict, unquestionable relation between gender and body has been further developed with different perspectives, in particular by the philosopher Judith Butler; in her *Gender Trouble* (1999), she argues that gender must be read not as something that one is, but more as something that one does, an act rather than

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[69] Demetrakis Z. Demetriou "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 30(3), June 2001, p. 349.
[70] Noel Schepp, *Queering Masculinities ‐ Reformulating the Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity*, Otto-Suhr-Institute of Political Science, Frëie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2021, p. 2.
[71] Ibid., p. 9.
[72] N. Schepp, *Queering Masculinities*…, p. 9.

a being, a verb entailing action, "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief".[73] Introducing the idea of "performativity", she suggests that social environment *gender* (to be read as an active verb) the body, and not the other way around, excluding in this way the possibility of any pre-existing "natural" being. In this way, the very pillars of determinism are deconstructed, as well as those theoretical points of Connell's view for whom masculinity can be seen as "a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures, and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex",[74] stressing again the relation between male gender and masculine body.

To explain the basis of her contribution, Butler draws upon Austin's "speech act theory",[75] connecting linguistic performativity to gender: in her opinion, gender is constituted by language through the act of naming things (i.e., the masculine man/the feminine woman), actually getting over the idea of any pre-existing gender identity before language. On the contrary, it is through "discourses" that gender is eventually created, with subjectivities being the results rather than the cause of these narrative expedients. In Butler's performative theory, gender appears as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being".[76] It is crucial here to understand that this regulatory frame is represented by power authorities and social agents which actually lead and orient what role one should enact through discourses. She then moves forward, incorporating in her analysis the idea of the "imitative" nature of gender: for Butler, all genders, as products of discourses, actually constitute a form of parody. In this sense, drag performances appear as an extremely interesting example of this conceptualization, as through imitation, "drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency".[77] Judith Butler's conceptualization, for whom drag experience is a sign of how gender is performed as a parody, reveals – by assuming that no original exists – that all gender performances are actually an imitative act,

[73] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40(4), Dec. 1988, p. 520.
[74] R. Connell, *Masculinities…*, p. 52-53.
[75] Jhon L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Clarendon, Oxford 1962.
[76] Butler, J., *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York and London 2007, p. 45.
[77] Ibid., p. 187.

a parody of a parody in itself, including in this also the heteronormative experience. In doing so, she deconstructs and put into light the very imitative nature of the relation imposed by patriarchal society between the body of the performer and the gender performed. The merit of Butler's performativity theory lies in its ability to overcome the strict relationship, still evident in Connell, between masculinity and the male body: by analyzing and considering more marginal performances of masculinity that do not necessarily come from biologically male performers (drag, transgenders, dyke lesbians who actually "play" masculine role), Butler's uncovered the subversive, resilient potential of subjectiveness in all its components, giving the floor to queer theory and its interpretations which have traditionally been excluded from CSMM, usually more oriented towards the study of cis-genderism[78]. The matters of drag performances and transgenderism, in particular, represent fundamental experiences of "doing masculinity without men"[79] which can effectively dialogue and engage with modern theorizations developed in the last decades by different scholars.[80]

The need for a new theoretical exercise that moves from the first "hegemonic masculinity" conceptualization and that is able to grasp and include different performative experiences of gender has been highly emphasized by scholars such as the same R. Connell, J. W. Messerschmidt, P.Y. Martin, and M. A. Messner, who recognized the importance of reviewing the theory as exposed in 1987, in their co-edited miscellaneous Gender Reckonings of 2018. Through this collective effort, the authors aimed to ulteriorly engage with gender theory, suggesting how important it was to "renew the conceptual contribution of social science and social activism to the understanding of gender".[81] Within this work review, the editors strived to mark the pathway of development of gender theory with possible future implications, tracing back and commenting on the changes that occurred in over three decades of contributions and research. Finally, they determined six

[78] See Lucas Gottzén and Wibke Straube, "Trans masculinities", NORMA: *International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, Vol. 11(4), 2016, pp. 217-224;

[79] Sofia Aboim, "Trans-masculinities, embodiments and the materiality of gender: bridging the gap", NORMA, *International Journal of Masculinity Studies*, *Vol.* 11(4) 2016, pp. 225-236;

[80] See Jonathan A. Allan, *Queer theory and critical masculinity studies*. In: Lucas Gottzén, Ulf Mellström & Tamara Shefer (Eds.) Routledge International Handbook of Masculinity Studies, Routledge, Abingdon 2019, pp. 72- 81.; Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham University Press, Durham 1998; Alan Petersen, *Unmasking the Masculine – 'Men' and 'Identity' in a Skeptical Age*, Sage Publications, London 1998.

[81] J. Messerschmidt et al., *Gender Reckonings…*, p. 6.

major areas of change in the field of gender studies, namely: 1) intersectionality, 2) masculinity, 3) organizations and work, 4) globalization/neoliberalism, 5) sexualities and 6) transgender/degender. This does not directly suggest a lack of knowledge in those fields studied by scholars and feminists within their research until that moment, but more the need to rethink and reintegrate that knowledge into a new, modern social theory of gender. From this range of topics, not only sexualities and transgenderism/de-genderism appear as new and fruitful subjects of discussion for the years to come, but also masculinity as a broader context of research and civil society organizations, in particular, the role of youth and grassroots activism for gender equality and their presence in a world which, more connected and "online" than ever, can therefore more easily internationalize their battles (i.e., the *MeToo* movement).

As gender roles and their perception in modern society change, the last decades of the 21st century have been more and more marked by the attention of governments' political agendas, institutions, and academia toward the role of men and young boys in combating *gender-based violence* and actively engaging in gender equality initiatives. An always-increasing number of scholars seek to understand the meaning of men's presence within international organizations, NGOs, and grassroots movements in global communities and its translation into practices of development in contemporary societies. The sociologist Michael Flood is prominent in emphasizing the importance of men's study alongside those about women, with numerous contributions exploring the presence of young boys and men in gender equality initiatives all over the world, "as participants in education programs, as targets of social marketing campaigns, as policymakers and gatekeepers, and as activists and advocates".[82] The collective work *Engaging Men in Building Gender Equality* (2015), co-edited by Michael Flood and Richard Howson, address this new crucial subject from different geographical and theoretical perspectives, engaging with its presence within the field of activism, health, fathering, childcare and familial relations, sexualities and workspace[83] and finally opening the areas of discussion for future researches and scholars. Under such an interest, a wide range of scholarship and knowledge production marked the end of 20th and starting of 21th century,

[82] Michael Flood, "Involving Men in Efforts to End Violence Against Women", *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 14(3) 2011, p. 358.

[83] See Flood, M., and Howson, R. (eds.), *Engaging Men in Building Gender Equality*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, New Castle Upon Tyne, 2015.

with the first faculties and research centers created within major universities in the US, UK, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, and others.

During this phase, the focus on gender and feminist scholarship also returned to the Middle East. There, the growth of gender studies has to be looked at both inside and outside the field; in this sense, praise, censorship, and the constant reporting efforts of scholars to the government are all factors that shaped the field from the outside. The link between academia and its social context of work reveals the growing activist direction followed by scholars and research institutions from the beginning of the 21st century, which more than ever seemed necessary to achieve practical results of gender equality and human rights in a general context of scarcity of resources, censorship, and restraints. In her preface to the volume *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives* (1996), the sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti suggests how "we have already traversed some of the considerable distance separating an initial preoccupation with 'women's condition' in the Middle East from developing gender perspectives on diverse aspects of culture and society".[84] Drawing upon her consideration of the subjects involved in contemporary gender research, it is noteworthy how the last decades were renewed and characterized by constant and growing efforts by scholars and academia to widen and develop the field of gender studies, both inside and outside the MENA region. In particular, masculinities and their "deviations" from the pathway of heteronormativity and commonly accepted gender role started to represent an interesting subject for a growing number of scholars who dedicated several efforts to the topic.[85] Indeed, these elements have been taken into account by many, spatializing from economy to sexuality, physical and mental health, post-colonial perspectives, history, cultural ethnography, law, medicine, militarism and public security. The multiple performative experiences of maleness in contemporary Middle Eastern societies thus came at the forefront of a new theorization that should run parallel with, rather than in opposition to, the extremely prolific production of women's studies of the last fifty years, assisting in answering prominent theoretical questions raised by more years of study of women and society. Never standing solely for itself, but always articulated in its interaction with economic forces, social classes, religion, and cultural narratives, the recent production of knowledge on masculinity served as a critical momentum to dig out new categories and

[84] D. Kandiyoti, *Gendering the Middle East…,* p. 15.

[85] Among these, see El-Rouayheb 2005; Siraj 2006; Lagrange 2008; Massad 2007; Rahman 2010, 2014; Bouhdiba 2012; Tolino 2013, 2014; Allan 2019.

identity subjectivities and their performances, from female and male homosexuality to queerness, effeminate masculinity, crossdressing, and transsexuality, as well as to interrogate the coping strategies these identities employ within the patriarchal or traditional societies they are part of as well as processes of inclusion/exclusion they are involved in.

In this regard, it is necessary to highlight that the topic of masculinity and its different embodiments within the Middle Eastern context was not completely new for the previous century. Emasculation practices and narrations about eunuchs, effeminates, and homosexuals were all part of the pre-modern Islamic society,[86] and in particular within the Ottoman court lifestyle. These alternative representations of masculinities within Islam became a crucial category of analysis for the contemporary development of the subject, moving from theories of the past, focused exclusively on sexual practice, to the more recent and alternative discourse centered instead on sexual orientation.[87] Today's ongoing transformation of North African and Middle Eastern inter-gender and intra-gender relationships can be seen as a concrete expression of rapidly mutable factors, as Connell's theory warned: in the vast majority of the region, structural relations for centuries understood as 'traditional' are being superseded by new forms of interactions between individuals as well as among families and broader communities. Going deeper, the process of modernization, fueled by the advent of Western neo-liberal policies, the growing injection of welfare subsidies, and the promotion of public education, has produced a shift in the hierarchical organization of Arab-Muslim societies for which the family no longer represents the only subject providing economic, moral, religious, and social support to their younger members. One of the direct consequences is that more and more men, no longer the sole providers of an adequate Income for their family, are losing their traditional role of breadwinner. Although a large part of scholars and mainstream media refers to this phenomenon through the lens of *crisis*, another possible lecture looks at this phenomenon as a transformational

[86] See Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society*, Oxford University Press, New York 1995; Richard Millant, *Les Eunuques à Travers les Ages*, Vigot Frères, Paris 1908; William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Eunuchs and Concubines in the History of Islamic Southeast Asia", *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 10(4), pp. 8-19; Aymon Kreil, Lucia Sorbera, Serena Tolino (Eds.), *Sex and Desires in Muslim Cultures, Beyond Norms and Transgression from the Abbasids to the Present Days*, Gender and Islam Series, I.B. Tauris, London 2020.

[87] See Siraj 2006; Massad 2007; Kugle 2010;

moment for young Arab men,[88] who in many cases deliberately share their power and authority with wives and spatially interplay with them within the gendered dominion of the house. For instance, since spending more time at home than before, often men take care of children and look after household matters, developing a brand-new intimate state of cooperation and helpfulness with their female counterparts within the domestic context, overturning a traditional vision of private gender relations in the region and beyond. Arguably, on the relational level, younger generations of boys and girls resort to technology to meet partners, enjoy more freedom within the relationship (like non-monogamous, open relations), and openly embrace their sexual orientation, in drastic opposition to their parents and particularly to their fathers' generation. Abudi (2011) well explains this tendency, suggesting that "the process of modernization has brought about new conceptions of the family and gender roles, as well as changes in family relationships, parenting styles, child-rearing practices, and expectations for puberty and dating".[89] These changes imply individual and collective consequences not only for the younger generations but also for the older ones, who are experiencing extremely rapid changes in social conditions determined by globalization and neo-liberal policies within Middle Eastern Muslim countries.

Indeed, the last quarter of the 20th century saw the outbreak of neoliberal economy and political changes that started to permeate and influence the outer regions of North Africa, the Middle East, and the Gulf, contributing to transforming and influencing social relations and cultural narratives and eventually pushing the region into the centripetal spin of the globalized world. The results of this incorporation of cultural narratives, economic methodologies, and social beliefs within the usually traditional Middle Eastern region vary a lot and can only be understood if local features are correctly taken into account. To do so, any simplification implied in the Orientalist-based approach, based on uncritical, passive, and reductive confrontation between Western-Eastern geopolitical poles, should be avoided. In this sense, critical feminist research on modernity and gender in the MENA region continues to suffer from "omissions and silences regarding the extent to which indigenous modernity discourses exist(ed) not only in

[88] See Marcia P. Inhorn and Emily A. Wentzell, "Embodying Emergent Masculinities: Men engaging with Reproductive and Sexual Health Technologies in the Middle East and Mexico", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 38(4) 2011, pp. 801-815.

[89] Dalia Abudi, "Mothers and Daughters in Arab Women's Literature: The Family Frontier". In: Margot Badran, M. and Valentine Moghadam (Eds.) *Women and Gender. The Middle East and the Islamic World*, Brill, Leiden 2011, p. 45.

relation to the West, but in response to local political histories, and ethnic, class, and other inequalities and differences".[90] Scholarly, the relationship between feminism and women's rights in the MENA region countries cannot be investigated properly if the interconnectedness of their economies and histories is not taken into account.[91]

Among the works of scholars aimed at uncovering the peculiar intertwining of economic and social factors, the case study analyzed by Farha Ghannam in her book *Live and Die Like a Man: Gender Dynamics in Urban Egypt* (2013) offers an interesting starting point for reflection. The book is indeed the final result of a 20-year long-lasting ethnographic study in a low-income neighborhood in Cairo, aimed at understanding how masculinity as a social product and social performance is made and re-made under changing economic circumstances. Through the means of biography, Ghannam analyses several male individuals of different ages, uncovering how their masculine trajectories are marked by different "moments of embodiment" that permeate every social relationship with women, other men, and with the self as well. More recently, the collective work *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity in the Modern Middle East* (2000) edited by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, brought together several essays produced on the topic of maleness and masculinity, addressing the subject from different perspectives under the common umbrella of Connell's theory. The result is a fine experiment of combined contributions ranging from the relationships of the politics and the military with masculinity to fiction productions on the psychological implications of maleness in the Arab Middle East, as well as modern embodiments of masculinity and LGBTQI+ sexual identities. All these crucial topics have been lucidly addressed by major scholars and novelists such as Abdelwahab Boudhiba, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Frederic Lagrange, Hazim Saghieh, and others, combining different means to reach a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of what it means to be a man in contemporary Middle Eastern societies.

On the same path, but from a more historical and anthropological perspective, *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986) by Lila Abu-Lughod is considered a masterpiece of sociocultural studies involving patriarchal discourses and tribal values. The author spent

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[90] Frances Hasso, "Problems and Promise in Middle East and North Africa Gender Research", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 31(3), 2005, p. 657.

[91] See Raka Ray, "Post-Coloniality and the Sociology of Gender". In: J. Messerschmidt et al. (eds.) *Gender Reckonings*, New York University Press, New York 2018, pp. 71-89.

her two years of fieldwork (1978-1980) living in the Awlad Ali tribe in Egypt, where she carried out participant observation, interviews, and collection of oral poetry to describe and highlight the internal contradictions experienced by the members of the whole community who on the one hand, were called to express individual autonomy and honorability, while on the other were subjected to the domination of the elder males of the tribe. Abu-Lughod's ethnographic synthesis argues for a deeper understanding of male-centered and dominated contexts through the study of different communicative means – in this case, poetry – which for Awlad Ali tribe's members serves as a "safe space" where counternarratives can be carried out without contravening the normative discourse backed and represented by the majority of the community. Finally, in *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties in Iranian Modernity* (2005), Afsaneh Najmabadi presents a compelling and ground-breaking study of modern Iran, using gender as a primary analytical framework to investigate 19th century visual and literary content. The usefulness of this work lies in its novelty, as little research has been conducted on the same topic focused on Iranian society. The employment of gender as a category of analysis demonstrates how crucial gender and sexuality have been in the construction of modern Iran, as well as how family, love, affection, and maternity have been shaped and changed.

The new phase of gender studies in and on the Middle East and North Africa was crucial in breaking down two important milestones for the understanding of masculinity and gender in the region: 1) the orientalist, colonialist, and imperialist perception of masculinity, which reduced the subject to a hetero-normative, patriarchal model of subjectivity; 2) the long-standing stereotypical depiction of Arab-Muslim masculinity in its post-September 2001 declination, namely the equation of Muslim men and Islamic terrorists. As previously seen, the first crucial example of this urgency to problematize masculinity and reinterpret its traditional reading within modern society was that of Raewyn Connell's book *Gender and Power*, edited in 1987. The contribution of scholars such as Raewyn Connell, Judith Butler, Michael Kimmel, James W. Messerschmidt, and Michael Flood to the growth and expansion of the social theory of gender is undeniable. Nevertheless, some critics suggest that the dominant theories in contemporary masculinity and queer studies developed under the exclusive dominion of white males in the United States and Australia, with the consequent juxtaposition of the theory from Western societies to the MENA region without any significant

consciousness, in a redundant replication of the West/East, active/passive relationship. Among those more rigorous in their approach towards this jeopardizing of the theory were Frances S. Hasso and Paul Amar, who respectively summarized their criticism in two recently published articles. In her *Decolonizing Middle East Men and Masculinities Scholarship: An Axiomatic Approach* (2018), the sociologist and historian Frances Hasso suggested that Arab and Muslim masculinities have often been synthetized and essentialized into a fixed model that doesn't recognize any difference or existence of peculiarities at a regional level, thus flattening the discussion about men and their role in politics, economics, and social spheres without any theoretical entanglement with sex and gender. In doing so, they produced a "culture knowledge" that is "reductive and ahistorical, although powerful in feeding racism and imperialism".[92] Similarly, in his contribution Middle East Masculinity Studies, *Discourses of "Men in Crisis"*, *Industries of Gender in Revolution* (2011), Paul Amar warns that the perspective of sociological deviance from which all studies on men and masculinities in the region start, focuses almost exclusively on disruptive male behaviors and their alleged undermining of social order. As a consequence, the sociological and anthropological theories that were diffused in particular in the West, produced the reinforcement of intelligence services and supported what he calls "terrorology industries", standing as a theoretical reference for wrong and inaccurate analysis of masculinity and Islam in the Middle East. In this sense, "these critical approaches to masculinity can easily become incorporated into liberal, colonial, or disciplinary state projects".[93]

Starting from these considerations, the recently overviewed production involving Middle Eastern gender studies, both in and on the region, shows how, from the 21st century onward, there has been a significant shift in the MENA region aimed at overcoming this long-lasting tradition of taking subjectivities and behaviors of boys and men for granted, either by focusing solely on girls and women or by assuming that boys and men — for example, in politics, economic institutions, security forces, and social movements — can be investigated without any analytical engagement with sex and gender. This increased interest in reconceptualizing the gender studies field, and in particular that on males and masculinity, continues to grow

[92] F. Hasso, "Decolonizing Middle East Men and Masculinities Scholarship: An Axiomatic Approach", *Arab Studies Journal Online*, Vol. 15, 2018. Retrieved from: https://hdl.handle.net/10161/19498 [Accessed 01/04/2022].
[93] P. Amar, "Middle East Masculinity…", p. 45.

within the region, with several insights and research addressing predominantly countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, or Lebanon, often supported by European international agencies, Western organizations or NGOs. A useful bibliographical reference on contemporary masculinities in the MENA region is represented for example by the IMAGES – *International Men and Gender Equality Survey* (2017), the largest multi-country study on masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa. The project, coordinated by the NGO Promundo and UN Women with local research partners, "confronts many of the stereotypes commonly associated with men in the region and highlights pathways to gender equality" by engaging their discussion with public and private life issues of masculinity.[94]

It should be mentioned here that nowadays, contents on gender equality, masculinities, and queer identities employ numerous and diverse means of dissemination. In this sense, also new ways of knowledge production are finding space in the region, in particular with the help of social media platforms, giving life to comics, films, forms of artivism (activism through art) and exhibitions, online journals, photography reports, songs, podcasts and digital visual content. In this scenery, youth are the leading force of such a contemporary change, with several grassroots associations, CBOs (community-based organizations), movements, and collectives of artists working both physically and online. Among these, extremely interesting production are those of *Chouftouhonna* Festival in Tunisia,[95] *Mawjoudin* – We Exist in Tunisia, *Helem* in Lebanon, the collective *Mesaha*, *HeForShe* and *MyKali* Magazine in Jordan, Jeem online website and *Machi Rojola* Podcast in Morocco.[96] These platforms, organizations, and movements serve both as safe spaces for the people involved, usually subjected to a logic of

[94] IMAGES Report - MENA Region 2017, UN Women and Promundo. Retrieved from: https://imagesmena.org/en/ [Last Accessed 04/04/2022].

[95] See Sara Borrillo and Mounira Soliman, "Chouftouhonna Festival: Feminist and Queer Artivism as Transformative Agency for a New Politics of Recognition in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia", *Studi Maghrebini/North African Studies Special Issue: Artivism, Culture and Knowledge Production for Egalitarian Citizenship in the Middle East and North Africa post 2011*, Vol. 18 (2), 2022, pp. 203-230.

[96] For a comprehensive view of these initiatives, see: https://www.mawjoudin.org; https://www.helem.net; https://www.mamacash.org/en/mesaha-formerly-sanabel-queer-collective; https://www.facebook.com/ArabicHeForShe/; https://www.mykalimag.com/en/home-page/; https://jeem.me/en; https://www.mykalimag.com/en/home-page/; [Last Accessed 7/04/2022]; Also see "Machi Rojola - a Podcast that Questions Masculinities", Euromed Women, 25/02/2021. Retrieved from: https://www.euromedwomen.foundation/pg/en/resources/view/9539/machi-rojola-a-podcast-that-questions-masculinities [Last Accessed 25/01/2023].

concealment within their culturally and religiously traditional countries, and as megaphones to promote discussion on sensitive topics – such as LGBTQI+ issues – which cannot be normally addressed outside the framework of official activism. Most of these men, highly involved in this process alongside their female peers, do not conform to any of the Western-oriented stereotypes which draws upon 9/11 narratives: not only they do not respond to the violent nor to the extremist depiction of masculinity, but rather, these young boys and men are keener to delineate a different shape of maleness and masculinity within the gender framework of their lives, both inside the private space of family and the public one. Therefore, the masculinity they embody and their behaviors result in less sharp margins and always growing shades of emotion and affection towards females, males, and themselves. Thanks to the growing affirmation and presence of these individuals and communities in the public sphere, the MENA region is witnessing the emergence of new forms of being male and expressing the gender role; these brand-new subjectivities, the so-called emerging masculinities, represent indeed a new fluid and unfixed model for future generations which stand in complete distinction and antithesis to the long-existing harmful and violent forms of manhood.

# Chapter 2. The creation of contemporary Jordan and the role of tribes

## 2.1. The dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Emirate of Transjordan (1915 – 1938)

In order to fully understand the cruciality of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Middle East and the role its tribal component played in the last century of history of the area, it is necessary to look back at its formation process under the European imperialistic desires for expansion and immediately after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of World War I, the territories of Transjordan were under the political rule of Istanbul, alongside those of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. [97] The incorporation of these areas into the Ottoman administration was slow and irregular, with the Ottomans first imposing over the northern area of Jabal Ajloun in 1867, while the southern districts became part of the empire only at the end of that century.[98] From that moment, Damascus sought to control its nomad, semi-nomad, and Bedouin population, who were scattered from the district of Ajloun to Maʿān and Karak, through a form of indirect ruling, thus leaving a wide operational margin to tribal local leaders to self-regulate their life and subsistence. Until the beginning of the 21st century, a number of powerful tribes (*'ashīra)*, clans *(ḥamūla),* and confederacies inhabited and controlled these different districts, from the Banū Khalid, the Banū Hassān and the al-Adwān in the North, to the Banū Ṣakhr, the al-Ḥuwayṭāṭ, the al-Tarāwna, and the Banū Ḥamīdah in the Centre and the South.[99] According to the Tribal Administration Department (*Niyābāt al-'Ashā'ir*) at the beginning of 1922 nomadic Bedouins represented 46% of the total population of the area, with the ethnographic element always having a more important role than

[97] The *Sham* (Levant) became part of the Ottoman Empire after the Mamluk defeat of 1516. For a comprehensive history of the area; see Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*, I.B. Tauris, New York and London, 1993.

[98] Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002.

[99] H.R.H Ghazi Bin Muhammad, *The Tribes of Jordan at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century*, Jamʿīyat Turāth al-Urdun al-Bāqī, Amman 1999.

the religious one. Thanks to the Ottoman system of *millet,*[100] Islam, although professed in some areas, peacefully co-existed under the Imperial rule with other religious identities, from Christians to Druze.

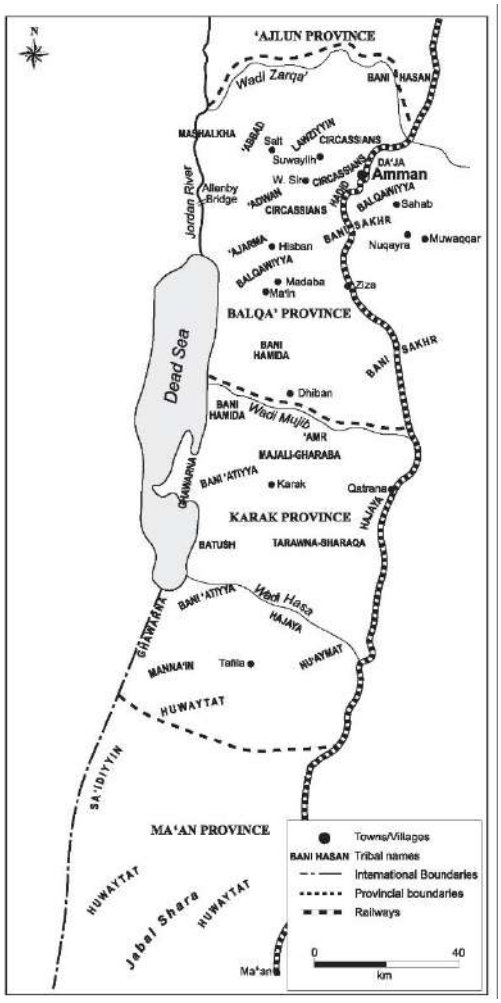


***Figure 1. Distribution of major Bedouin tribes in Transjordan.***[101]

Politically and economically, the area was considered nothing more than a distant periphery, characterized by small trade and a basic lifestyle, and mostly excluded by direct relationships with the outer world. The need to maintain a certain degree of autonomy translated into what Rogan identifies as *chieftaincy*, a form of political hybridization between the typical State

[100] See Maggiolini, P., «La naissance de la Transjordanie et la présence chrétienne. Communautés religieuses, minorités religieuses protégées et identités tribales », Relations Internationales, vol. 173(1), 2018, pp. 79-94.

[101] Image retrieved by https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/the-making-of-jordan-tribes-colonialism-and-the-modern-state/maps

structure and that of tribalism, maintaining together features of both. Within this horizontal system, the local leaders (*shuyūkh*) had the responsibility of supervising and handling the internal decisions and disputes, guiding their fellow tribesmen through their moral and personal authority. This kind of structure appeared in the current area of Jordan during the 19th century, even though it never reached the same level of complexity expressed in other tribal areas of the Middle East and the Gulf. Despite not being fully developed and considered much less structured than other similar political units, the *mashāyikha* system represented indeed a pilot experiment of alliances, pacts, and coalitions that allowed these subjects to avert a total subjugation to the British mandate in the aftermath of the war, as well as later on facilitated the creation of the complex, highly structured experience of the modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In this sense, the long period of semi-self-determined rule operated by this "societal topology"[102] – as Ouahes (2021) defines the conglomerate of local groups and tribes – over the territories that later would have become part of the modern project of Transjordan led not only to a consolidated system of agreements among the different local confederacy of tribes but most importantly to the stabilization of tribal culture in all its societal forms: lineages, blood and the application of customary tribal law *('urf)* to solve the disputes among families and communities:

> The forging of political alliances control over land and water, seasonal migration, the provision of personal security, conflict resolution, and marriage arrangements all took place either within the tribal system or in accordance with its conventions.[103]

The need for security and protection of the land was crucial in determining the nature of internal clans' relationships, which based their power exclusively on male filiation and not on political or religious hierarchies. As well explained by Maggiolini (2017), kinship served not so much as a remark of men's power over females, but rather as a form of "memory" to guarantee a sense of *'aṣabiyya* – namely protection, solidarity,

[102] Idir Ouahes, "Minoritisation and the State-Societal Balance of Forces (1920-1946): British, Bedouin, Hashemite and Circassian Relations". In Paolo Maggiolini and Idir Ouahes (eds.), *Minorities and State-Building in the Middle East*, Minorities in West Asia and North Africa Series, Palgrave MacMillan, 2021, p. 60.
[103] Y. Alon., *The Making of…*, p. 13.

and *ésprit de corps* – for all the community members. This form of governance, in the absence of specific centralized power, played a huge role in reinforcing cultural and political features which are still visible in today's Hashemite modern formulation.

When World War I ignited in 1915, forced by the need to protect the Empire from the European advance, Istanbul decided to promote the formation of local militias in the central-southern area, delegating the defense of Hejazi borders and of near Egypt to the local tribes who, compelled between the choice of being coopted or cooperating, opted for a partial integration in the defense of their territories, thus maintaining a fundamental role in the area, wielding their power against a common enemy together with the European troops but never losing their tribal prerogatives. Treaties and secret agreements started to be stipulated between the Arab populations of the region and the European powers, actually leading to the creation of the Transjordan experiment; in 1915-1916, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī (1854 – 1931), the Hashemite Sharīf of Mecca and Medina in the Hejaz, and the British High Commissioner in Egypt, sir Henry MacMahon (1862 – 1949), agreed upon the creation of an independent Arab State led by the Hashemite family once obtained the Ottoman Empire dissolution. As a result of this pact, the British would have received the military support of Arab troops in its progress toward Palestinian territories and annexation of other Ottoman territories, considered absolutely crucial for the realization of a European enclave in the area. In May 1916, the Sykes-Picot agreement signed between Great Britain and France established the partitioning of the entire region: Syria and Cilicia would have come under the rule of Paris, while Baghdad and Bassora regions would have come under the control of London. With the end of the great conflict and the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, ʿAbd Allāh (1882 – 1951), son of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, a direct ascendant of the Banū Hāshim – the lineage of the Prophet from the Meccan tribe of Quraysh[104] – was set up to be King of the new Transjordan area, which in 1928 officially became the Emirate of Transjordan *(al-imāra al-urduniyya)* with Amman as its Capital.

As several historians underlined, the fall of the Ottoman Empire led to the creation of an ideological void in such a vast and heterogeneous area, which until that moment managed to rule itself despite being characterized by

[104] For a comprehensive understanding of Prophet Muhammad's lineage, see "Arabia since the 7th century Arabian and Islamic expansion", Britannica. Retrieved from: https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Arabia-31558/Arabia-since-the-7th-century#ref484287 [Last accessed 28/09/2022].

several ethnic groups, religious communities, and lifestyles. As Wilson described, this *vacuum* posed the basis for the consolidation of Arab Nationalism – yet existing during the Ottoman era but not fully organized in its practical aspects – a new ideology that eventually filled that void by creating a common sense of belonging and revendication.[105] For this reason, the European chancelleries sought to compel the role of ʿAbd Allāh under strict British control in order to avert any centralization of power under Arab nationalistic ambitions or violation of trust towards London. In an official statement of April 1921 about the agreements with the Hashemite *amīr* (prince, chief) under the authority of the British Prime Minister in charge, Sir Winston Churchill (1874 – 1965), it was recalled that:

> […] ʿAbd Allāh had returned to Amman on the understanding that they would be adopted. If he failed to get support he might fall at any time, in which case Trans-Jordania would be the scene of anarchy and a military occupation might be necessary.[106]

As appears from official papers, the position of ʿAbd Allāh through the mandate was thus the result of a compromise, by which the ruler accepted to reign over a multifaceted, heterogenous, and disoriented component, seeking the balance among the imperialist impositions, the tribes' practical needs, and the claims of Arab nationalist ideology, also navigating the threats coming by the ascendancy of Saudi family in the Najd, concerning, in particular, the incorporation of tribal groups within their geopolitical area of influence from the South. The political agenda of Kind ʿAbd Allāh thus translated into a "fluid and defensive approach to foreign policy while maintaining a rigid and offensive domestic agenda"[107] to deal with internal discontents and anti-imperialist rebellions.

Since the beginning of the mandate, the element of novelty marked by the implementation of this system lays in the direction followed by the

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[105] Mary C. Wilson, "The Hashemites, the Arab Revolt and Arab Nationalism", in Rashid Khalidi and Lisa Anderson et al., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, Columbia University Press, 1991.

[106] The National Archive, CAB 23/38/39, "Conclusions of a Conference of Ministers held in Mr. Chamberlain's Room, House of Commons, S.W., on Monday, April 11th, 1921, at 6 p.m." f. 270. Retrieved from: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7652959 [Last Accessed 22/09/2022].

[107] I. Ouahes, "Minoritisation and the State-Societal…", p. 63.

imperialist powers in the aftermath of World War I: despite showing a pretty vague and hesitant policy in this vast area, the shared battlefield with the Arab troops as well as the common contrast of revolts against the Ottoman Empire, opened the possibility for a less direct, more partnership-oriented rule of the territories between Iraq and Palestine, which until that moment constituted nothing more than a desolated land between two crucial geopolitical areas, thus helping to consolidate British imperial presence. Many historians agree upon considering this indirectness of the mandatary control as its element of power: the methodology employed was from one side to allow the local tribes to rule themselves while from the other, letting the military and administrative authorities integrate, adapt, and respect the cultural traditions of the area. From a general idea of Transjordan as nothing more than a strategic pathway towards Palestine, the European politics in this area indirectly opened the path for the creation of that contemporary Kingdom of Jordan which, nowadays, represents not only an extreme frontier but more often the tiebreaker for the balance of the entire region. A further political step was moved in 1926 when the *amīr* and the British were able to finally incorporate Ma'an and Aqaba within the Transjordan borders.

From the tribes' point of view, which at the beginning of the 20th century continued to represent the majoritarian societal group of the area, this season of adjustment, with the definition of a political autonomous identity and clear geographical borders, registered a certain degree of discontent and distance from a brand-new military, British, and administrative elite who started to establish itself around the area of Amman. The coming years saw the implementation of some bureaucratic and administrative resolutions that actually forged the creation of a formal statal entity, in particular the recognition of religious minorities through Law No. 22/1938, the land redistribution, and the Law on nationality.[108] This, in particular, represents the first attempt by the Emirate to institutionalize and incorporate the nomad, semi-nomad, and Bedouin tribes into a modern conceptualization of State belonging, despite these groups naturally missing any element of classification and categorization in a strict Westphalian sense. The definition of borders and nationality meant, for the tribes of Transjordan, being embedded in State-building dynamics that, in the end, partially or totally

[108] Nationality was granted by the *amīr* and the British administration either through *ius soli*, in the case of birth within the Transjordanian geographical borders before 1924, or *ius sanguinis*, in the case of demonstrated blood kinship with a Transjordanian man.

prevented them from continuing their usual pastoral habits. This moment in the history of what would have become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was just the first in which a form of forced integration and recognition within the institutionalized structure occurred, showing all the intrusiveness of a modern Nation-State within these traditional territories, where the element of tribalism represented until that moment not only a cultural horizon but most importantly a methodology to self-regulate social life and existence in case of impervious situations, from internal or external threats to famine or natural disasters. Indeed, the need of the Hashemites to assert their power and to grant themselves the Bedouins' trust and loyalty revealed itself to be crucial on many other occasions during the following decades of the country's history.

### 2.1.1. The tribal integration process: Glubb Pāshā and the Desert Patrol Corp (quwāt al-bādiya)

The discontent of tribes towards ʿAbd Allāh and its mandatary rule started to represent a real threat to that stabilization process initiated in 1921, in particular with the growing external assaults led by the wahhabi (*Wahhabi)*[109] component yet from 1922, but also with internal reluctance against the *amīr* administration.[110] This posed two main problems: on the one side the security and protection of the borders, on the other the internal needs of the tribes, who frequently suffered raids from the South, and their growing disaffection towards ʿAbd Allāh's and British nationalist project. From there, despite the Bedouins' necessity to defend themselves from external threats, the absence of an efficient protection system by the newly created Emirate was making the already vulnerable relations between the administrative élite and the tribal component even weaker. A first attempt to create a protection force had been done with the establishment of the "Arab Legion" (*al-jaysh al-ʿarabī*) in 1923, but its composition – mainly of Circassian and Arab recruits – was interpreted as too external by local populations and tribes. It was in 1926 that the situation finally found the opportunity to be solved:

[109] For a comprehensive understanding of *Wahhābiyya*, see Esther Peskes, Ende, W., "Wahhābiyya". In: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. [Last Accessed 31/01/2023]. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1329.

[110] See Y. Alon, "The Balqāʾ Revolt: Tribes and Early State-Building in Transjordan", *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 46(1), 2006, pp. 7-42.

indeed, the Lieutenant-General of the British Army Sir John Bagot Glubb Pāshā (1897 – 1986), yet Commander of the Arab Legion, understood the possibility of integrating the nomad-dwellers component into a larger military force of defense within the desert (*al-bādiya*). By doing so, the ultimate goal was not only that of moderating their frustrations but also to provide them with benefits from their loyalty and help: health care, educative services, and payments for the services received are only a part of the granted support that allowed Glubb Pāshā and the British to strengthen the relationships and fidelity with the Bedouins of Transjordan.[111] Glubb Pāshā decided to financially support the tribes by giving the *shaykhs* economic subsidies and a fixed payment to each soldier (*jundī*), ensuring their cooperation against persisting raids and therefore creating a form of clientelism that lasted, with some differences, until today. If the initial intent was that of forming a mercenary force, the final result was instead an important reconfiguration of tribalism within the mandatary Transjordanian ideological edges: the creation of a forefront with a common identity and values to be protected and worked for by its original inhabitants, who in return obtained financial support and protection, especially during periods of land drought and prolonged famine. The ability of Glubb Pāshā was to give space to the human element when taking choices, thus expressing a mild form of military domination unusual for the colonial time; this methodology appears clear from the words of the same Lieutenant in one of his reports on the situation in the desert:

> The Transjordan deserts were reduced from anarchy to order almost without firing a shot and literally without putting a single Bedouin in prison. This was done by constructing an administration on the feudal lines which the tribes understand, instead of endeavoring to force upon them an administration which owed its origin to European thoughts and ideals. The tribes are loyal to and satisfied with the Transjordan government because it has given them an administration in accordance with their own customs, which prescribe lavish hospitality to princes.[112]

[111] See Tancred Bradshaw (Ed.), *The Glubb Reports: Glubb Pasha and Britain's Empire Project in the Middle East 1920-1956*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2016.

[112] TNA, Kew, London; CO 831/37/3, "A monthly report on the administration deserts for the month of august 1935" in Tancred Bradshaw (ed.), *The Glubb Reports: Glubb*

Indeed, in light of this incorporation during the nation-building process, the identitarian quest would have opened from that moment onward the path to multiple theorizations and reflections about who was to be considered a real Bedouin and through what categories describe it, a difficult distinction visible also in the inaccurate census carried out in 1946.[113] More generally, the Middle East has been characterized by the search for a definition of identity, in particular from the modern State appearance in the region, which found in the tribal identitarian matter an element to legitimate itself. From the Ottoman Empire dissolution and with the advent of colonial imperialism, populations of the region developed, adopted, and reclaimed for themselves several identity criteria based on ethnicity (Arabs, Circassians), religion (Islam, Christianism, Druze faith), lifestyles (*badaw* or *haḍarī*) or language, becoming for identity politics studies a fundamental and crucial field of research.[114] With Glubb Pāshā, the ethnical element took over to the point that a form of "transjordanization" of the Bedouins was accomplished, with the consequent creation of a stereotypical depiction of Jordanian tribes as loyal, strong, and protectors of the Hashemite family, an epitome of tribalism that still persists today.

To better understand this transformative process, it is useful to look at the years between 1929 and 1936, which signed some other important steps towards the codification of Jordanian tribal strategic integration into the new phase the Hashemite Emirate was about to experience, that of stabilization of a modern nation-state, with a recognized centralized power and a clear common identity, as well as the ability to self-defend from outside threats without any internal rebellions. It was in these few years indeed that the reform on agriculture, the Bedouin Control Law, and the Tribal Courts Law were officially ratified, this last in particular allowing the tribal courts to be operative in all the Emirate's provinces and granting *shaykhs* a special income from the Treasury, thus integrating them *de facto* in the administration of the country. This particular act of hybridization between two different political

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*Pasha and Britain's Empire Project in the Middle East 1920-1956*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2016, p. 49.

[113] See Adolf Konikoff, *Transjordan: An Economic Survey*, Economic Research Institute of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Jerusalem 1943.

[114] For a comprehensive analysis see Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993; Odetta Pizzingrilli, *State and Legitimacy within an Arab-Muslim context: Understanding the identity criteria in Jordan and Kuwait*, Ph.D. Thesis - Politics: History, Theory, Science, LUISS Guido Carli, 2019.

systems, tribal customary law on the one side, and rule of law on the other, stayed unaltered until 1976. As visible in the official cartridge of Glubb Pāshā, the decision to integrate more Bedouins of the Desert Patrol Corp and the codification of Tribal Law actually encompassed the well-calculated intent to weaken the well-known Bedouin's resilience to outside intimidations, transforming the Mandatary presence into the certainty of security, gradually introducing modern European principles and regulations:

> […] When tribesmen who complain to the government do not receive what they consider to be their private rights, they cease to complain to the government any more. They try to recover their rights by force. This causes fresh crimes, which undermines faith in the government and makes all tribesmen rally around the tribe, as being better able to protect their private interests than the government. The best way to weaken tribal feelings is to ensure the safety of persons and their property.[115]

Private interests are fundamental in understanding the presence of tribalism in the modern State structure, which from 1921 both assured their survival thanks to a form of bargaining between tribal law, dispute resolutions, and *shaykhs* with its element of modern electoral representation and parliamentary debating. Moreover, the ability of Glubb Pāshā was also in posing attention on the consolidation of a Transjordanian ideological apparatus: to do so, the strengthening of the school system for children in the *al-bādiya* was crucial; it was in this context, indeed, that also a form of "gendered Transjordanian nationalist agency was first conceived".[116] In the long resumes offered by Glubb, as well as by his biographer James Lunt, on his journey and permanence first in Iraq and later on in Jordan, it appears evident a tendency to an Orientalist reading of sexualities and physical appearance regarding the Bedouins he encountered. In his descriptions, the tanned skin, the long hair, the corollary of ornaments, and the long winter dresses, all represented at the same time elements of feminization of the

[115] MEC, Kew, London, Glubb Papers, box 208, undated, "Note on the application of the tribal courts' law, 1936" in Tancred Bradshaw (ed.), *The Glubb Reports: Glubb Pasha and Britain's Empire Project in the Middle East 1920-1956*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2016, p. 51.

[116] J. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*, Columbia University Press, New York 2001, p. 150.

tribesmen as well as their hypermasculinization as Arabs and desert-dwellers. These, in the British officials' view, were attributed the label of "Glubb's girls", [117] due in particular to their peculiar facial traits. In his opinion, the tribes also lived in anachronism with respect to civilized Europe.[118] In this regard, Massad sees in the element of time the expression of the "phallic technology that the Bedouins still lack", [119] a modern technology that Europeans – in his colonialist perspective – were able to use to deflorate a virgin land in a way that neither the Bedouins could have had.

In this context, the apparent mild and progressive conglobation of tribalism within modern nationalist constraints – which will become particularly evident during the post-colonial phase – actually was a specific attempt to coopt, sedentarize and shrink the space of autonomy of tribal composition through the implementation of the rule of law on the one side, and through an *engendering* of individuals and their bodies on the other, with the final aim of conforming them, from a personal, psychological, and also a physical point of view to the British military and masculine standard.[120] In the case of modern law application, the juridical not only represents a repressive expression of power but "also plays a central productive, albeit regulatory, role: it produces and regulates identity". [121] Of this potential, Glubb Pāshā was certainly aware: despite in his writings he insists on the need to not violently impose, but rather mildly mingle, the modern law arguments with the old traditions he nevertheless undoubtedly failed to address the colonial, European, white, and Western-centric position he held. In particular, he lacked in the ability to understand the effects of Western impositions on those populations, who inevitably, as Massad (2001) keeps suggesting, modulated – in more or less conscious ways – their old identities on new social, political and military perspectives introduced by the British mandate. Also geographically, the British ought to sedentarize and deprive Bedouins of their nomadic prerogative, in order to complete the "transjordanization" process of Bedouins and replace blood ties with territorial contiguity. Finally, the Intent was to reproduce the same blind, military-driven, passive corporativism and faith expressed in the European Kingdom towards the State

[117] James Lunt, "Glubb Pasha", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 18(2), 1987, p. 132.
[118] See Jhon Blagot Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1948.
[119] J. Massad, *Colonial Effects…*, p. 140.
[120] After 1936, Bedouins soldiers of the Desert Corps were not allowed to keep their hair long, actually conforming to the British standard.
[121] J. Massad, *Colonial Effects…,* p. 19.

and the royal family, building upon the masculinization of young boys, who from that moment on had to swear their unconditional loyalty no longer to the *shaykhs*, but actually to the Hashemites and to the nation.

## 2.2. From Emirate to Kingdom: The Independence and the consolidation process (1939 – 1989)

*"The foundations laid during the mandate period are one of the keys to understanding the state's resilience and its ability to face the challenges of the post-independence years".*

Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan…,* p. 3.

At the end of the 30s, the Emirate of Transjordan had revealed to be a success within British imperial ambitions: indeed, at that time the country had overcome several harsh political and social turbulences which marked its short history until that moment, from the initial contentious European presence to the not so obvious and mostly peaceful co-existence of Bedouin traditional logics with the newly introduced modern State structure, which – with few exceptions – never escalated into violent repressions of the tribes. Surprisingly, the blast of World War II in 1939 actually represented for the Emirate a further element of development, in particular from an economic point of view, and specifically for the continuation of that integration process of tribalism that started more than a decade before. Indeed, while Great Britain consolidated its position in the region supported by Glubb Pāshā's Arab Legion,[122] from 1941, the world conflict allowed Transjordan to earn from it. By pushing forward the military spending, calling numerous nomads and peasants to the building of new infrastructures, in particular roads and railways to the South, and financially subsiding the Arab Legion, the war carried the country toward a new level of development. Alongside war economy and infrastructures, the bourgeoise merchant class, a novelty element for Transjordanian society, emerged, with most of its exponents mainly coming from Syria to enrich themselves: in a very short period of time,

[122] Glubb Pāshā became head chief of the Arab Legion in 1939, replacing his predecessor Peake Pāshā.

this new class reached an elevated position in the social structure of the future Kingdom, starting to express an important political weight in ʿAbd Allāh I reign.[123]

Meanwhile, the central administration kept employing the Bedouins within the army, thus assuring them and their kinship a secure income from the one side, as well as securing the ties that bonded them to the British crown for more than thirty years on the other. Given the mostly peaceful circumstances and the ability to take almost every kind of revolt or disaffection under control, Great Britain actually reinforced its presence in this area of the Middle East, intensifying the relations with the Hashemites at the point of allowing the recognition of the independence of Transjordan. In 1946 indeed, the Emirate was officially recognized as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (*al-mamlaka al-urduniyya al-hāshimiyya*) with the Amir ʿAbd Allāh, until that moment dependent from British mandate rule, who was now granted the charge of King (*mālik*), finally gaining a stronger political role for all the Jordanians. An official constitution was issued in November of that same year,[124] as well as a treaty of alliances between the two countries establishing mutual help and the right of Great Britain to impose its strategic interests in the country. Despite formally establishing the birth and independence of the modern Hashemite country, the treaty of 1946 actually represented the first moment of shift of balance between the two political powers, and the starting of a process of detachment of Jordan from colonial powers which culminated with the events of 1955-1956.

The treaty was indeed one of the reasons why a considerable part of nationalist officials asked for a definitive and effective political and economic separation from Great Britain, denouncing the wide operative margin maintained by the European power, seeking instead self-determinism and pan-Arabist instance – already growing in the Middle Eastern region. An updated version of the treaty was formulated in 1948, but remaining far from solving the internal disputes over the autonomy invoked by nationalists; on the contrary, with the British annual subsidy to the Kingdom raised to two million pounds, the discontent intensified, remarking the persisting colonial nature of the agreements between the two reigns. On the regional level, the

[123] Abla M. Amawi, *The Transjordanian State and the Enterprising Merchants of Amman,* in Hannoyer, J., & Shami, S. (Eds.), *Amman: Ville et Société*, Presses de l'Ifpo, 1996. Retrieved from: https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/8229?lang=it [Last Accessed 24/09/2022].

[124] On November 28, 1946, the Legislative Council passed the first Jordanian Constitution, published in the Official Gazette, no. 886 (February 1st, 1947).

first Israeli-Palestinian conflict of 1948-1949, the vague political plans for this area, and the persisting desire of King ʿAbd Allāh I to unify the territories of Transjordan, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq under the project of a "Great Syria" opened other branches of contrasts and imbalance. Moreover, with the intensifying tensions in the mandatary Palestinian territories, the balance between Jordan and Great Britain was ulteriorly shaken. In this sense, the attempted creation of an Arab coordination group, under the control of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and finally Jordan ignited the spark of revolts. At that moment, the economic British presence within the Transjordanian territories showed all its political weight, with ʿAbd Allāh I's decision to stay loyal to the British crown.

The 1948-49 Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the annexation of the West Bank revealed to be the very first moment, in the history of modern Jordan, to demonstrate its internal stability and the effectiveness of the tribal integration process: the Arab Legion indeed proudly fought on the battlefield, composed of 4.500 soldiers, most of whom volunteered from the tribal groups of Banū Ṣakhr, al-Ḥuwayṭāṭ, al-Adwān, and Hadid. With the end of the conflict in Palestine, a huge part of the Palestinian population was indeed welcomed into the Jordanian Kingdom, giving birth to what has been called the "Jordanization of the West Bank"[125] and initiating a schizophrenic process by the Kingdom that was oriented, as will be later shown, to inclusion or exclusion according to the contingency of political and economic circumstances experienced by the country in each specific moment. After 1948, 'Abd Allāh I granted Jordanian citizenship to around 720,000 Palestinian West bankers.[126] The "chance" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict actually represented for ʿAbd Allāh I also the opportunity to finally set himself as the element of pacification and aggregation well beyond the limits of the Jordan river, recollecting under the Hashemite family control also the protection of old Jerusalem and the Islamic holy sites.[127]

[125] See Y. Alon, *The Making of…*, op. cit., 152.

[126] See Laurie Brand, "Palestinians and Jordanians: A Crisis of Identity", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.24(4), 1995, pp. 46-61.

[127] See Kimberly Katz, "Administering Jordanian Jerusalem: Building National Identity". In: Tamar Mayer and Suleiman A. Mourad (eds.), *Jerusalem, Idea and Reality*, Routledge, London and New York 2008.

## 2.2.1. King Ḥusayn and the Arab Cold War: a transformative conjuncture

The years between 1951 and 1958 represented a very crucial watershed for the future not only of the Hashemite Kingdom but also of the Middle Eastern region as a whole, split and broken between the two main political directions during the so-called "Arab Cold War": from one side, the dream of a pan-Arab Middle East, free from any colonial subjugation, under the guidance of the Egyptian Official Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, after self-declaring as the leader of Pan Arabist movement with the *coup d'état* of the Free Officers of 1952, opened a season of tremendous transformations for the region; on the other, the consolidation of conservative monarchical regimes, as wished by King Faysal's Saudi Arabia.[128]

A first crucial event for Jordan was represented, with no doubt, by the assassination of King 'Abd Allāh I, shot dead while entering the al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem by a Palestinian, Muṣṭafa Shukrī al-'Ashū, near the positions of Great Muftī of Jerusalem, Hajj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī (1897 - 1974) and of a former official of Arab Legion and regime opposer, 'Abd Allāh al-Tāll.[129] The death of the until that moment unifying leader of the Jordanian project marked a clean break from the past and the beginning of a new political cycle. Indeed, in 1952, after a short experience on the throne, compromising health conditions forced King Ṭalāl (1909 - 1972), son of the passed 'Abd Allāh I, to leave the Kingdom's leadership to the rule of his son, Ḥusayn ibn Ṭalāl (1935 - 1999). Under such controversial circumstances, the future of Jordan started to delineate, with growing moments of political participation and opposition within the nation. With King Ḥusayn, also a huge part of his grandfather's relations was redefined or resized, in particular those concerning the colonial presence within the administration official apparatus of the Kingdom. The first bold step in an openly post-colonial direction was represented by the Jordanian Government refusal to join the Baghdad Pact (1955).[130] This agreement between Western countries, Great Britain and the

[128] Malcolm. H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War 1958-1967: A Study of Ideology in Politics* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press, London, New York and Toronto 1967.

[129] The Guardian, *Assassination of King Abdullah*, July 20th, 1951. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1951/jul/21/fromthearchive. Last accessed 17/10/2022.

[130] At its beginning in 1955, the Baghdad Pact was officially known as the Middle East Treaty Organization, and included the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and

U.S. in particular, and the Arab world, aimed at creating a parallel alliance within the NATO sphere of influence against the Soviet infiltration into the Middle East, with particular attention to its oil reserves. In Jordan, after a long period of uncertainty and clashes, the pact was finally rejected, mostly perceived as another attempt by Western countries to redistribute their powers within the region during mutated Cold War circumstances.[131] Actually, from a more internal policy point of view, it was the renovated nationalist spirit within the Kingdom that actually played a crucial role in the decision-making process against the Baghdad Pact, as well as a precarious condition exacerbated by escalating revolts against the colonial occupant, often ended in violent repressions and shooting of protestors.

Averted any possibility to sign the Pact, in 1956 King Ḥusayn I also decided to forcibly remove and expel the Arab Legion's chief in charge, Glubb Pāshā, from Jordanian soil, giving him twenty-four hours to leave the country. With this removal, the last symbol of the old guard was erased, and a new era for post-independence Jordan opened officially: Glubb's dishonorable dismissal represented a new moment of British-Jordanian relationships, especially from a financial point of view, with the gradual withdrawal of the former colonial Empire from the position of the first economic and military partner of the Hashemite Kingdom. Ḥusayn's need was to remarkably regain its internal infrastructures control, by substituting most of the British officials with Jordanian ones: soon the move revealed all of its weaknesses, with a drop in efficiency due to the new officers and commanders' unpreparedness and inability to take control of the State apparatus in such a transformative momentum. On the other side, the removal of Glubb also represented a break with the project of Transjordanization of Bedouins into the military apparatus initiated in the late 20s: now, the tribesmen, recognizing the ascendancy of more well-educated officials' élite from the town, especially after the Palestinians' incorporation within the National borders, feared that their component – until that moment loyal beyond doubt to King 'Abd Allāh I – could be marginalized or completely replaced.[132] To some extent, the tribal component of the Arab Legion was allegedly accused of attempted coups and internal revolts, opening the path

Turkey. After Iraq left the agreement, the name was change into CENTO, Central Treaty Organization.

[131] See Jamie Allinson, *The Struggle for the State in Jordan: The Social Origins of Alliances in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York 2016.

[132] See Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *Politics and the Military in Jordan: A Study of the Arab Legion*, 1921-1957, Frank Cass & C., New York 1967.

to a complete reorganization of the Legion and moving the subject to a political level: this tendency was particularly evident within the sphere of nationalists' group. Despite swinging between regime loyalist and pan-Arab positions, this period for Jordan actually represented the first moment of internal and foreign policy collocation within the international arena, but also of delineation of political movements and parties that marked its most recent history. In this general context of mutated political directions, both internally and internationally, the new nationalist Prime Minister Sulaīmān al-Nabulsī (1908 – 1976), elected in 1956, signed the Solidarity Act with Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia; a year later, the Treaty of 1948 was abrogated, with the Kingdom turning their economic interest towards the U.S. and receding, for the first time in its history, from the British Kingdom subsidies.

Navigating the difficult conjunctions of the 50s, King Ḥusayn had the merit to let Jordan float but never sink into the dialogic of Arab Cold War ideologies, not subjecting his country neither to Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir (1918 - 1970) Egyptian-led pan-Arabism nor to the Soviet bloc influence in the region, finally constituting for the U.S. the perfect alliance in a such a controversial area, marked by the Israel-Palestinian conflicts from one side, and the slow but inevitable decline of Imperial powers on the other. The battle for the leadership of the Middle East briefly redirected itself into a new matrix, with the unsuccessful experiment of the Arab Union (*al-ittiḥād al-ʻarabī*) in contrast to the RAU, the United Egyptian Republic (*al-jumhūriyyah al-ʿarabiyyah al-muttaḥidah*), who saw the joint actions of Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. This experience, followed by the attempted *coup d'état* of ʻAlī Abū Nūwar of 1957 and that of ʻAbd Allāh al-Tāll of 1958 saw the consequent harsh epuration of remaining regime conspirators. Throughout all these difficult years, the role of tribes and their loyalty to the regime was crucial: it was indeed a tribesman, ʻĀkif al-Fāyīz, son of the paramount Shaykh of the Banū Ṣakhr tribe, who actually alerted King Ḥusayn of the imminent risk of a coup.[133] The question of the role of the army in the Jordanian state-building process during the 50s, and its transformation from a patrol Corp to an élite group, occupies a huge space in modern theories and research, but looking at the Jordanian case study, it is possible to suggest, using Vatikiotis words, that the very nature of the Arab Legion before 1949 actually prevented any subversive attempt or coup d'état "due to the absence of the most common accelerator of coups and violent revolts against the *status quo*: namely, defeat

[133] See Lawrence Tal, *Politics, The Military and National Security in Jordan 1955-1967* (2nd Ed.), Palgrave MacMillan, London 2003.

in a war". [134] In this sense, not only the administrative element but also the political one was ready to transform according to the great changes of post-World War II, with more dialectical challenges and new spaces of contrast delineating in the modern Hashemite country. With the foiled threats and the nationalist sphere of influence at its peak, the Kingdom was finally escorted out of the difficult conjuncture of the 50s, towards a new but equally turbulent new decade.

### 2.2.2. The 60s and 70s: the PLO and the end of the Jordan project

After the controversial and tumulted decade of the 50s, the Jordanian monarchy found itself profoundly shaken but positively opened to new directions, especially from its economic and political points of view. The outside threat and the wave of pan-Arabism actually sparked and encouraged the search for new spaces of internal participation, confrontation, and in particular for the definition of Jordanian identity within the global scenario. Differently from what happened in the past, in this new decade, the "Transjordanian" and "Palestinian" dimensions intensified their differences and emerged as two distinct political directions, interconnecting or distancing at different moments until finally reaching their violent peak with Black September events. From a regional point of view, the beginning of this new decade was only apparently peaceful and quiet: indeed, in 1963 the Ba'athists promoted a nationalist coup first in Iraq and then in Syria, while Yemen was shocked by the rage of a civil war. Moreover, the end of Nasser's revolutionary pan-Arabism, with the defeat of the RAU in Syria in 1961, gave the Hashemite Kingdom a net margin of manoeuvre, returning to the adoption of a perspective of unification under the only Jordanian identity, which was to stand in the regional context as an example of resilience and modernism, and with the consequent aim of preventing any centralization of Palestinian ambitions.

The first act in this direction was the election In 1962 of Prime Minister Waṣfi al-Tāll (1919 - 1971), a technocrat and reformist, "man of the

[134] P. J. Vatikiotis, *Politics and…*, p. 147.

King" and former Ambassador in Iraq, and firm believer of the need for modernization of the Hashemite regime; his figure was much appreciated by the Palestinian component, especially because of its participation in the war of 1948, as well as by the U.S. administration. At the beginning and with no doubt, al-Tāll was able to promote his reformist plan (which included modernization of agriculture, tourism, welfare, transport and roads, health, and education), alongside supporting an "active Palestinian line".[135] The following events tough demonstrated the weakness of al-Tāll's political vision, as well as the readiness of Palestinians to concentrate into an autonomous movement all their instances. The political views were delineating, and this was clear when Ḥusayn I, tired of al-Tāll's hostility towards Egypt and the possibility of a new conjuncture with the pan-Arabist, revolutionary front, decided to depose his Prime Minister and call for new elections, opening again a season of uncertainty and strong oppositions, where the conservative regime of Jordan and King Ḥusayn I attempted the way of diplomacy with the Nasser's Egypt "to resurrect his respectability in revolutionary circles".[136] A remarkable moment was the *summit* of 1964, with the creation and official recognition by Jordan of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to strongly confront the common enemy of Israel. It was indeed the inauguration of a renovated centralization of power under the Hashemite crown, firmly determined to highlight and spread the national identity rhetoric for both banks of the Jordan river and to contain the growing power of PLO, from 1965 under the guide of Ahmad al-Shuqayri. That same year, the "façade of collaboration was shattered"[137] when, through an official statement, al-Shuqayri severely criticized the Jordanian attitude, demanding also the compulsory recruitment of Palestinian refugees for the Palestinian Liberation Army, thus crossing and threatening the stability of Jordanian sovereignty. The Palestinians' presence in Jordan started to be seen by the government as an external, worrying element, to be put under strict control by the Jordanian regime institutions, determined to carry on the realization of the Jordan project.

The years 1966-1967 marked the end of this brief peaceful co-existence of different Arab revolutionary identities within the project of revised pan-Arabism: several clashes in Jerusalem, the accusation by the PLO

[135] Uriel Dann, *King Hussain and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, Jordan: 1955-1967*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989.
[136] M. H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War 1958-1967…*, op. cit., 151.
[137] Ibid., p. 147.

of Jordanian non-intervention attitude after Israeli attacks, and the difficult relations between the *fidā'iyyin*[138] of the PLO front and the Hashemite power put the basis for the definitive rupture between the East and the West bank. The experience of a common front definitely died with the 1967 war defeat of the Arab Legion and the consequent loss of the West Bank. The dream and ideology of pan-Arabism died with soldiers on the battlefield, and the ideological dichotomy that marked the 50s and 60s era "became an irrelevant anachronism in the real world of Arab politics [..] that now became more realistic and pragmatic".[139] For the first time since 1948 and the annexation of the West Bank, Jordan had to give up on its most important prerogative: that of being the force of unification of the two Jordan river banks. In this context of transformation:

> […] the regime responded by turning back to relying on its old support base. Old patterns which characterized the Emirate days were now either reactivated or exposed[…] the tribes in particular, which were by now fully integrated into the state, coopted and devoid of their former autonomy.[140]

The end of the decade, marked by the civil war in 1970-1971, should not be read through the lens of distinct political bipolarism between the regime front and the Palestinian one; it should instead be interpreted as the continuation of the event of the 50s, during which a growing, lively expression of political participation started. Due to the difficult compatibility between the Hashemite need to assert their sovereignty and the PLO-*fidā'iyyin* front, characterized by the need to recall Palestinians to armed resistance against Israel, the debate intensified, reaching a difficult but fruitful moment within the identitarian discourse. This moment called the regime to interrogate itself on its own nature, the direction of its politics, as well as its very same structural elements, in particular the King, its entourage, and the army, showing that the modern political expressions within the region were far more heterogenous than expected.

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[138] *fidā'iyyin* can be translated as "guerrilla fighters".

[139] Asher Susser, "The Jordanian Monarchy: The Hashemite Success Story". In: Joseph Kostiner (Ed.), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenges of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publisher, Boulder and London 2000, p. 103.

[140] Y. Alon, *The Making of…*, p. 153.

## 2.2.3. New Nationalism and the revival of Tribalism

The following years were characterized on the one side by those Palestinians who strongly identified with the West bank events, thus recognizing the need for the fight, and on the other, by those who remained under Hashemite control as Palestinians-Jordanians. After so many years of wars and conflicts, the opportunity to rehabilitate the Kingdom and give birth to a new course of events was given by the celebration of King Ḥusayn I's silver Jubilee of 1977, who centralized in his personal figure the reason and the sacrality of the State and the ruling family, standing as the father of "everyone" with the ultimate aim of reinforcing the national rhetoric, so heavily endangered during the last two decades.

This new era had been ideally inaugurated by a new direction of nationalism. The void left by the collapse of long-lasting 'Abd Allāh I and Ḥusayn's dream of reuniting the two banks of the Jordan river under the unique Hashemite and Jordan protection needed to be filled in order to capitalize the long *state-building* process and redirect the multitude of identitarian feeling towards the crown. The element upon which this project was built was represented by the tribal component: again, after years of disorders and the creation of a town élite of officials during the 50s, the Kingdom resorted to its indigenous subject, recalling from the past the most loyal component of society as "the symbolization of Jordan's national identity".[141] The tribal Bedouin heritage, the Quraysh lineage, and the Nabatean remembrance as well, all contributed to this renewed nationalist project of the late 21st century. Accordingly, the religious element served to collocate Jordan within the broader Arab-Islamic context of the region. To achieve the nationalist discourse goal, the material elements of tribal culture (dresses, utilities, adornments) were all fundamental in building a common sense of belonging to a unique, single tribe – the tribe of Transjordan – instead of stressing the idea of different groups and kinships. In order to do so, as Alon (2007) describes, the regime proceeded to the "nationalization" of the tribes through the abolition of the Tribal Courts in 1976, thus facilitating a mix of the Bedouin element into the State juridical structure. This heavy romanticization of the Emirate past and its Bedouin component also translated into the narration and reinforcement of tribal values within the modern Hashemite Kingdom society, seen as the bulwark of Jordanian citizenship not

[141] Linda L. Layne, *Home and Homeland…*, p. 138.

only within the Hashemite Kingdom borders but also abroad. In this way, Jordan "cultivated a Bedouin image of itself" particularly visible in the "uniform of Desert Patrol and especially its red-chequered *kūfīyya*, desert encampments in Wadi Rum, and coffee paraphernalia",[142] all elements that contributed to the foundational image of the country, a façade that still persists today and that resonates particularly in those who arrive in the country from abroad.

Among the reasons behind this context of transformation, there is the growing tendency and will of Hashemite Kingdom to move from an attitude of integration toward Palestinian populations of the region to one of defense against any inference of the PLO, in order to guarantee itself the stability of sovereignty. This crucial historical shift is well summarized in the passage from the slogan "Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan" to the "Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine" one.[143] Such a turning point in the history of built national identity in Jordan was remarked by the decision of King Ḥusayn, in 1988, to give up on any ambition for the West Bank, with the consequent denationalization of over one million Palestinian-Jordanians, considered for the very first time as inhabitants of a distinct territory.[144] This process of exclusion of the Palestinian component – which as we will see will shift again in the coming decades – in favor of tribality's revival and the celebration of mandatary glorious memories, actually represents a contested field of dispute for the same tribal community, as Alon (2007) explained. Contrasting the analysis of Massad, who thought about the Bedouinization of the State as a complete colonial invention, he rather suggests how, if from the one side the State "nationalized" the Bedouins, these for their part, seeking to give a personal meaning to the question about true Jordanian identity, actually "tribalized the nation".[145] Under such circumstances, the attempt of the regime to create one single tribal supra-identity never reached a complete stage, given the permanence of elements of distinctions among the tribes, who continued to employ their original names of affiliation, to build solidarity networks, as well as started to produce Bedouin genealogies and biographies; in this sense "rather than undermining each other, the two notions of being a

[142] Y. Alon, *The Making of…*, p. 157.

[143] Iris Fruchter-Ronen, "The Palestinian Issue as Constructed in Jordanian School Textbooks, 1964-94: Changes in the National Narrative", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 49(2), 2013, pp. 280-295.

[144] See Karen Culcasi, "Warm Nationalism: Mapping and Imagining the Jordanian Nation", *Political Geography*, Vol. 54, 2016, pp. 7-20.

[145] Y. Alon, *The Making of…*, p. 157.

proud Jordanian and a proud member of a tribe complement and strengthen each other".[146]

## 2.3. The 90s and the New Millennium: Jordan between retribalization, securitization, and liberal reforms (1990 – 2011)

At the end of the 20th century, the Middle East had experienced both the culmination and the disappearance of the ideology season: pan-Arabism, communism, and reactionary monarchical endeavors all pertained to the past, in a turning point of history that forced the region and its social actors to find new adaptation strategies in a rapidly and enormously changing context. In this sense, Jordan leaned out on the 90s with cautious optimism towards its stability and adaptive capabilities, well performed and demonstrated in the recent past, but this time maintaining a more prudent and realistic approach than before. The ancient dream of a Great Syria first, and that of the unification of the two Jordan river's banks under the Hashemite *insignia* then, were now replaced by a more careful "unity, freedom, and a better life" perspective.[147]

Economically, this season had opened with a growing internal resentment of the population towards the regime, which eventually deteriorated into clashes against the austerity measures implemented to cope with the International Monetary Fund program requirements. These riots, initially directed against the economic marginalization of a huge part of the population, actually turned into an opportunity to manifest also against the increasing corruption within the government and its representatives.[148] The most important aspect of 1989 turmoil lied in its mixed participation: this time, the usual anti-regime opposition forces walked the streets of the capital Amman alongside a vast majority of East bankers, who represented the majoritarian group in the protests. Under these circumstances, the government and the regime could not, in any case, address West bankers or Islamist of being the cause of these imbalances. All these events convinced the King to dismiss the government and give birth to a path of political and

[146] Ibid.

[147] A. Susser, "The Jordanian Monarchy...", p. 104.

[148] C. Ryan, "Political Opposition and Reform Coalitions in Jordan", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.38(3), December 2011, pp. 367–390.

economic democratization. The first step in this direction, after the complete detachment from the West Bank project, was the issuing of new elections for that same year, after the renovation of the parliamentary structure, through the revision of the Electoral Law of 1986 and the cancellation of accounted seats for the West Bankers. Accordingly, the lower house and the upper house maintained specific numbers of guaranteed seats for different groups' representatives. These provisions, alongside a more relaxed political atmosphere, virtually inaugurated a season of liberalization within the State apparatus, escorting the Hashemite Kingdom into the new millennium. The new elections were thus significant in that they put an end to the 1953 coercive provisions as well as because they brought to light the ascendancy of a new force on the field, political Islam. The novelty stood indeed in the source of instability for the Hashemite ruling power: if during the previous century, this mainly came from the secularist left, now the challenge to the *status quo* emanated from the religious right, with the crushing victory of the Muslim Brotherhood[149] (*al-ikhwān al-muslimūn*), later became Islamic Action Front (*jabhat al-'amal al-islāmī*). This win actually reflected a wider regional situation, with the Middle East invested in those years by the rise of the same political faction in its different local declinations. One of the reasons behind the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, as asserted by several scholars, is tied to its recent past of 1957, when king Ḥusayn declared illegal all political parties. Only the Brotherhood was granted the possibility to exist and work on Jordanian soil, thanks to its identification as a charitable association. Exactly this philanthropic soul of the party represented the social leverage that permitted the group to gain people's trust, substituting itself for the State and filling the socio-political void left by this one. The Islamist page of the late 21st century did not mark, with few short exceptions, a form of threat for the Hashemite Kingdom, which strong of the democratization process put in place in those years, would have never allowed any political force to overturn or unbalance its *status quo*. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood played the card of accountability within the public space of Jordan without exceeding in any radical direction, taking advantage of the high-level freedom they had in the country with respect to their Brotherhood peer groups in other Middle Eastern countries.

[149] The Muslim Brotherhood, is a political-religious group created in Egypt in 1928 by the Islamist Hassan al-Banna, aimed at the employment of Qurʾān as the theoretical reference of modern Islamic society.

In this general context of plural identities and alleged democracy, a health-proven King Ḥusayn I was well aware of what kind of Jordan he wanted to leave behind after his death: a State in strong continuation with the Hashemite descendancy, not held in the grip of one single political faction, and thus far from that risk of totalitarian or dictatorial derives that had a crucial role in the history of neighbor countries, Syria and Egypt in particular. Keeping this in mind, as well as the successful – although controversial – project to deliver its reign one common national identity to resort to at difficult times, his foresight appears more understandable. Indeed, in April 1990 he officially convened a National Conference with the aim of drafting the future democratic reforms to be implemented by the Parliament: the result of the convening, whose participants were directly appointed by the King and were representatives of all the different souls of Jordanian politics (liberal, nationalist, Islamists, leftists), was the so-called National Charter (*al-mīthāq al-waṭanī*), which broadly served the scope of posing the basis for the democratization process in the country starting by freedom of political association and expression. In reality, the noble project imagined by Ḥusayn was more a façade for internal stabilization rather than a real reversal of the purge and autocratic direction followed by the regime in 1953. Indeed, if we consider the reality of freedom of expression in the country "one year into the venture, only political iconoclasts and tribal leaders (who spoke from the safe haven of old age) would dare criticize Hussein",[150] as Shryock described.

Another front of instability was actually created on August, 2nd 1990 with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This military move actually put Jordan at the crossroads of two different but equally distant poles: on the one side, there were the fruitful and respectful Iraqi-Jordanian relations, until that moment guaranteed by King Ḥusayn I and Saddam Ḥusayn (1937 - 2006) political dialogue; on the other, the pressure exerted by Riyadh and Washington towards Jordan to military engage on Iraqi's soil at their side. The war events had the potential to severely destabilize Jordan and its democratic process, but this time, differently from what happened in the past, Jordan decided to stay neutral and indirectly assume a position far from its Western allies and Saudi Arabia, putting its internal interest first to avoid the possibility of instability and pressure from the oppositions. Through this choice, the Gulf

[150] Andrew Shryock "Dynastic Modernism and Its Contradictions: Testing the Limits of Pluralism, Tribalism, and King Hussein's Example in Hashemite Jordan", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 22(3), Summer 2000, p. 60.

War became a reason for "improved political cooperation between parliament and the leadership and led to greater national unity".[151]

Averted the internal crisis, Jordan followed through the path of democratization initiated some years before, and finally, in 1992 the political parties were newly admitted and legally recognized by the Law. 32. In 1993, two other decrees were implemented, both contributing in some way to the Kingdom's democratic openness while indirectly regulating and limiting those forms of political and social freedom that could have, in any way, prevented the *status quo* and the regime from continuing to exist. In the first case, the Press and Publication Law No.10/1993 defined the operative margins of expression in the country; contemporarily, also important amendments were made to the Electoral Law. This new electoral system actually permitted "drawing up smaller single-deputy electoral district"[152] facilitating *de facto* the tribal-clan vote, thus favoring the familial linkages at the expense of the ideological and political relations. Behind this only apparently democratic choice there was the need of the regime to maintain and reinforce that same system of mutual help and support with the Bedouin and tribal component that in the past allowed it to endure its internal unbalances; additionally, favoring the tribal preference also helped to contain the Islamist rise begun in 1989. It is precisely at this moment that the regime seriously engaged in a project of what Maggiolini (2017) calls "retribalization" of the Bedouin component by following two different but equally remunerative directions: on the one side, the State promoted the creation of fictional tribal imagery, with "simulacra" of the desert-dwellers subjects produced for tourist consumption, reinforcing the official Hashemite discourse based on a magnificent common history and identity. On the other, well aware of the weakness of the tribal traditional lineages generated by the liberalization process, the regime fostered the reintegration of tribal kinships and family relations within the modern apparatus of the States through the creation of family associations (*al-jam'iyyat al-'ā'jliyya*). The final aim of this move was that of "repackaging" the ancient tribal groups as welfare providers for the population in a time of strong contraction of basic services by the State,[153] with the creation of new familial linkages and genealogies

[151] Katherine Rath, "The Process of Democratization in Jordan," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.30(3), 1994, pp. 530-557.
[152] K. Rath, "The Process of…", p. 547.
[153] Anne Marie Baylouny, "Creating Kin: New Family Associations as Welfare Providers in Liberalizing Jordan", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 38(3), Aug. 2006, pp. 349-368.

which could adapt to the newly created societal sectors (economic, press and publications, welfare). The élites in charge of these brand-new tribal genealogies, over 400 in a few years, gained from this exercise a powerful position within the regime structure, wielding "significant economic power over fellow kin".[154] However, the hegemonic regime discourse about identity within these groups was all but fixed and completed: indeed, these charitable organizations actually enhanced the dialogic practices nowadays still active within the country, showing how the question of who a "real" Jordanian is, and what exactly does the label mean, is not a solved question; for sure, as an evident factor, the "retribalization" of the State of the 80s and 90s well represented the tendency of Hashemite Kingdom to maintain a form of pluralism of political and social directions within its borders.

All the decisions and political directions taken between 1989 and 1993 well represented the intent of Ḥusayn to leave behind himself political and economic stability as well as a historical continuity with the ancient glory of a tribal past. Nonetheless, it is precisely for this reason that the direction taken in 1999 seemed, to public opinion and the international community, very far from his initial goal. Indeed, with enormous surprise both at home and abroad, he deposed the expected next in line of succession as defined by the Constitution, namely his brother, Crown Prince Hassan (1947 - ). This choice, which actually had also social repercussions on Jordanian citizens' perception of the crown, was in favor of a more direct line of succession, by which the designated King would have become now His majesty's son, ʿAbd Allāh II ibn al-Ḥusayn (1962 - ). The event revealed to be a surprise to the same newly appointed King, who a year later his enthronement in 1999, in an official speech held at the dinner with media, communications, and entertainment leaders in Davos, Switzerland, admitted that only a year before, his interests laid "in simply being the best soldier in the Jordanian Army that I could be".[155] The Kingdom inherited by 'Abd Allāh II was far more developed and politically stable than the one received by his father, especially from the bureaucratic, military, and economic points of view. In this sense, the Lebanon civil war of 1975 had given Jordan the possibility to become a point of reference for the Middle Eastern region's market: thanks to this conjuncture, it economically gained revenues employable for internal

[154] Ibid, p. 349.

[155] H.M. King 'Abd Allāh II, "Remarks by His Majesty King Abdullah II at The Dinner with Media, Communications and Entertainment Leaders", Switzerland, Davos, 30/01/2000. Retrieved from: https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches, [Last Accessed 8/10/2022].

consolidation and the promotion of the *status quo* although the high rates of unemployment constituting a fundamental issue for the country until today. Nonetheless, the apparent peaceful beginning of ‘Abd Allāh II’s reign only lasted for few years: indeed, the regime was about to be shaken by approaching historical turning points later crucial for the Middle Eastern region as a whole, that represented for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan a new watershed, in particular for what concerns its economic ambitions and internal security structures. The historical cycle inaugurated by King ‘Abd Allāh II was not in total contradiction with that of his predecessor, but opened to a new season of reforms and economic alliances with Western partners which served in two directions: from the one side, the new course helped to collocate and empower Jordan within the globalized context of the new Millennium; on the other, it represented the attempt of the country to put its internal balance at safety from regional disorders and threatens, first and foremost the rise of Islamic terrorist organization of al-Qā‘ida and Isis.

## 2.4. The modern Jordan and the securitarian grip

The beginning of the new Millennium, virtually inaugurated by the new reign of King ‘Abd Allāh II, had been marked by several regional and international episodes that more or less directly moved the country and the whole Middle Eastern region toward specific political and economic directions. Among these, some of the most important certainly were the beginning of the second *intifāḍa* in 2000,[156] the bombing of three main hotels in Amman in 2005,[157] the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 on the World Trade Centre in New York, and the consequent declaration of war of the U.S. – and more broadly, of the Western world – to Afghanistan and its terrorist organization al-Qā‘ida, at that time headed by Osāma bin Lāden

[156] The second Intifāḍa, also known as Intifāḍa di al-Aqṣā, started on September 28th, 2000, due to the visit paid by the Likud Party leader, Ariel Sharon, to the *al-haram al-sharīf* compound.

[157] On November, 9th 2005, three main hotels of Amman, the Grand Hyatt Hotel, the Radisson SAS Hotel, and the Days Inn were bombed on a coordinated attack, later claimed by al-Qā‘ida terrorism. As a direct consequence, the government strengthen its security measure, in particular those concerning the anti-terrorism.

(1957 - 2011).[158] Differently from what his father did, ‘Abd Allāh II never questioned his relationships with the Western partners; on the contrary, alongside Riyadh and Cairo, he strengthened Jordanian ties with the U.S in particular, thus becoming the prime ally of Washington in such a turbulent Middle Eastern scenario, where power relationships and economies were about to change drastically. He, therefore, proceeded to internally open a new season of structural reforms to reinforce the regime and its social legitimacy, this time in a more similar way to that of his predecessor. While promising the citizens greater outcomes in terms of welfare and quality of life through the concession of democratic reforms, the reign simultaneously implemented a series of resolutions clearly oriented towards a more securitizing grip to protect the country from internal instability.

In this sense, under King ‘Abd Allāh II, the royal family and the Hashemite Kingdom implemented a double-standard image of themselves: while representing a symbol of modernism, openness, and democracy abroad, they were actually harshly criticized for their autocratic and at times coercive methods at home, which shrunk enormously the political participation and dialogue freedom among the different souls of Jordanian society. The double standard between domestic agenda and foreign policy applied by the Hashemite ruling power is particularly interesting because it well describes the deep nature of the Jordanian case: being neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic, according to Ryan (2011) the country could be considered an example of a “hybrid regime” or “liberalizing autocracy”, in clear contraposition with other Middle Eastern countries on the one side, but at the same time indirectly fostering lack of security and instability by not granting political participation and proper freedom of expression to the different society component (moderates, Islamist, trade unions, civil society, and grassroots activism).

In a regional context crossed by renewed Israel-Palestinian conflicts, liberalizations processes and the fight to extremism, the securitization grip became particularly evident also in the Hashemite country: here, in December 2002, following the assassination of Lawrence Fowley, a USAID officer in Amman, the security forces sieged the town of Ma’an, in the South of the country, arresting all those openly critics to the regime, firmly believing that the small town actually could represent an enclave for extremists groups. The

[158] Ronen Yitzhak, “The Question of the Legitimacy of the Hashemite Regime in Jordan: the Islamic Radical Organizations, the Western Territories and Israel”, *Oriente Moderno*, Vol. 100(1), pp. 75-92.

incident of Ma'an, alongside other events calling for a strong security forces intervention,[159] were implemented in order to give a strong signal to every possible anti-regime faction. The tendency was actually endorsed by Western countries, at the time engaged in a relentless and decisive fight against Islamic terrorism and thus more open to the possibility of authoritarian shift by Middle Eastern regimes. Also, for this reason the government decided to approve numerous amendments to the law, actually giving the regime useful tools to control and direct the freedom of expression and of associationism. Alongside penal code amendments, more than two hundred special laws were issued during those critical years, red and defined by the regime as an emergency moment that therefore required a special and autocratic approach. As we will see, this "emergency" mode will be recycled in future occasions to limit and control those branches of society openly not regime-oriented, as well as to centralize power under the façade of crisis, as in the case of Covid-19 pandemic.

All these decisions, executive interventions, and manipulations of the laws served once again to sustain the regime while navigating a season of strong contradictions and political oppositions, maintaining legitimacy in the footsteps of the ancient "Jordan project". In order to do so, in 2002 King 'Abd Allāh II officially launched a national campaign with the significant name of "Jordan First" (*al-urdun awwalan*). This campaign, in the words of the same king, was more "a plan of action to consolidate the spirit of belonging among citizens".[160] This first reference was direct to the internal conflicts between Palestinians-Jordanians and East bankers. Moreover, the project aimed at strengthening the rule of law, public freedom, and alleged transparency of the government, so as to reinforce the long-lasting Jordanian identity discourse. This example of *top-down* initiative was followed in the next years by numerous other campaigns,[161] all of which sought to deliver the same reassuring and unifying message, meanwhile making the Jordanian country a stable and reliable partner for old and new global partners.

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[159] In 2005, Amman was shocked by a number of terrorist attacks that directly hit its capital Amman, during which three bombs blew up three hotels in different districts of the city. The attacks were lately revendicated by Iraqi al-Qā'ida member Abū Muṣʿab al-Zarqāwī.

[160] See H.M. King 'Abd Allāh II Official Website: https://kingabdullah.jo/initiatives. [Last Accessed 28/09/2022].

[161] In 2006, Jordan launched the campaign "We are All Jordans" (*kulna al-urdun*) followed by hundred years celebration campaign in 2021, with the slogan "The march continues" (*wa-tastamir al-masira*).

Financially, the new Millennium course of King ‘Abd Allāh II assured the country the continuity of foreign incomes, on which the State still remains today very dependent, with an increment of IMF assets of 77 million dollars,[162] as well as the stabilization of its presence on international markets, thanks to various fiscal and trade agreements with the U.S. and the European Union. Despite the numerous economic initiatives, investments in the private sector, and the alleged redistribution of resources through reforms, Jordan failed in reaching its most marginal social groups, in particular the rural population and the Transjordan, tribal component. This economic marginalization and exclusion can be read as one of the reasons for the future clashes that crossed Jordan in the coming years from 2011 onward, right when the rest of the region started to be heavily invested by the so-called wave of “Arab Spring”.

Despite in different ways and at different degrees of severity, the second decade of 2000 in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was not completely immune to the mass protests and *bottom-up* mobilization that had shaken the whole Middle East. Moreover, it is not possible to exclude the tribal component from this dissent and revolutionary discourse: actually, the creation of the *al- Ḥirāk* movement signed the beginning of a new direction in that process of “retribalization” of the Jordanian society initiated in the late 80s under King Ḥusayn. In Jordan, differently from what happened in other countries, the official narrative promoted by the State played a role in pushing the youth tribal component not so much to overthrow the ruling power, but more exactly to gain space for official political participation in the decision-making processes of their country. The retribalization of the population fostered by the central government after the political and military events of 1970s’, represented therefore a crucial moment in the promotion of a new nationalist discourse, according to which “true Jordanians can only be of tribal (as opposed to Palestinian) descent”.[163]

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[162] See Jane Harrigan, Hamed El-Said, and Chengang Wang, “The IMF and the World Bank in Jordan: A case of over-optimism and elusive growth”, *The Review of International Organizations*, Vol.1, 2006, pp. 263–292.

[163] A. Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1997, p. 38.

# Chapter 3. The politics of honor: spaces of violence and counter-violence in contemporary Jordan

## 3.1. Honor-Shame binomial: from "complex" to "system"

In his study of the Berbers of Kabylia, Bourdieu (2001) suggests that most of the ancient and modern Mediterranean societies are similarly characterized by what he calls a "'phallo-narcissistic' vision" [164] and "androcentric cosmology"[165] which, even though on a mostly theoretical and cognitive level, are still able to resist modern society developments through mythological-ritual forms and processes.[166] These resistance elements or cognitive schemes, "naturalized" within society through the highlighting of differences, are continuously reinforced and reproduced by the world as it is commonly seen and perceived and made evident in a series of oppositions between:

> up/down, above/below, in front/behind, right/left, straight/curved (and twisted), dry/wet, spicy/bland, light/dark, outside (public)/inside(private), etc. which in some cases correspond to movements of the body (up/down // go up/go down // inside/outside // go in/come out. [167]

The objectification of sexuality through body differentiation reinforces the idea of biological differences between men and women, to the extent that these differences are perceived as natural, necessary, and inevitable. This way of perceiving sexual division applies to every dominion

[164] Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (2nd ed.), Stanford University Press, Stanford 2001, p. 6.
[165] Ibid., p. 6.
[166] Bourdieu describes for example the element of wheat germination as an epitomized element of resurrection, just as the grandfather resurrects in his grandson through the use of his patronymic.
[167] P. Bourdieu, *Masculine*…, p. 7.

(body, household, labor market, organization of time),[168] thus justifying and legitimizing the male domination over females, or – on a more general level – the domination of what is perceived as masculine over what is instead perceived as feminine. In this sense, the anatomical differentiation of male/female justifies the differences applied to the social order – for example, in terms of labor division or spatial segregation; at the same time, the social order like this prescribed justifies and explains, in turn, the anatomical differences, in a perpetual replication of "a relationship of circular causality"[169] which makes hard, if not impossible, to escape from cognitively and objectively see the male dominion over women as something natural, immutable and innate.

Mediterranean societies – from Greek Iliadic culture, southern European peasants' communities, or Middle Eastern Bedouins – are exemplary of male domination on all societal levels, both within the familial private space and the public one. Anatomically speaking, they agree that a man's honorability is strictly related to his physical embodiment, namely, the phallus and the metaphorical idea of penetration: in turn, honor, and virility become crucial elements for the determination of behaviors and interactions between individuals, groups, and tribes. In this sense, the tribal communities scattered throughout the Middle Eastern and North African region represent a crucial element of analysis for scholars, who, starting from the study of Mediterranean and African populations, gave birth to a wide range of understandings of this subject.[170] At the core of honor-related societies is the notion of integrity or sense of self of the individual, which, to exist, must follow a set of rules and behaviors inscribed within a "code of honor". When this code is violated through, for example, wrongful conduct, the integrity of the individual – and that of the whole community – is at risk. This unwritten moral code is deeply rooted in sexuality and relationships between the sexes; for example, women, the crucial element in the honor structure's preservation, must avoid any sexual intercourse that may represent a violation of men's reputation, who, in turn, are called to operate a strict control of the female world. Indeed, honor represents both a system of interpretation of reality

[168] The difference exists, for example, at the objective level within the household dominion, where the space is sexually divided into the female and the masculine spheres. At the same time, at a more non-corporeal level, it exists within the cognitive structures in form of perceptions, thoughts, and actions.

[169] P. Bourdieu, *Masculine…*, p. 11.

[170] See Evans-Pritchard 1951, Peristiany 1966, Abu-Lughod 1986, Antoun 2000, Ghannam 2013.

(through the use of symbols and values) and a practical behavioral guide that employs "categories, rules, and processes that are, to a significant degree, specific to a given culture".[171] According to Peristiany (1966), all Mediterranean societies are thus characterized by what he calls an "honor-shame complex", an obsession for honor and a preoccupation for chastity that further translates, in the case of violations, into shame and disgrace for both the individuals and the community. Moreover, the moral system guarantees the hierarchical social division within the tribal groups, who base their belonging on the blood element. In her anthropological fieldwork on the Egyptian tribe of Awlad 'Ali, Abu-Lughod suggests that:

> […] individuals must achieve social status by living up to the cultural ideals entailed by the code of honor, in which the supreme value is autonomy. The weak and dependent […] can still achieve respect and honor through an alternative code, the modesty code.[172]

Widening the conceptualization, Abu-Lughod argues that the system of honor not only implies values such as chivalry, hospitality, and loyalty but most importantly freedom and independence. In this sense, strict gender differentiation is operated at the level of society through the dichotomy of strong/weak, according to which individuals not recognized as the independent, the strong, and therefore the masculine elements of society, cannot reach honor by referring to the same system of values of others, or at least not entirely. Secondly, the freedom/independence standard refers both to the relations among tribes, as well as, politically, to the act of resistance of tribes to the modern State emergence, as exemplary during and after colonialism.[173] The need for independence – translatable into land ownership, freedom to occupy the soil, and peaceful co-existence with other kinships – is undoubtedly fundamental for the tribes which, in case of misconduct attempting on their freedom, are "forced" by the customary tradition to resort to some instruments to restore the peace. One of these tools is reconciliation through agreement (*ṣulḥa*): this strategy has been extensively employed by Muslim Middle Eastern tribes for centuries and it still exists today, ensuring the end of conflicts that arose from a wrong action from one or more tribes'

[171] Paul Friedrich, "Sanity and the Myth of Honor", *Ethos*, Vol.5(3), 1977, p. 284.
[172] Abu-Lughod L., *Veiled Sentiments...*, pp. 78-79.
[173] See Chapter 1.

members at the expense of others. Through the employment of the *ṣulḥa*, the most honorable men of the tribes involved are called to put an end to the dispute, formalizing peace in place of what would instead be a non-stopping cycle of revenge. Honor becomes critical before, during, and after the resolution process of *ṣulḥa*, as the disputants appeal to *sharaf* to "maneuver, sometimes postpone, and ultimately facilitate and maintain a final reconciliation".[174] Resorting to such elements is extremely useful for Bedouin societies' juridical control, which due to their nomadic or semi-nomadic structure, could not manage their internal disputes and penal convictions by using detention facilities, especially in the past. The honor-related value system in which tribalism is embedded and through which it represents itself is reflected also through language: a real man should be accountable as he keeps the "word of honor" (*kalimat al-sharaf*), his wife and daughters represent "his honor" (*'irḍ*), any immoral act would bring him and his kinsmen dishonor and shame (*'ayb, 'ār*), women misconducts will force to a restoration of his family's honorability through the perpetration of honor killings.[175]

## The encounter: Jordan between modernity and tradition

With the advent of modernity, under the rule of European colonial powers, the traditional elements of tribal societies of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Middle Eastern region as a whole were absorbed into the modern State structure, rapidly becoming tools for gender discrimination and growing inequalities. The encounter between the Islamic *sharī'a* law and the western codifications of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reinforced both the traditional value foundations and the modern nation-State project, whose final goal was setting the family and its institutionalization under the strict control of the bureaucracy and in line with capitalistic modes of production; in this sense, "the nation-state that the Muslims encountered was – and continues to be – a masculine entity"[176] governed by pervasive patriarchal narratives and behaviors replicated in the private and public spaces of everyday life. Accordingly, the translation into modern structures of

[174] Doron Pely, "Honor: The Sulha's Main Dispute Resolution Tool", *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, Vol. 28(1), Fall 2010, pp. 67-81.
[175] Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Law from Sinai and the Negev, Justice without Government*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2009.
[176] Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 119.

traditional values was no longer for the sake of tribal ties and networks, but actually had the specific aim of reinforcing the model of nuclear family under the State rule, which through law implementation started more and more to control and subjugate the individual rights and freedom of its citizens. In this sense, in the aftermath of World War I and the declaration of independence of 1946 of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, it is possible to witness an always growing urbanization process in the area, with the gradual sedentarization and incorporation of Bedouin communities within the modern State apparatus[177] and the consequent transformation of the extended web of tribal ties into more nuclear familial structures. The tribal groups thus felt the urge and the necessity to protect their system of values, cultural habits, and internal structure under rapidly changing economic and spatial conditions. As Na'amneh, Shunnaq, and Tasbasi pointed out, "space is not merely an arena in which social life unfolds"[178] but also the stage on which this is produced and reproduced continuously. In this sense, since the nation-building phase onward, tribalism was not completely erased from Jordanian public and private life, but actually, it adapted both to new physical spaces (i.e., growing urban conglomerates) and places of social representation within the modern State, simply modeling its categories according to the new social environment. In particular, the meaning attributed to the word Bedouin (*badū*), or desert dweller, within the modern society framework came from being a synonym of "nomadic" to a political identity marked both by tribal values and belonging and mutual exchange of interests with the State. Despite undergoing this process of modernization and adaptation to new socio-economic infrastructures, the internal elements of tribalism remained mostly unchallenged, continuing to be produced and reproduced within different socio-cultural constraints, similar to what happened for other countries characterized by a high tribal presence (like Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia).

From the 2000s onward the encounter between tradition and modernity produced crucial changes in the representation of tribalism and nomadic roots of the country, changes that still need to undergo a deep analysis nowadays. In particular, new ways of cultural dissemination and

[177] See Riccardo Bocco, "The Settlement of Pastoral Nomads in the Arab Middle East: International Organizations and Trends in Development Policies, 1950-1990" in Dawn Chatty (Ed.) *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Facing the 21st Century*, Brill, Leiden 2006.

[178] Mahmoud Na'amneh, Mohammed Shunnaq and Ayseful Tasbasi, "The Modern Sociocultural Significance of the Jordanian Bedouin Tent", *Nomadic People*, Vol.12(1), 2008, p. 151.

promotion of "Bedouinism" around the country started to appear, transforming tribal belonging into a rewarding business, or to put it in the words of Layne (1994) "a central ingredient in the making of exotic Jordan".[179] Alongside, in the same period Jordan started to witness major changes within the private, familial domain, with different standard for relations between parents and kids, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, in line with capitalistic growth and openness of the country towards foreign countries. Nowadays, despite still not constituting an organic base for further studies, more and more original lines of research started to address changing family and private dynamics in the Middle Eastern context, like emerging family models, social media and dating, sexual and reproductive health technologies and their impact on the original concept of "kinship" and tribal ties.[180] Indeed, scholars recognized the cruciality of analyzing these emerging family structures, with its changing socio-economic features and characteristics, to detect critical modifications on a larger regional scale.

Some of the constitutive elements of tribalism resisted these major changes introduced by modernity, with vertical family organization, gender segregation of spaces, cultural and moral obligations and ceremonies continuing to be performed and embraced both in rural and urban areas, even if more in a nostalgic attempt to crystalize them and protect them from modern transformations. Indeed, the massive urbanization process that from the early 50s' invested the area, in particular that of Amman, changed the spatial characteristics and the housing attitudes of traditional communities, contributing to a redefinition of private roles within a rapidly changing context.[181] The last decade in Jordan represents in this sense a turning point, especially for the youth population of tribal origins, who inspired by the events of the Arab Spring of 2010/2011 came to be the first oppositional group through the *al-Ḥirāk* movement,[182] seeking democratic transitions and

[179] L. Layne, *Home and Homeland…*, p. 102.
[180] See Strathern 1992; Inhorn 1995, 2011, 2012; Edwards J. et al. 1999; Cohen-Mor 2013; Inhorn and Naguib 2018.
[181] See Yahya Farhan and Sireen Al-Shawamreh, "Impact of Rapid Urbanization and Changing Housing Patterns on Urban Open Public Spaces of Amman, Jordan: A GIS and RS Perspective", *Journal of Environmental Protection*, Vol.10, 2019, pp. 57-79.
[182] See Jacob Amis, "*Hirak*! Civil Resistance and the Jordan Spring". In: Adam Roberts and others (eds), *Civil Resistance in the Arab Spring: Triumphs and Disasters,* Oxford Academic, online edition, 2015, pp. 169-193. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198749028.003.0007 [Last Accessed 24/01/2023].

political participation in the crucial matters of the country, after a century as the "backbone" of the State.

According to this picture of the country and the transformation of its tribal component, the behavioral framework of value and duties performed by and over men, if from one side remained fundamental in maintaining and supporting their social status and gender privilege, is coming more and more to represent a burden young boys want to let go of, despite being the one upon which the entire psychological stability and social existences has been based until now. Failing in the lifetime challenge of being "a real man" in the common religious and traditional sense can therefore cause social exclusion, psychological consequences, or in the worst-case scenario, the "classification" as a threat to their own community and family. The following chapter addresses the question of honor (*sharaf* and *'irḍ*) and shame (*'ayb* and *'ār*) in their different social and spatial configurations, starting from the smaller familial context, the privileged locus of socialization of Arab-Muslim men, to the institutionalization and consolidation of the "honor-shame complex" through traditional and religious rituals and narratives, laws implementation, and other tools employed by the State to affirm a discourse of hegemonic masculinity which should be seen not only as the result of culture but also, to put it in the words of Hasan (2002), of actual "politics of honor".

### 3.1.1. Gender roles and honor in the Arab-Muslim family

The complexity in the study of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan comes, as previously seen, from the controversial political processes behind its creation and recognition as a ruling State during and after the imperialist phase. Likewise, the number of political, religious, and ethnic groups that constitute the country's population, not only define the different souls of the Kingdom but simultaneously represent a number of different horizons of identification and recognition for its people. In this widely heterogeneous context, family detains a double role: on the one side, it represents the privileged space for the construction of the identity of all its members, contributing to guiding, shaping, and defining all the character-related features and behavioral peculiarities of individuals. On the other, it parallelly plays an explicitly political and religious role, as through the Prophet Muhammad's precepts and indications, it became the fundamental tool for the

continuation of the *umma*, the community of believers, in time and space. As sociologist Barakat (1993) pointed out, the entities of the Middle Eastern family and that of the modern Arab-Islamic national structure can be juxtaposed: indeed, the family's patriarchal guide, the father (*rabb al ʾusra*), is the in-scale equivalent of the nation-State political infrastructure – represented at its peak by the King in the case of Jordan, to whom the subjects – both as family members and citizens – should physically and metaphorically bow down. To put it in the words of Hallaq "as a man was head of the family, the State was the head of society".[183] Moghadam (2004) goes beyond the concept, explaining how the nature of the Arab-Muslim family insists on "a patriarchal gender contract";[184] in her opinion, although the numerous benefices for women introduced by Islamic reforms in the modern era, the family in Arab-Muslim society still represents a *locus* where gender rights are exchanged in favor of freedom and protection.

Within the Arab-Muslim world, at the edge of the independence era, the nuclear family thus became the final aim of nation-building processes, with the two elements of family and the State standing in a "mutually constitutive relationship";[185] within it, biology represented the element of legitimation of kinship. As highlighted by Sonbol (2005), the encounter between the European legal system and the Muslim socio-religious apparatus not only weakened women's agency but also created a fixation on the project of nuclear family creation and maintenance. In this sense, the new male State-patriarchy endorsed a biological discourse to foster the idea of "the family as the nucleus upon which the fabric of society was erected",[186] using legal systems and coercive power to challenge any subversion of this dominant model. Accordingly, the Jordanian nation State experience created in the aftermath of 1946, was drawn around the concept of the nation as a masculine prerogative, with its right to exercise exclusive dominion over its population and in particular over women, limiting them through family law and control of their bodies. In this context, the gender segregation of spaces was not an exclusive characteristic of the pre-modern era, but actually, it persisted in the modern configuration of social and spatial organizations, with clear

[183] Hallaq, W. B., *An Introduction to…,* p. 317.
[184] See Valentine M. Moghadam, "Patriarchy in transition: Women and the changing family in the Middle East", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 35(2), 2004, pp. 137–162.
[185] W. B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to…*, p. 120.
[186] Amira Sonbol, "A history of Marriage Contract in Egypt", *Hawwa*, Vol.3(2), 2005, p. 182.

similarities visible both in the Bedouin tent and in modern households, either in rural or urban settings, as well as in public spaces. Indeed, the traditional Jordanian black tent (*al-bayt* or *bayt al sha'r*) has generally reflected, with few exceptions, the gender division of the family through the existence of a female section, where young girls and women socialize among themselves, and a male one, where all males gather and welcome guests, offer the tea, interacts with each other and take important decisions.[187] Only elderly women are allowed to participate in the act of guest welcoming, while the younger should be authorized by men, especially in the presence of male strangers.

In the Jordanian-specific context, the spatial segregation of the tent comes to represent a part of that "honor-shame complex" first described by Peristiany (1966) and believed by many scholars to affect the vast majority of Arab Mediterranean societies, even though some recent ethnographic research demonstrated how, for some tribal groups, gender and spatial segregation is less imperative in favor of more generosity towards the guests.[188] In this vein, in his study of *Rashayyida* tribe from East Sudan Young (2007) suggests how the predominance of the honor-shame complex cannot be considered exclusive, as in his case study a proper rite of incorporation of the guest – even in the case of a man – into the household is detected. Although this peculiar exception, tribesmen from modern households are those entitled to accommodate guests, serve tea, and open the conversation, while women stay in the kitchen preparing breakfast or lunch and rarely interact with visitors. Of course, the degree of social and spatial segregation depends on geographical reasons (i.e., the family lives either within the city or in more rural areas) and cultural backgrounds. Where tribal roots are stronger, with blood ties kept intact, segregation is more likely to happen in a cutting-edge way; where, on the contrary, modern behaviors and traditional values are more in touch – for example, in the urban area of Amman – women can often actively engage in the social interactions, with men consequently exerting a different degree of power over the females.

Useful ethnographic insights come from the participant observations I carried out during my research fieldwork between 2021 and 2022 in Jordan. The first research encounter occurred during a visit in February 2022 to al-Taibah, a small village of Irbid province, in the northwestern area of the country, inhabited by major clans and confederations like that of al-Tall, al-

[187] See Abu-Lughod 1986, Shryock 2004, Na'amneh et al. 2008.

[188] See William C. Young, "Arab Hospitality as a Rite of Incorporation. The Case of the Rashayyda Bedouin of Eastern Sudan", *Anthropos*, Vol.102(1), 2007, pp. 47-69.

Hijazi, and al-Khraiz.[189] The district, which in the last decade has undergone a huge process of development thanks to international fundings,[190] is well known to be one of the most traditional areas of Jordan, with several small villages scattered throughout a vast geographical region mostly impervious to non-locals. I was invited by Muhammad, one of my young informants and gender equality volunteer, to travel there together and personally witness the traditional hospitality of Jordanian tribes in more peripherical areas with respect to the central Amman. Indeed, during the visit to the local tribal family of al-Quraan, the ritual of hospitality unfolded to me in different ways. Indeed, the younger members of the family escorted the guests' car with a group of five people, both males and females (three Jordanians, one Lebanese, and one Italian) from the entrance of the village to the hosts' house, arousing the general interest of the locals. Once at home – a simple and modern white-stoned building extending over three floors – Monther and Abu Mourad, a pair of twins of 50 years old, and the older son of one of them welcomed us into a big leaving room in the foreground, furnished with a rounding couch, a long table, and two traditional smoking pipes, colloquially called *'arghile*. The white Islamic dress *(dishdasha)* worn by the men of the al-Quraan family, the typical Jordanian setting, and the warm welcome we received, perfectly resembled the well-known country's hospitality described by scholars' ethnographic research.[191] Accordingly, the hosts offered water, traditional Arab tea, coffee, and clean towels to wash hands in preparation for the dinner. After a short introductive conversation full of respectful formalities and flatteries *(mujamilāt)* between hosts and guests, we all gathered around the table to start eating. The number of dishes offered by the hosts and the rapidity with which they were served was clearly a sign of the importance that hospitality, generosity, and honorability occupy in the tribal's behavioral code. An interesting element I could observe during the visit to al-Taibah's family was the complete absence of any female member from the social circumstance, both younger and older, during our whole permanence in the house: indeed, as we were friendly chatting with our hosts, women spent the

[189] Mohamed F. Tarawneh and Mahmood Naamneh, "Urbanization and Social Identities in Jordan: The Case of Irbid", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 42(4), 2011, pp. 615-635.

[190] See UN Habitat, Swiss Confederation and Great Irbid Municipality, "Urban Planning & Infrastructure in Migration Contexts, Irbid Spatial Profile – Jordan", online resource. Retrieved from: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/04/220411-final_irbid_profile.pdf [Last Accessed 11/11/2022].

[191] See Shryock and Howell 2001; Shryock 2004;

night preparing the food, never approaching nor welcoming the visitors at any moment, avoiding any encounter or eye-contact if moving from one room to the other, as prescribed by the customs in the presence of male guests. The food was served by the older son, who was also the one appointed for cleaning the table and the room during and after the meeting, helping the guests with any requests, and managing the *'arghile* preparation.

According to Young's study of Sudanese tribes (2007), the double attitude of hospitality on the one side and that of honor and shame-oriented segregation of spaces on the other should not be read as two completely different behaviors but rather addressed as deeply interconnected and meaningful. Indeed, as he suggested, the absence of women during the food distribution does not make them simply remote bystanders in the social performance. Actually, although carried out in a separate space, the food preparation still indicates respect, openness, and generosity of women for their visitors. Similarly, albeit the absence of al-Quraan women from the dinner initially left us with a sense of disinterest and avoidance, it actually can be seen as an act of care, consideration, and devotion to the guests. Furthermore, for tribal culture, the presence of guests represents for families an opportunity and a threat at the same time, as the social experience of receiving visitors holds in itself two separate meanings. On the one side, it is the chance to show off in front of the community and to the guests; simultaneously, it also represents a risk for the family as the in act of welcoming people into the private space actually reputation is at stake.

The second example coming from the field pertains instead to the urban setting of the capital Amman where, as yet highlighted, the tie with tribalism is reduced in favor of modern attitudes in relations, housing habits, and gender roles. There, a few weeks after my arrival in Jordan, I have been welcomed by my neighbor's family for breakfast. In this case, the setting was a modern, cozy ground-floor apartment in Jabal al-Weibdeh, also known as "the expats neighborhood". The host was a family of four composed by the father, Mr. al-Tarazi, his wife, and his two male children. Similar to the Irbid experience, the head of the family was the first person to welcome me into the household, showing me around and interestingly presenting and celebrating the apartment as "part of a UNESCO project for its traditional constitutive elements"[192] where tribal roots and modernism coexisted. The

[192] The author has not been able to prove this statement through any official paper or informants. The cultural heritage of old houses of Amman has been studied within the EAMENA - Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa

difference in the gender division of roles and spaces appeared soon evident, as the wife, after spending the first minutes in the kitchen preparing the food, immediately joined us in the living room to eat and conversate, not wearing traditional Islamic *ḥijāb* nor limiting herself in the social interaction. The father mostly guided the conversation, highly interested in my European background and the reason behind the choice to spend time in Jordan for academic research. The interchangeability of roles within the couple was clear in that the father not only behaved as the head of the family – guiding and instructing – but also supported the wife in serving the food, helping the guest, and cleaning. The image in return was that of a modern translation of traditional values of hosting and welcoming, in which the space is at the service of all the family, and the gender roles – despite undoubtedly being defined by women's relation to the kitchen and the food preparation and men's to the public performance – appear less demarcated than they are in the traditional context. The wife indeed proceeded to talk with me about her career as a teacher in an elementary school, as well as her fruitful studies at the university of Amman. In this sense, as Hughes (2021) notes,[193] the process of modernization undoubtedly changed also the conceptualization behind the idea of "family" – which is not neutral – and what it comes to represent: indeed, the socio-economic transformations introduced by modernity fostered the transition from the traditional *ʿāʾila* (the relational mode of family based on kinship) to that of *ʾusra* (nuclear family). This social shift became crucial in supporting new enforcements around family law (divorce, marriage, child custody) and, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was highly encouraged by the Islamic political parties on the field, interested in challenging and questioning tribalism as a social binding force. In this context, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan probably represents a *unicum*, given – as previously suggested – the internal distribution and coexistence of different social groups, first and foremost, the numerous tribes who keep organizing themselves around horizontal kinships. Here, the struggle between tradition and modernity, *ʿāʾila* and *ʾusra*, is far more intricated and foggy than elsewhere.

(EAMENA) project, with the creation of a body of data that can be used by national and international heritage professionals to target the sites most in danger. For more informations, see: Shatha Mubaideen, Dana Salameen & Rudaina Al Momani, "Using the EAMENA database to document modern heritage: the Amman Heritage Houses, Jordan, case study", Levant, Vol.53(3), 2021, pp. 302-314.

[193] Geoffrey F. Hughes, *Kinship, Islam, and the Politics of Marriage in Jordan Affection and Mercy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2021.

## 3.1.2. Transforming boys into men: gender expectations and socialization rituals

*Outside, men could compromise themselves with the new order of things as much as they wished. But, once he was at home, the Arab man rediscovered an atmosphere steeped in the past, one in which yesterday was an eternal beginning.*

A. Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 227.

For the immensely vast Muslim world, the traditional Arab-Muslim family represents a complex social unity organized around hierarchies, regulated by patriarchal values, and based upon vertical and horizontal relationships to be protected and preserved by the threats of the external world and time. Within the familiar nucleus, the central authority is that of the father, the head of the family, who generally holds financial power. Indeed, the well-being and subsistence of the group depend upon him, to whom everybody owes obedience and who manages the internal social unit according to age and gender paradigms: the younger are subjected to the older, the women to the men. Within the group, the order and functioning are guaranteed by the regular administration of the internal, private space and its distinction from the external, public one[194] (horizontal hierarchy). In such a context of strict separation between rights and duties, inside and outside, Muslim women are first subjected to the paternal authority (*wilāya*), and later to the marital one (*'iṣma*), formally indicating the transition "from one type of submission to another".[195] Nevertheless, with age, they can achieve a different status, having more direct responsibilities towards the employment of patriarchal dynamics. It is indeed in this context that the first phase of the child's socialization, namely childhood, begins: during this period, the mother holds what can be defined as "temporary" power, lasting from birth to the first seven or nine years, having a crucial role in the education and development of the child with whom she may develop a relationship based on care, closeness and affection.[196] Concerning the father instead, the masculine

[194] See Ayse Saracçil, *Il Maschio Camaleonte: Strutture Patriarcali nell'Impero Ottomano e nella Turchia moderna*, Mondadori, Milano 2001.
[195] Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, English translation by Alan Sheridan, Saqi Books, London 2012, p. 491.
[196] See Andrea B. Rugh, *Family in Contemporary Egypt,* The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1985, pp. 305.

identity-building process of the Arab-Islamic context – in its cultural connotation – is deeply rooted in the concept of submission to God's will, as exemplified by the Bible's narration of Abraham and Isaac.[197] In Middle Eastern society indeed, the son owes total obedience to the father just as this shows complete submission to God, thus realizing the divine project on earth through procreation. In turn within the institution of a new family, the relationship father-son will be based upon respect and obedience, with little if no space for tenderness and emotions. This means that, in the first phase of socialization, the child usually develops a stronger emotional bond with the mother, the source of every positive emotion, maintaining more distance from the other parent, according to what Bouhdiba defines as "an impenetrable wall between the child and his father".[198] This authority relationship is visible at all societal levels and it binds not only the parents,

> [..] but also teacher to pupil, master to disciple, employer to employee, ruler to ruled, the dead to the living and God to man. It is not only the father who is castrating; society as a whole emasculates. However, in the midst of this universal emasculation there is one haven: the mother.[199]

As he described, the "emasculation" of society reveals also the resistance to the patriarchate operated by the mother by means of her children's bond. Young boys in particular, in the attempt to challenge and flout the patriarchal authority, become secret allies of the mother, reporting for example pieces of information about the father's public life, carrying secret stuff into the domestic space, and – most importantly – becoming, in their mother's mind, the financial and emotional providers of her future. Despite this prolonged uterine relation, Arab-Muslim society centers around the strict division of the masculine universe from the feminine, plotting this violent separation with different tools ascribable both to culture and religion. It is indeed at the end of childhood that young boys, considered ready to leave the warm maternal environment, the figurative womb where they lived until

[197] See Dalia Cohen-Mor, *Fathers and Sons in the Arab Middle East,* Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2013.
[198] A. Bouhdiba, *Sexuality…*, p. 370.
[199] Ibid., p. 371.

that moment, finally enter the masculine world, with its controversies and distinctive traits, its social spaces and performative duties, under the guidance of the father, the uncles, and the male kin group. This emancipative act is generally prepared by fundamental rituals, like the exclusion from the female *hammam*, and – most importantly – the young boys' circumcision *(khitān)*. This customary practice, considered by Islam as a highly recommended action (*mustaḥabb*)[200] is common both to Islam and Hebraism, but if in Judaic tradition it holds a sacrificial value, for Islamic religion it actually represents a crucial act of purification *(ṭahāra)* from both soul and body's pollution. As Bouhdiba well explains:

> [..] purifying oneself from pollution is a technique, a pleasure, an art, a practice – and, sometimes, an obsession. *Ṭahāra* is that which gives man back his original status. It is a total, solemn act [..] *ṭahāra* is essentially magico-religious.[201]

The Islamic jurisprudence *(fiqh)*, strictly defines the boundaries around which man's purity must be achieved. All aspects of everyday life which may determine impurity, contamination, and dirtiness for the soul and the body are indeed described and absolved through religious prescriptions, all explained by the *fātāwā hindiyya* – a *sharī'a* corpus of regulations from 17th century.[202] In this context of transition from the feminine universe, represented by the prolonged uterine relation, to the masculine one, encompassed by the duties and responsibilities towards the family and the father, the man evolves and develops an altered, mythical image of his masculinity, with the passage from its pure biological meaning, the *dhukūriyya,* to the gender role performed in society, known as *rujūla*. According to this model, this hyperbolic representation of masculinity feeds itself with great attention to physical appearance, what Bouhdiba (2012) also calls a form of "Don Juanism" in disguise, creating constant erotic anxiety around finding a worthy mother substitute. The mother and her relationship with the son continue to be predominant during life, thus becoming the

[200] Islam classifies human actions according to five categories (al-*aḥkām al-khamsa*): mandatory (*farḍ* or *wāğib*); recommended (*mandūb* or *mustaḥabb*); permitted (*jāi'z* or *mubāḥ*); discouraged (*makrūh*); forbidden (*ḥarām*).
[201] A. Boudhiba, *Sexuality…*, op. cit., 50.
[202] See *al-Fātāwā al-Hindiyya*, ed. Bulaq, 1310h., 6 Vols.

horizon men aspire to, a fantasy they should be freed of in order to reach emotional maturity. Conversely, during the same phase, young girls continue to be socialized by their mother and the other women of the family, in preparation for marriage and the consequent creation of a new family, in a relationship of fear and obedience to the father. The Arabic language uses the term *unūtha* to describe both the biological female attribution and womanhood, namely the women's gender role, giving it the meaning of femininity and muliebrity. Hence, it underlies the absence of difference between the idea of the body and that of gender, the biology of sex, and the role played by women in society, which is generally seen as passive and subordinated with respect to the active and dominating masculine. Only old women, over time, may find a space of emancipation, as they carry out a fundamental role in the lives of their sons.

Ultimately, with adulthood, marriage is the final and crucial ritual for the identity construction of Arab-Muslim men and women, considered by Islam as the only constraint within which the sexual act is legitimate and lawful.[203] As with circumcision, marriage as well symbolizes a ritual loss (in the first case the man loses the foreskin; the woman instead loses her virginity during the first nuptial night, epitomized by the blood stain on the bed) and a new beginning for both the spouses. In this sense, marriage and circumcision should not be considered as distinct events, but more as two related moments within the unitary lifetime of the individuals: circumcision is the promise and the guarantee of a fulfilling marital life, which in turn corresponds to the future hope of having as much male offspring as possible to continue the family lineage. Through the legitimation of procreation and sexual act within the sole wedlock, the patriarchal culture attaches to the woman's defloration a tremendous social and public significance, as it is considered a direct testimony of both the bride's virginity and the groom's virility in from of their families and communities. In light of this, the woman who reaches the first night of marriage with her hymen intact is actually confirming the honor of her husband – and consequently that of the family. Furthermore, marriage social weight is not limited solely to the man-woman relationship but actually is determinant for the future economic and relational agreements between the families involved, who through the union of two of its members formally

[203] The Holy Qur'ān punishes with fustigation the act of fornication outside marriage (*zinā*): "*As for female and male fornicators, give each of them one hundred lashes,1 and do not let pity for them make you lenient in ˹enforcing˺ the law of Allah, if you ˹truly˺ believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a number of believers witness their punishment*" (Surat al-Nūr, 24:2).

initiate also a financial alliance. The marital institution represents the peak of the emancipatory movement of the individual also from a practical perspective, as through the housing change after marriage, they physically abandon the family house where they stayed until that moment and actually take a giant leap into adulthood, as also exemplified by the adding of the *kunīa* "Abū" and "Umm".[204]

It Is through these conditions that the road for the familial hierarchy is laid, a socio-historic heritage handed down from one generation to the other, from father to son, mother to daughter, within a never-ending vicious cycle. Negative feelings like fear, competition, and emotional distance actually embed the contradictory nature of intra-familial relationships in the Arab-Muslim world, according to which individuals, forced to fully accomplish the duties of their gender roles since childhood, suffer at different degrees and in different ways the same constrictions: for men, these translate into the need to always give back a hetero-normative and macho image of their masculinity, made of authority, physical strength, economic provision and, often, violence; similarly, women are obliged to live their sexuality as a burden, as a heavy responsibility to be preserved and protected, in the constant attempt to avoid any behavior which could dishonor them, their family and their community. This suffocating structure is strengthened, supported, and consolidated by different actors, from Islam (and in particular, by its political branch represented by the Muslim Brotherhood party), by the Kingdom's official institutions (regime, parliament, administrative bureaus, economic and military structures) and the socio-cultural environment as well (tribalism and customary law), who in turn have used the religious dictates and the sexual repression to guarantee that the weak Arab-Muslim structure would not collapse. Nevertheless, as Hughes (2021) notes, one should not confuse traditional structure with immobility: modernity indeed has a role in shaping and re-building social and gender dynamics, putting men and women in front of the double standard of fitting the model prescribed by traditional society while adapting to rapidly changing economic and social conditions.

[204] *Kunīa* represents an honorific prefix, a sign of respect, as the father or mother of someone, usually accorded to married persons. When pronouncing the full name, the *kunīa* precedes the personal name (i.e., Abū Hasan/Umm Hasan).

## 3.1.3. *Sharaf* and *ʿirḍ*: honor and reputation within Jordanian neighborhoods

*"Folks in our neighborhood love a good story to chew on"*
The Alleys, 2021

In August 2021, the Jordanian movie "The Alleys" *(al-hāra)*[205] by director Bāssel Ghandūr was screened for the first time at the International Film Festival of Locarno, Switzerland. Months later, the movie reached the Middle Eastern and North African countries, fascinating their audience with a cutting-edge, daring, and at times raw portrayal of what is like to live and experience a traditional Jordanian suburb, where the labyrinthine lanes and the tall buildings' windows allow a special view on neighbors' existences and private affairs. The movie tells the story of an anonymous character who secretly video records a young unmarried couple, Alī (an unlucky hustler) and Lana (a hairdresser) in an intimate moment, blackmailing the girl's mother and thus triggering an inexorable cascade of violent, honor-related events. As the director Ghandour told me in an interview we held in December 2021, all the different characters "come from real Amman life":[206] the young "promiscuous" couple, the mother Aṣīl – or *ḥājja,* as the old lady is presented – who threatened by the anonymous voyeur, turns to the local gangsters, ʿAbbās and Hanādi, to find the filmer and take revenge. The setting of the film is not trivial, but actually resonates with the common cultural opinion many Jordanians have of what is like to live within the typical space of an Arab-Jordanian neighborhood. Here, the community represents a safety element and a threat at the same time, especially for girls and young couples who, on the one side controlled and "protected" by their families, relatives, and acquaintances living in nearby households, can also be easily spotted and put under threat for their alleged unlawful behaviors. The words of Ghandūr about the role of the *maʿallim*[207] Abbas are in this sense emblematic when he says that "he gives the neighborhood a reputation and the neighborhood gives a reputation back to him".[208]

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[205] The Alleys movie, Bāssel Ghandūr, 2020.
[206] Interview with director Bāssel Ghandūr, Amman (online), 04/12/2021.
[207] The Jordanian word *maʿallim* is a deferential title referred to an old or important man to whom everyone should pay their respect. It comes from the classic Arabic adjective *muʿallim*, translatable as "teacher", "professor" or "mentor".
[208] Interview with Bāssel Ghandūr.

The story narrated by "The Alleys" is interesting and useful in that is able to portray several social elements of contemporary Jordan, in particular, the weight of reputation in society, alimented by the gossiping often entailing gender discrimination within the community. Without hyper-fictionalize these elements, the movie actually transposes on screen the results of research on the field: [209]

> The movie is based on research […] you know, for the most part, these characters are based on some real version or amalgamation of different other characters. When I started researching, I realized these stories are true, whether they are exaggerated, gossiping, about spies, or even the stories that people tell each other… it's in the spirit of the place, it is what people believe, so what's truer? To me, what people believe is just as true as facts on the ground. Because you enter a place that you know nothing about and this is what the collective belief is, so I wanted to reflect that in some ways in the film: gossip, stories, and exaggerations, it's all part of our lives, part of our neighborhoods, and it's a part of how as Arabs and in this [Jordanian] small communities we see ourselves, also across the borders. I think you can look at any Arab community and find some version of this exaggeration, gossiping, and social policing: you go to the suburb and rural town and it's the same, you go to the upper-class, elite it's the same, it's all full of gossiping and social policing in one form or another.[210]

The element of "social policing" cited by Ghandūr is extremely interesting in that it refers to the act of controlling and driving people's opinions and behaviors through the instillation of massive fear about what others would think and how they will react in front of any deviation from what is considered

[209] At the beginning of 2023, a number of conservative MPs accused the film of blasphemous contents. Consequently, they asked for the withdrawal of citizenship for one of the actors who defended the film on social media. Similarly, they requested the Parliament to prosecute Jordan's Royal Film Commission, which helped fund "The Alleys," for supporting a distorted portrayal of the country. See: "Uncensored Thriller 'The Alleys' Draws Conservative Fire in Jordan's Parliament After Dropping on Netflix", Variety, 26/01/2023. Retrieved from: https://variety.com/2023/digital/global/thriller-the-alleys-conservative-fire-jordan-parliament-netflix-1235503003/ [Last Accessed 30/01/2023].

[210] Ibid.

normal and right, with few differences between male and female. In this sense, the reputation of the single individual is every day at stake within the context, forcing people to replicate – more or less consciously – their gender role with constant attention, effectiveness, and adherence to socially shared values. The movie goes further by describing the inevitable intertwining of reputation with modern crucial factors which have usually been dismissed by recent studies on the matter, like copying strategies from periphery economic marginalization, hustling, micro-criminality, and the role new technologies play in fostering honor-related control in highly coercive and conservative areas of Jordan. Here indeed, individuals have always resorted to forms of socialization dating back to the first centuries of settlement in the area, way before the appearance of Islam. Indeed, it is through these atavist structures that men and women follow the ritual pathway that from childhood brings to adulthood, encompassing and epitomizing the full realization of their gender roles as imposed by society, built upon collective principles and values that guide both the moral and the actions, the internal and the external, the mind and the body. Honor is a crucial constitutive element of this structure, considered both an individual and collective virtue to be defended at all costs.

Nowadays, the thick tribal substrate of Jordanian society is made up mainly of Arab Muslims and Orthodox Christians who generally belong to an *ʿashīra* or a *ḥamūla*, claiming their belonging with pride in the eyes of modernity; this makes most of the relations still highly characterized by an extensive network of family ties, customary practices, and traditions that run in parallel with, or sometimes completely overcome, the modern State law, according to a co-existence of powers that – as seen in Chapter one – endures since the beginning of the modern Transjordanian entity. Through this cultural heritage, the defense of honor and reputation crystalized over time into morally accepted and normalized forms of patriarchal control and violence to avoid any attack on family cohesion. Thus, in this context, the value of honor represents the main concern, fundamental in keeping the family's respectability whether in the eyes of the tribes, the village, the neighborhood, or bigger communities.

Linguistically, the Arabic language has a number of different words to describe the concept of honor and related matters, distinguishing in particular between two main typologies: one is the *sharaf*, commonly considered as a synonym of reputation, hospitality, and chivalry with no sexual connotation; in the definition of Abou-Zeid "the Arabic word *sharaf* (honor) comes from a root verb which implies 'highness' both in physical

position and in social standing".[211] On the other side is the *'irḍ*, the family honor, fully dependent on the woman's moral conduct. Differently from *sharaf* – which is strictly related to the personal behavior – the *'irḍ* is a possession to be protected and maintained through a collective endeavor on the part of the male subjects of the family. The role and importance of collectivity are in part related to the pre-modern tribes' social organization, as in the lack of a central authority and structural power, mutual trust and responsibility among tribesmen represented the only useful tool to govern a large number of people scattered throughout such a vast and mostly desertic region. With time, *'irḍ* came to be the object of a spasmodic control of female integrity and an obsession for chastity, in the attempt to prevent any action against the unwritten behavioral code shared and enforced by tribes and communities. In this sense, if the *sharaf* can be augmented or diminished by each family member's actions (for example, through the fulfilling of duties towards guests), the *'irḍ* can only be preserved or lost through dishonorable behavior on the part of the woman. Interestingly, the woman doesn't actually ameliorate her status by being deferential to the traditional moral code, nor by staying a virgin until marriage and not even by perfectly meeting her duties as mother and wife; she can only lose her *'irḍ* by immoral conduct, thus triggering an escalation of shame and revenge within her family.

As Abou-Zeid (1966) pointed out, there is a strict distinction between a less impacting kind of shame, the *'ayb*, and another one, way more crucial to keep the family's respectability intact, the *'ār*. In the case of *'ayb*, this particular typology of shame "only influences and shames the doer of the deed"[212] and may come from a woman wearing the wrong dress, not staying aside, or talking too much. Conversely, when *'ār* is induced through what is considered an irreversible act, i.e., adultery (*zinā*) or pregnancy outside marriage,[213] the man may resort to violent acts, including murder, as his own

[211] Ahmed M. Abou-Zeid, "Honour and Shame among the Bedouin of Egypt". In: Jhon Peristiany (Ed.), *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966, p. 245.

[212] Manar Hasan, "The Politics of Honor: Patriarchy, the State and the Murder of Women in the Name of Family Honor", *Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 21(1-2), 2002, pp. 1-37.

[213] Jordanian Law prohibits abortion, but sentences may be mitigated if a girl resort to it to save family's honor after having been raped. Interestingly, in this case, the Penal Code adapts to customary law and not the other way around; see Musawah, "Overview Table on Muslim Family Laws and Practices: Jordan 66th CEDAW Session Geneva", 2017, online. Retrieved from: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/JOR/INT_CEDAW_NGO_JOR_26632_E.pdf [Last Accessed 13/06/2020].

honor and that of the entire family are affected. This differentiation actually says little about the burden of honor for Middle Eastern women, who since childhood are immediately introduced to the concept and forced to behave accordingly. According to Hasan "it is difficult to view the two types of shame as totally separate. […] an act committed by a woman may lead to *'ayb* within a specific group or a specific place, but not necessarily in another".[214] A description of shame comes through the words of Jūd and Jumān, two young activists of the *HeForShe* movement for gender equality from Amman, whom I interviewed in October 2021. In the first case, Jūd recalled that:

> […] if I'm going to a certain family setting, I know that I'm not going to wear certain things. Some people would say part of it is related to respect, as you would not enter certain places wearing certain things. But I don't believe that's the only reason. It's way deeper than that.[215]

In Jumān experience, shame directly comes from fear, as in her opinion:

> […] people are afraid of each other because they are afraid of each other's judgment. When someone [a man] has a girl, that means this is a mission for him to raise her in the right way, what's right for others. She will save the family's honor.[216]

As much as it sounds contradictory, the concepts of "right" and "wrong" are actually defined from the outside world, and not from the internal dominion of the family's household. In her analysis of the Ottoman patriarchal system, Saracçil (2001) explains how the two elements of internal/external dominions of power should not be considered as completely separated but intimately connected. Indeed, the private, internal space of the household, generally entrusted to women, cooperates with the external, patriarchal environment, thus ensuring and guaranteeing that the general order would not be affected or endangered. This also favors and explains the participatory role of women in the patriarchal system. At a first analysis, the

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[214] M. Hasan., *The Politics of Honor…*, p. 5.
[215] Interview with Jūd, young activist of *HeForShe* movement, Kempinski Hotel, Amman, 29/10/2021.
[216] Interview with Jumān, young activist of *HeForShe* movement, Abdali Boulevard, Amman, 24/11/2021.

different ways through which honor can be earned, held, or protected entails the duality of the "honor-shame system" and its practice: men, being able to enrich their honorability through actions, appear to be the active subject within their community, while women – in that they are considered to inherently carry the *'irḍ* weight on their shoulders since birth – are forced to be passive and submissive, to experience the external world in different ways from their male counterpart, and to live the internal household by performing and accomplish their honorable duties.

Arguably, this dualization has much more in itself, and actually reveals the controversial character of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean honor system for both genders: specifically, a man who declines his role as punisher of the female loses respect and may undergo marginalization and discrimination: indeed, if he doesn't accomplish his duty by killing the girl who shamed him and his family, his gender role is inverted and "emasculated", meaning that "he is no longer a man (therefore, castrated, a "bottom", a woman). His performance has suffered a serious failure".[217] Alongside, the woman – despite being relegated to the inactive element in the process – can actually weaken, jeopardize or completely compromise her relatives' lives through her actions. In this sense, it is also interesting to note that the elder woman actually can have a certain degree of responsibility in controlling family members' behaviors; for instance, she makes them strictly comply with the rules of decency, concealment *(mastūra),* and respect as prescribed by the customary law, to the point that "when an offense goes unpunished, they may urge the father or brother to do his duty, to see to it that the *'irḍ* is protected".[218] Contrary to the common belief, mothers, aunties, or grandmothers often encourage the act of reparation through honor killing, sitting around the table with their male relatives to plot and define the violent plan, generally premeditated in every single detail. To a certain extent, patriarchal society witnesses a form of compliant femininity, a less-known dominion where power is transferred from men to women, with the ultimate goal of survival of the passive subject with respect to the active, at the expense of their own social group. In this sense, Kandiyoti described this process of negotiation as a form of "bargaining with patriarchy",[219] where women accept

[217] Lama Abu-Odeh, "Honor Killings and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies"*, The American Journal of Comparative Law,* Vol. 58(4), 2010, p. 919.
[218] Peter C. Dodd, "Family Honor and the Forces of Change in Arab Society" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 4(1), 1973, p. 46.
[219] See Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy", *Gender and Society*, Vol. 2(3), 1988, Special Issue to Honor Jessie Bernard, pp. 274-290.

a certain degree of subjugation and prevarication in order to navigate the patriarchal space in which are embedded and from which they cannot free themselves.

Scholars involved in the study of honor and family in the Levantine area[220] generally stressed the role of culture and traditions in fostering and wide spreading the practice of honor killing among the Middle Eastern populations. Indeed, the study of this pervasive and patriarchal dynamic can be conducted by applying several categories of analysis that well adapt to different countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine) all of which share a common cultural background as well as similar religious and historical developments that transcend geographical borders. Generally, when a girl dishonors her family through a behavior considered filthy and impure, it is very hard to restore the family's honor, often unleashing violent acts of revenge within the family or tribes, as usually happens in the case of honor killings or blood feuds. The reasons behind honor-related crimes, and in particular honor-killings, can be of social nature and not necessarily all sexually related: talking in public with strangers, not wearing the appropriate outfit, sharing a male company, or disobeying the parent's will in terms of marriage and companionship may all represent the violation of that unwritten moral code which all women are forced to respect during their lives, maintaining both in the public and in the private a concealed approach. The methodologies of honor-killing roughly follow a fixed scheme: in the first phase, after the dishonor has come to be of public dominion within the community, the girl's family takes charge of the consequences to restore it. It is not unusual that all members gather around a table or plot among themselves in secret for days, sometimes weeks, before moving to action. This is a very important note in the analysis of honor killings, as it highlights the sometimes-premeditated nature of this kind of murder, which may have a determinant role in justice trials against those convicted. Usually, the formal executors are the brothers of the victim, often supported by the uncles and cousins from the father's lineage, with the use of several kinds of weapons, among which the most commons are knives, guns, or poisoning expedients (i.e., poison in the food).[221] The patrilineal root is a crucial element in customary acts, specifically in honor killings, as only those men blood-related with the allegedly sinful woman are entitled to cleanse their shame.

[220] See Peristiany 1966, Dodd 1973, Kressel 1981, Ginat 1982, Abu-Lughod 1986.

[221] Rana Husseini, *Murder in the Name of Honor: The True Story of One Woman's Heroic Fight Against an Unbelievable Crime*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford 2009.

Accordingly, if a woman is found out having sexual intercourse with a man outside marriage (*zinā*), her husband is not entitled to kill her; on the contrary, only the girl's family can claim its right to restore honorability and behave in that direction. If the husband contravenes the custom and kills his wife upon *zinā* he is actually provoking dishonor to her male relatives by acting in their place and overcoming the rule of blood relation; additionally, he will also have to pay his wife's family the blood ransom.

Exactly economic restorations and financial dispositions, especially in the case of low-income working classes, is another element through which honor can be framed and analyzed in contemporary Jordan. In this sense, dishonoring behaviors not only attempt to the family respectability in terms of relational ties but also marginalize it from economic independence reached by each member through market and trade with other clans or tribes. If a girl causes *ʿār* to her family, she actually compromises the whole system of economic support upon which the *ʿāʾila* and the *ḥamūla* are based. Hasan (2002) talks of "economic domination", suggesting how honor killing is just the ultimate and most heinous step of a far more complex system of seclusion, deprivation, and violence. An example in this direction comes from *sharīʿa* law: indeed, despite it recognizes women the right to half of the men's inheritance, in most cases males from the family, in particular the brothers, resort to an agreement that is, only apparently, for her good. According to this practice, the girl refuses her part of the inheritance in exchange for continuative protection from the men of her family once under the marital roof, along with the promise of being paid holiday visits, and her relatives' open doors in case of divorce. By a thorough investigation, it appears clear how, behind the alleged affection and support demonstrated by the brother or the father through this compromise, there is actually the will to 1) operate a theft at the expense of the woman; 2) keep the controlling bond intact even after the girl leaves her paternal house. In the attempt to better their condition, many girls actually incur threats and economic dependence, deprivation of freedom, and eventually violent punishment. Another fundamental element, namely that of space, appears crucial in understating the unfolding of honor killings, which are often favored by either the remoteness and distance from the central areas or by the environment of small suburbs where they take place. It is important to highlight that a dishonorable and impure act that may weaken the family's *ʿirḍ* is considered irreversibly punishable once it becomes of public dominion, traveling among the narrow neighborhood streets and passing through families' walls.

***Figure 2. Views on traditional alleys in the neighborhood of Jabal Amman.***

For those acquainted with typical Jordanian, Middle Eastern neighborhoods and their architectural features, the element of the small alleys and their fast, vicious whistleblowing and gossiping is not to be underestimated. Most of these heinous crimes are unfortunately successful: according to al-Rai News, the first months of 2019 in Jordan witnessed twelve cases of alleged honor killings, in line with the average of fifteen-twenty cases

per year.[222] During the official curfew proclaimed due to Covid19 pandemic, which also worsened the conditions upon which these crimes happen, a tremendously violent and heinous case of honor killing has raised public opinion outrage and media interest in Jordan and abroad, putting the matter on an international stage: on July, 18th 2020, a young girl from Amman, Ahlam, was killed by his father in the middle of a street in a suburb of the capital. After smashing her head with a concrete brick, the man proceeded to drink tea and smoke next to her body, waiting for the police to arrest him. The Ahlam case was crucial because of its public execution nature, with the girl's neighbors and eye-witnesses leaning over the windows and recording the murder after hearing her withering screams. The video footage circulated on main social media like Facebook and YouTube for days, immediately reaching thousands of Jordanians who – shocked by so much mainstreamed cruelty – raised against the government and the institutions for their immobility against perpetrators, asking for a stiffening of the penalties.[223] The wave of protests transformed into a media campaign called "*ṣarkhāt Ahlām*/screams of Ahlam" promoted by the Solidarity Is Global Institute (SIGI/JO), the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), civil society, and in particular youth social media users all over the world. As leaked from the press, the reasons behind this crime turned around an alleged relationship of the girl with a man behind her family's knowledge.

Only a few months before, another similar case was reported in Bethlehem, Palestine: Isrā', a young YouTuber and make-up artist was killed by her brothers after she posted a video of a date with her fiancé. Also in her case, the family had a crucial role in the finalization of the crime: her cousin, after watching the video online, shared it with her brothers and started that unstoppable cascade of heinous events that eventually led to the death of the girl. As with Ahlam's episode, a wave of online rage upsurged, giving birth to the hashtag *#WeAreIsraaGhrayeb* and opening an interesting debate on the very "honor killing" naming choice. Accordingly, for the activists this definition doesn't actually reflects reality, as there is no honor in killing female relatives. In the rare case of a girl able to escape the death sentence

[222] "Raising of killing attack on women in Jordan", *Al-Rai*, 21/07/2021. Retrieved from: https://alrai.com/article/10494494/محليات/ارتفاع-جرائم-القتل-بحق-النساء-في-الأردن-الى-12-جريمة-منذ-بداية-2019 [last accessed 05/12/2022].

[223] "Until When? Honor Killings and Other Domestic Violence Against Women in Jordan", Hiba Balahab, *POMED*, 08/03/2021; retrieved from: https://pomed.org/publication/until-when-honor-killings-and-other-domestic-violence-against-women-in-jordan/?print=print [Last Accessed 9/12/2022].

received by her family, the protection system offered by institutions is often unresponsive or lenient towards perpetrators, with police officers and official authorities lacking the financial, educational, and emotional tools to deal with these kinds of crimes. More often, the authorities resort to old and harmful juridical provisions such as the practice of administrative detention[224] – which will be later discussed in detail – or suggest resorting to so-called Family Reconciliation and Mediation Offices,[225] mainly created with the final aim of reconciling disputes and preventing increasing divorces in the Hashemite Kingdom.

In this sense, the man who kills her sister, cousin, or relative collects in this gesture the final tragedy and the dramatic nature of male gender role in such a patriarchal society, which mobilizes men to women's control while contemporarily crushing them under the weight of their own violent actions. In this sense, Abu Odeh well describes the practice by asserting that "in the Arab culture, a man is that person whose sister's virginity is a social question for him".[226] Thus characterized, honor killing takes the form of a *sui generis* crime, halfway between domestic violence and premeditated murder, supported in the Jordanian context by three pillars of Hashemite governance: the tribal customs *('urf),* deeply rooted in the Jordanian social tissue, according to which *sharaf* and *'irḍ* are values to be protected at all costs; the Jordanian Penal Code, nowadays still retaining reserves in favor of honor-killing perpetrators; the Islamic *sharī'a*, which through modern misogynist reinterpretations by conservatives groups in the country support violent retorsions against allegedly impure women. Far from being three distinct and separated forces in the country, these three major areas of influence actually foster the general complicity and cultural acceptance of honor crimes in the modern and "democratic" Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

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[224] The administrative detention is a powerful tool employed by police and officials to put under arrest anyone believed to be a possible threat to the social order. Accordingly, in 2022 this instrument was used to deliberately shrink the space of civic confrontation by arresting several political activists. See "Jordan: Government Crushes Civic Space Detentions, Interrogations, Harassment and Restrictions on Basic Rights", *Human Right Watch.* Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/18/jordan-government-crushes-civic-space [Last Accessed 26/12/2022]. For a comprehensive understanding of administrative detention, see Jo Baker and Elna Søndergaard, "Conditions for Women in Detention in Jordan: Needs, Vulnerabilities and Good Practices". In: *Dignity Publication Series on Torture and Organized Violence,* Danish Institute Against Torture 2015.

[225] The Family Reconciliation Offices had been established with Law No.6/ 2008 from the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), under the guide of the Jordanian Ministry for Social Development.

[226] L. Abu-Odeh, "Honor Killings and the Construction…", p. 919.

Here Indeed, the 90s' represented for the Jordanian country a temporal *vulnus*, a period of time where – despite the growing reforming impulse from the 'Abd Allāh II's kingdom – few efforts were being done in establishing common initiatives against honor crimes by authorities and civil society. Only from the beginning of the 2000s, the Jordan Times's journalist and women's rights activist Rana Husseini sparked national and international interest in the matter. In 2009, Husseini published her book *Murder in the Name of Honor: The True Story of One Woman's Heroic Fight Against an Unbelievable Crime*: by recalling real stories from the Jordanian context and highlighting for the first time the tremendous increase of systematic violence and violation of women's rights, Husseini started to shed new light on honor-related episodes in the country, pushing the Ministry of Justice, the NGOs, and the whole community to ask for effective changes both in the Penal Code and the public opinion. These changes took some more years to be implemented, as will be discussed in the next section, but actually improved the nature of the discussion and the general perception of honor-related crimes in the country, even if there is still an undeniably long way to go.

## 3.2. Juridical practices around *gbv* and honor crimes

On July, 1st 1992 the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan officially ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which started to be effective in 2007. The Convention was actually adopted with numerous reserves, in particular regarding the art. 16, par. 1 I, (d), and (g), according to which the signatory State "shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations". [227] Interestingly to note, the adoption of CEDAW was not discussed by the Parliament, with a clear attempt to avoid interference against its implementation by the most conservative and religious factions. Behind the choice to maintain some reserves tough stands the will of the Hashemite Kingdom to find a balance between its international ambitions and the

[227] OHCHR, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Retrieved from: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf [Last Accessed 25/10/2022].

preservation of traditional domestic policy, firmly bonded to the conservative powers of the country (in particular, the religious parties and the tribes). An example of this difficult balance comes from the recent fistfight ignited in February 2022 by some political members during a parliamentary session called to make adjustments to the second chapter of the constitution. In particular, the case in question revolved around the decision to change the title to "Rights and duties of Jordanian men and *Jordanian women*", thus adding the feminine *"urdiniyyat"* pronoun to make it more inclusive.[228] Although these numerous contrasting subjects existing within the political sphere of Jordan, several efforts to implement other institutional tools have been made in the last decade, promoting for example the creation of a number of welfare institutions under the rule of the Public Security Directorate (PSD) and the Ministry of Social Development, with the implementation of a National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA). In January 2008, the Jordanian Parliament also enacted the Protection from Family Violence Law No. 6/2008, supporting efforts for reconciliation between family members and mediating disputes in order to preserve family's cohesion. Through the law, Committees for Family Reconciliation were created, along with the Family Protection and Juvenile Department (FPJD),[229] entitled to take precautionary measures as for example barring "the defendant from the family home for up to forty-eight hours if there is no other way to ensure the protection of the victim or a family member".[230]

Despite including important dispositions around women's rights and ending *gbv* within the domestic space, Law No. 6 actually shows several dark zones: in particular, the very definition of violence is limited to the solely domestic one, stating that the law applies only to the members of the family who actually live under the same roof. This element is highly controversial, in that it prevents intervening whenever a case of violence occurs outside the family, as often happens with honor killings. Additionally, there is a complete

[228] See "'Elephant in the Room': Jordanian Women and Equal Rights", *Al-Jazeera*, 18/02/2022. Retrieved from: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/18/elephant-in-the-room-jordanian-womens-struggle-for-rights [Last Accessed 02/01/2023].

[229] First established in Amman 1997 under the name of "Family Protection Department", in 2021 the judiciary body merged with the "Juvenile Department", coming to be the current FPJD. For more informations, see Family and Juvenile Protection Department of Jordan, Official Website. Retrieved from: https://psd.gov.jo/en-us/psd-department-s/family-and-juvenile-protection-department/ [Last Accessed 18/12/2022].

[230] Layth K. Nasrawin, "Protection against Domestic Violence in Jordanian Law and International Conventions", *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 31, 2017, p. 382.

lack of clarity regarding the role of police authorities in cases of violence. In this sense, *gbv* in the Hashemite country appears as a critical issue not addressed appropriately by the official State-sponsored initiatives, which seek to address internal family disputes rather than prosecuting those who commit violent crimes against women. Under such critical circumstances, in 2017, the country witnessed growing requests from civil society and the international community to improve the response to domestic violence of official institutions in the country, supporting and finally obtaining the adoption of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (No.15/2017).

Indeed, according to a survey promoted by the government in 2019, "46% of ever-married women and 69% of all men age 15-49 agree that wife beating is justified"[231] under specific circumstances (for instance, for burning the food, arguing with the husband, going out without telling him, insulting him, disobeying him, having relations with another man, neglecting the children). These data well describe the general attitude toward punitive methods for women, considered necessary or even fair to avoid disorder within the familial space.

On the Jordanian Penal Code front, the country promoted actual efforts toward the amendments and abrogation of some of its most controversial articles concerning *gbv* violence and honor-related crimes. These institutional provisions and the general mobilization of the Jordanian public opinion demonstrated to be paramount in shading new lights over gender equality and *gbv* issues, but are still not enough to finally eradicate pervasive and deeply rooted behaviors, in particular domestic violence, abusive interpersonal relationships, and honor killings. Exactly the kind of crimes that turn around respectability and family reputation are accepted by a large part of public opinion and most conservative, religious factions in the country. Accordingly, the juridical praxis reflects this lenient approach towards *gbv* and honor-related crimes as well: it is for example the case of articles 340 and 98 of the Jordanian Penal Code, often employed by judges and official authorities to rule out the defendants from criminal allegations for honor-related crimes. Indeed, until 2001 the art. 340 represented the preferential tool for the exoneration of defendants accused of honor killing; despite some amendments in 2001 to the original art. 340 (Law No. 16/1960)

[231] Department of Statistics (DOS), "Jordan Population and Family Health Survey 2017-18 (JPFHS)", p. 268. Retrieved from: http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/linked-html/DHS2017_en.pdf [Last Accessed 14/12/2022].

which made the article more gender equal by granting the same opportunities to female defendants, its application kept facilitating to a larger extent the men. The art. 340 emended text (Law No. 86/2001)[232] states that:

> 1. There shall benefit from the mitigating excuse (*'udhr mukhaffaf*) whosoever surprises his wife or one of his ascendants or descendants in the crime of adultery or in an unlawful bed, and kills her immediately or kills the person fornicating with her or kills both of them or attacks her or both of them in an assault that leads to death or wounding or injury or permanent disability.
>
> 2. Shall benefit from the same excuse the wife who surprises her husband in the crime of adultery or in an unlawful bed in the marital home and kills him immediately or kills the woman with whom he is fornicating or kills both of them or attacks him or both of them in an assault that leads to death or wounding or injury or permanent disability.
>
> 3. The right of lawful defense shall not be permitted in regard to the person who benefits from this excuse nor shall the provisions of aggravated circumstances (*ḍurūf mushaddida*) apply.

Similar provisions concerning honor killings still exist or used to exist in different Arab and Western countries even though, as Abu-Odeh explained, all these codes differ around some specific issues. For instance, differently from the Lebanese and Syrian Law, the Jordanian code expands "the defense to situations of the 'unlawful bed'".[233] Additionally, the Jordanian code grants a reduced sentence in case of unlawful bed not only to the husband, son, father, and brother but also "providing exemptions for a bigger list of beneficiaries through its use of the Ottoman expression, wife or

[232] Art. 340 Law No. 16/1960, amended by temporary Law No. 86/2001; see Lynn Welchman, Extracted Provisions from the Penal Codes of Arab states Relevant to 'Crimes of Honour', SOAS University, London 2013. Retrieved from: https://www.soas.ac.uk/honourcrimes/resources/file55421.pdf [Last Accessed: 20/06/2020].

[233] L. Abu-Odeh, "Honor Killings and the Construction…", p. 915.

female unlawful in the case of 'committing adultery'"[234]. Moreover, despite being highly employed to defend honor killing perpetrators, the law never mentions honor. Indeed, its interpretation and use are simply based on the assumption that, in specific cases of employment, someone's *'irḍ* is involved.[235] The very accurate nature of this provision, which requires the elements of immediacy and surprise, as well as its abundance of details, made it difficult for lawyers and judges to apply it in honor killings cases. From 1964 onward, the Jordanian Court of Cassation (JCC), understanding that the majority of these crimes are premeditated by the family for days, started to encourage recourse to the art. 98 of the Penal Code, the formulation of which resulted to be much more generic and thus more easily appliable to honor-related cases. According to the text as amended in 2017[236]

> He who commits a crime in a state of great anger resulting from a wrongful (*ghayr muḥiqq*) and dangerous act on the part of the victim shall be liable to a lesser penalty [in view of extenuating circumstances].[237]

Though its general formulation, nowadays the article continues to benefit mostly men. Before the amendments approved in 2017, the text used the definition of "fit of fury", a formula describing the condition of extreme anger resulting from the dishonor and heavy shock experienced by the defendant; indeed, the majority of those believed to have committed these crimes under that condition of alteration were granted mitigating excuses, often accorded lenient sentences as a maximum of six months imprisonment. After 2017, the new formulation actually made it harder to access the same exculpatory circumstances by replacing the "fit of fury" element with that of "great anger"; nevertheless, the law continued to represent a useful tool for

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[234] Ibid., p. 915.

[235] See Ferris K. Nsheiwat, "Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws", *Penn State International Law Review*, Vol. 23(2), 2004, pp. 251-281; Catherine Warwick, "The Vanishing Victim: Criminal Law and Gender in Jordan", *Law & Society Review,* Vol. 39(2), 2005, pp. 315-348.

[236] "Senate approves changes to Penal Code", *The Jordan Times*, 02/08/2017. Retrieved from: https://jordantimes.com/news/local/senate-approves-changes-penal-code [Last Accessed 16/12/2022].

[237] "Honoring the Killers: Justice Denied for "Honor" Crimes in Jordan", *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 16(1E), 2004. Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/jordan0404.pdf [Last Accessed 21/06/2022].

many judges and lawyers to avoid serious consequences for the defendants. By comparing articles 340 and 98, it is interesting to note how for a long-time honor killing in Jordan was treated by courts and judges on a par with minor crimes, inflicting derisory sentences for those who killed or injured their female relatives, thus fostering the idea of lenient detention and punishment for this kind of crimes. In this sense, for decades the defense of honor and the leniency towards *gbv* in Jordan kept steadfast on an intricate system of legitimation that permeated the juridical institutions, the religious conservative factions of Parliament and institutions, as well as the connivant silence of those involved through all the steps of reporting, intervening, and prosecuting. This happens on the one side because some specific articles of the Penal Code allow a certain degree of tolerance toward the defendants; on the other, it happens also and mostly because some of those judges and other judiciary authorities called issue sentences on these cases continued to adhere to the very same cultural system that produces and accepts them. Additionally, several other factors openly contrasted with the individual's rights protection, especially during the court hearing. Besides the complete discredit of the victim, in many cases, the mere suspicion of unlawful behavior on the part of the woman was more than enough to conduct a virginity or pregnancy test against her will. As an ulterior abuse, the medical results of these tests were not notified to the woman involved in the procedure, but only to her family, thus instigating possible violent retaliations. Under such circumstances, with no guaranteed rights and outraged in their own personal dignity, those women who were lucky enough to run away and avoid further violence generally had few opportunities to save their life on their own or through familial mediation; more often instead, under the Crime Prevention Act of 1954, they used to be relocated to different prisons around the country, waiting for the process under the formal condition of administrative detention, a form of preserving imprisonment aimed at protecting them from possible retaliations.

In this context, the efforts promoted by the Hashemite country since 2001 represent a timid attempt to answer the growing request for equality coming from civil society and Jordanian citizens, even though for many of them these steps forward should be considered nothing more than lip service, and not – as desirable – as a proof of concrete change. In this sense, the steps taken by the Hashemite courts and institutions also reflected the will to preserve the image of the country in the face of their international partners, aligning it with international standards in terms of gender equality, women's

and human rights, judiciary and protection officials' training on violence prevention and on how to handle sensitive cases. This doesn't necessarily mean that the provisions and initiatives implemented by the State are only a façade, but certainly can represent an element of further discussion when dealing with these matters in the country. My interview with former Court of Cassation vice-president, Judge Mohammed al-Tarawneh, was precisely oriented to the role of the Jordanian Parliament and judiciary authorities toward *gbv* prevention and law enhancement. At the time we had our interview, Dr. Tarawneh was – and continues to be – an outstanding figure within the Jordanian scene for *gbv* fight and judiciary modernization, also being the first Arab representative to win a Vital Voices Global Partnerships Award in 2016 for his endeavor towards gender equality.[238] Indeed, Dr. Tarawneh dealt with domestic violence, honor-related crimes, and law implementation in the Hashemite country for almost ten years now, being directly involved in the reforming process and development of gender equality initiatives from within the judiciary institutions. To do so, he collaborated with several NGOs and organizations, like the National Committee for the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law, the Royal Commission on Human Rights, the Scientific Committee of the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, the Jordan Coalition for the International Criminal Court, the board of trustees of the National Council for Family Affairs, the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue. Our interview started with a general consideration of the country's attitude towards honor crimes and *gbv*. Describing the situation of *gbv* and the judiciary sector's efforts in the country, he explained to me that:

> […] as a judge, it's not easy to talk about this issue in an Islamic country like ours; it is not like we could be talking about it in Europe, Canada, or the United States. Here in Jordan, it's very difficult because of the role of tradition in our society. We amended the law, starting from article 340 and another one against women, the art. 98. Traditions and habits of our society play a huge role, it's not easy to change everything like in Europe, especially when it comes to the mentality of MPs. For

[238] "The Judge Dr. Mohammed Al-Tarawneh Wins International Award in the Field of Confrontation Violence Against Women", *Ammon News*, 01/12/2016. Retrieved from: https://en.ammonnews.net/article/33410 [Last Accessed 16/12/2022].

example, I remember that with art. 340 we spent around five years to amend it.[239]

As previously seen, in the last two decades, the Hashemite country proved ready to start a modernization pathway around the very controversial issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, not only through public opinion orientation and *bottom-up* initiatives promoted by NGOs but also with *top-down* strategies implemented by the government, public institutions, and with international actors' support. These efforts tough have encountered a number of reluctances from the most conservative areas of the country, especially from those members of parliaments (MPs) representing religious factions, i.e., the Islamic Action Front (IAF) – the Muslim Brotherhood's political party. According to its members, the adoption of pro-gender equality reforms in the country, especially those concerning personal status like the CEDAW, encourages a reinterpretation of Islamic traditions that undermine marriage stability and family organization in the country, also contrasting that process of transformation from *ʿāʾila* to *ʾusra* – explained at the beginning of this chapter – which is highly encouraged by the religious power in the country. A huge role in the modern debate about personal rights and whether these can be applied equally to men and women turns around marriage and divorce. A useful tool to analyze the matter is Hughes's extensive work on marriage and kinship in Jordan (2017, 2021), which proves crucial in understanding the role these two elements occupy within the Hashemite Islamic society. With what is perhaps one of the most interesting ethnographic contributions of recent years, Hughes puts in conversation Islamist groups and religious traditions with gender equality discourses,[240] suggesting that a new idea of dating, marriage and romantic love is taking over the traditional, tribal model in the country. According to his research findings, not only social media and Western countries are involved in this process of modernization: this transition is fostered by Islamist political activism as well, which through economic support and the organization of

[239] Interview with former Judge of Court of Cassation, Dr. Mohammad al-Tarawneh, Amman, 01/10/2021.

[240] Hughes's research focuses on Chastity Society (*jamaʿiyyat al-ʿafāf al-khayriyya*), an organization linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, which disseminates educational materials about Islam and the family, organizes training courses, and mass weddings. For a comprehensive understanding of the topic, see G. F. Hughes, "The Chastity Society, Disciplining Muslim Men", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2017, pp. 1-18.

mass weddings is setting itself as the prime subject willing to solve the so-called "marriage crisis" (*azmāt al-zawaji*) allegedly investing the country. In other words, by fostering this common idea about a crisis investing young women and men who are financially unable to marry, build their own house, and start their adult life together, the Islamists are actually reinforcing their own narrative in the face of their detractors, first and foremost tribalism and customary family networks. The supposed downfall of marriage is nowadays a widespread idea among many Jordanians – with few if no distinctions of race, class, and gender – who consider it to be a massive threat to Middle Eastern social stability. The crisis belief emerged from the same Dr. Tarawneh words during our interview, particularly when he suggested that most cases of domestic violence actually entail "a problem between husband and wife".[241] Of the same advice was also Saād, a 21 years old friend and activist from Amman I interviewed in October 2021, who frankly supported the idea that the whole question of violence and gender inequalities can be solved by looking at "the divorce situation in Jordan"; in his opinion indeed "the whole failure comes out of that, comes out of the marriage separation between guys and girls".[242] Despite the marriage crisis element being uneasy and still under-researched, it is undoubtedly clear that it currently permeates society at different levels, constituting a preoccupation that insists on family preservation and defense also when dealing with objective cultural bias and patriarchal beliefs as in the case of domestic violence and honor killings treatment under the official jurisdiction.

In this view, another fundamental area of advancement on which the official institutions and bodies managing *gbv* and domestic violence are focusing from the beginning of 2000 is that of authorities' training as well as the permanent education of judges:

> […] also, we deal with new judges' training: for example, now we appoint many young female and male judges, providing them with training on how they can deal with these kinds of cases [honor-related crimes].[243]

According to the official procedure, those entitled to law enforcement in Jordan are the public prosecution, the FPJD, the police

[241] Interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Tarawneh.
[242] Interview with Saād Ghazalī, young activist from Amman, 28/10/2021.
[243] Ibid.

officials, the Public Security Directorate (PSD), and the governors. When a case of *gbv* and domestic violence is reported, the first authority allowed to intervene is the FPJD, which operates under the jurisdiction of the PSD. The *sharī'a* prosecutors provide support to the public prosecution through religious judges (who may conduct personal hearings) or the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Offices that interview people involved in the cases especially when related to personal status matters (divorce, custody) in the attempt, as previously seen, to solve the internal disputes without resorting to official law.[244] Accordingly, a regional training center was established in 2009 within the center of the FPJD, supported by the National Council for Family Affairs as a regional training body for:

1. workers in the Department of Family and Juvenile Protection and Public Security Directorate;
2. workers in the same field in Arab countries;
3. workers in the fields of psychiatry and forensic medicine;
4. workers in relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions;
5. social workers;
6. workers in the judicial field.

As two of its most important goals, the FPJD aims to "develop worker's skills to respond, deal, communicate, intervene, and direct their abilities and capabilities in order to achieve the concept of family security"[245] and "consolidate the principles, values and positive attitudes of the employees to be able to adapt to the emergency situations they face during their work".[246] Similarly, in 2019 the Arab Women's Legal Network (AWLN), in partnership with UN Women, launched the "Legal Framework for Dealing with Cases of

[244] See "Gender Justice Mapping and Assessment: Child-Sensitive and Victim-Centered Approaches and Procedures in the Justice System (Criminal and Personal Status Jurisdictions) for GBV survivors - 2022", Embassy of Switzerland, International Child Rights Institute, Terre des Hommes. Retrieved from: https://www.tdh.ch/sites/default/files/gender_justice_mapping_and_assessment_jordan_final_en_version_2022.pdf [Last Accessed 14/12/2022].

[245] Family and Juvenile Protection Department - Regional Training Center Objectives, retrieved from: https://psd.gov.jo/en-us/psd-department-s/family-and-juvenile-protection-department/regional-training-center/, [Last Accessed 18/12/2022].

[246] Ibid.

Domestic Violence",[247] a comprehensive guideline for the enhancement of the juridical sector handling methodologies of *gbv* cases management. Psychological precautions, interview techniques for first-hand authorities, investigative methodologies, and procedural and linguistic awareness toolkits to deal with gender-sensitive topics are all important aspects of the modernizing goal of the Hashemite Kingdom, strengthening the network of bodies involved throughout all the different procedural steps. For Dr. Tarawneh, the element of training:

> […] it is important because these cases are extremely private, it's an *inside-the-house* matter. It's not easy for you as a judge or a prosecutor to enter the family's house. Additionally, with covid 19, here in Jordan we witnessed how cases of domestic violence against women, wives, and children have increased in number, and this is maybe because for the first time, during Covid19, the whole family stayed a long time in the same house together. The real problem, the most dangerous problems happen inside the house.[248]

As previously seen and further encompassed by the interviewed, the private nature of domestic violence and honor-related crimes constitutes a tricky question both for officials involved in the prosecution and investigations, as well as for those individuals who are victims of the criminal acts, especially women and children. According to Abulelghanam (2014), the general perception around domestic violence, by considering these crimes as a private matter, prevents women from reporting cases to the officials (mostly men), actually encouraging a process by which "a woman that comes forward is revictimized by the abuser, the family and many times the legal system that

[247] UN Women, "الإطار القانوني للتعامل مع قضايا العنف الأسري" Retrieved from: https://jordan.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Jordan/Images/publications/2019/Legal%20Framework%20for%20Dealing%20with%20Domestic%20Violence%20Cases%20%20%20Full%20Design%2081019%202.pdf [Last Accessed 14/12/2022]. The guideline is part of the *Enhancing the Response of the Justice Sector for Cases of Violence Against Women' Program*, implemented by the European Union under the Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (MADAD) and the Governments of France and Japan.

[248] Interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Tarawneh.

is there to protect her".[249] Statistically, only 19% of women aged between 15 and 49 years old who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence have reported it to the police, while 67% kept a total reserve about it.[250] Often, individuals involved in violent episodes actually prefer to resort to internal circles (family, neighborhood, community, tribe) to solve their private matters rather than considering police, judiciary institutions or external help like that granted by the numerous NGOs addressing *gbv* on Jordanian soil. This general approach to domestic violence can be considered as a conservative approach, as further stressed by Judge Tarawneh, who during our interview insisted on the positive change promoted by the Courts and Ministries to provide new and useful tool to deal with the issue:

> There's a lot of secrets [in the family], as I mentioned before, so it's not easy for the judicial officials, the police or even the social worker to understand what happened. We resort to a lot of strategies to enter the private space.[251]

The numerous strategies he refers to are those found in the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act No.15/2017,[252] whose Art. 7 establishes that when the Department of Family Protection receives a complaint related to domestic violence, the following actions shall be taken: 1. Registration of complaint or detailed information; 2. Organize the necessary records for each individual case; 3. Transfer of the victim to the nearest hospital or health center if necessary; 4. Transfer of the victim with his consent to a safe place if necessary and in coordination with the Ministry; 5. Take the necessary measures to protect reporting persons and witnesses in accordance with a system issued for these purposes.[253] By a first reading of the Act, the

[249] Debbie D. Abuelghanam, "Domestic Violence Services, Training and Funding in Jordan", *Dirasat, Human and Social Sciences*, Vol. 41(1), 2014, p. 285.
[250] Department of Statistics (DOS), "Jordan Population and Family Health Survey 2017-18", p. 264. Retrieved from: http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/linked-html/DHS2017_en.pdf [Last Accessed 14/12/2022].
[251] Interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Tarawneh.
[252] Ministry of Social Development, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Protection from Domestic Violence Act No. 15/2017. Retrieved from: http://www.mosd.gov.jo/ui/arabic/ShowContent.aspx?ContentId=80 [Last Accessed 26/12/2022].
[253] Translation of the author.

provisions contained in the paper appear to be a concrete attempt to deal more effectively with violence cases and its perpetrators in the country. Accordingly, offenders are subjected to different rehabilitative measures, which include performing a public benefit service in a public facility or association or being provided with psychological and social rehabilitation programs or sessions organized by the Ministry or any associations approved for a period of six months.[254] The Act shows the attempt of the judicial sector, social workers, and police officials to discretely enter a space traditionally seen as sacred and inviolable, where even the most heinous crimes are assigned a meaning that escapes the application of modern codes and laws.

The aspiration of the country to be in line with international standards of gender equality and contrasting *gbv* is undeniable, but several factors must be taken into account when analyzing the situation. First of all, the official institutions are still undergoing a process of renovation of their internal infrastructures and representatives which will probably require years to reach a point of formal change. An example of this comes from the police sector: here, the personnel still lack concrete and continuous training on gender and *gbv* related matters. The problem appears visible through the general reluctance of women to report their experiences of violence, also fostered by the under-representation of women within the highly patriarchal security sector.[255] Having more women talking to women when dealing with *gbv* cases would be extremely helpful both from an investigative point of view as well as from an intimate, human perspective. In addition to these considerations, another element of disadvantage for the enactment of gender equality measures in the country comes from the slowness of Parliament when debating law implementation. As explained by my interlocutor, it took almost five years to amend a law concerning incredibly violent crimes such as those of honor killings, as well as many more years passed between the claims of civil society against Art. 308 (which allowed the rapist to marry his victim to avoid conviction) and its abolition from the Jordanian Penal Code.[256] In conclusion, as previously seen, the element of tradition and community-based

[254] Ibid.

[255] Women in Jordan are allowed to work in the security sector since 2002, but are generally assigned to office duties rather than highly operative environment.

[256] The Art. 308 of JPC has been repelled in 2017, putting an end to a controversial debate around its inhumanity that started in the last decade and marking an historic win for all women and civil society activists in Jordan. For a comprehensive understanding of the topic, see: Ibtesam Al-Atiyat, "Repealing Jordan's Rape Article 308", *Confluences Méditerranée*, Vol. 110(3), 2019, pp. 99-111.

belief in women's discipline still represent a stumbling block for any formal advancement. Luckily, in this contest, the young generations, as will be explained in the next chapter, are gaining more and more space within the gender-equality debate in their country, constituting an alternative force within the Jordanian scene and showing that an actual change is possible. The generational perspective and the willingness to provide the country with better conditions for future Jordanians seem implied in Dr. Tarawneh conclusion, as he explained to me that "sometime you deal with this problem not as a judge, but as a father".[257]

### 3.2.1. From Administrative Detention to "Dar Amneh": 1954-2018

The turning point witnessed by the country since 2001 onward with the amendment of some articles of the Jordanian Penal Code (Articles 98, 340 and 308) and a strong condemnation of *gbv* on the part of official institutions – strongly encouraged by *bottom-up* initiatives and NGOs reporting the growing rate of violence against women in the country – was not enough to eradicate the cultural connotation of *gbv* crimes, and in particular of honor crimes, which continue to play a crucial role still nowadays. Within the discourse on violence and counter-violence in the country the penitentiary system is not excluded, but on the contrary, it represents a crucial space where the lives of thousands of women are exploited, subjugated, and limited in many ways. Today, the Jordanian penitentiary system comprises eighteen prisons known as Correction and Rehabilitation Centers (CRC) run by the Ministry of Interior, as well as by some centers for temporary detention scattered all over Jordanian soil.[258] These facilities occupy a crucial place in the management and consolidation of that honor system that indirectly support revenge and punitive measures against women. Indeed, according to the Crime Prevention Law of 1954, local governors can detain women without charges or official trial when they are considered at risk of honor killing or violent revenges on the part of their male relatives. Indeed, they are put under administrative detention under the assumption that they would be

[257] Interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Tarawneh.

[258] Rehabilitation and Correction Centers Department, Official Website. Retrieved from: https://psd.gov.jo/en-us/psd-department-s/rehabilitation-and-correction-centers-department/ [Last Accessed 27/12/2022].

protected. In 2013, almost the entire population of female inmates in Jordan was confined within the Juweideh prison, in the south of Amman, with 1596 women – 43% of the total – under a condition of administrative detention, according to research conducted by Penal Reform International.[259] These individuals lived in a general situation of precariousness, subjected to physical and psychological abuses, violation of basic human rights, and not allowed any access to legal protection as instead guaranteed by the legislation. Often the women had to undergo highly degrading admission processes conducted by inadequate staff, with several reported cases of sexual molestation, beating and burnings. In general, girls detained were mostly young mothers with no education, coming from low-income families, who experienced violence within the domestic space and did not live with their partner at the moment of the arrest; the 44% of them referred stigmatization from family and society after the imprisonment, which may also last for many years.[260] The decision to put a woman under administrative detention is taken by the local governor, the only one who is also entitled to free her upon her family's word that she will not undergo any revenge once back home.

As a consequence of this highly degrading provision, many women decided in the last years to resort to arranged weddings to regain their freedom, often helped in this process by local NGOs, while many others – once outside – irremediably exposed themselves to an anticipated death sentence. In order to cope with this clearly inhuman employment of a detention tool, several organizations, both local and international NGOs, started to raise awareness, asking for a different treatment of women in jail, in line with human rights provisions and especially with those against torture, like the Bangkok Rules.[261] Indeed, in 1999 the Jordanian Women's Union (JWU) established the first center for women victims of violence, followed in 2007 by the Dar al-Wifāq, a shelter house for victims of abuse or domestic violence and their children. Nevertheless, still today there are numerous

[259] Penal Reform International, *Who Are Women Prisoners? Survey Results from Jordan and Tunisia* 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.penalreform.org/resource/women-prisoners-survey-results-jordan-tunisia/ [Last Accessed 24/05/2020].

[260] On average, women spend around thirteen years in the prison according to PRI research.

[261] The UN Bangkok Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders are a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2010 in order to raise the standards of female offenders and prisoners' needs. See https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Bangkok_Rules_ENG_22032015.pdf [Last Accessed 26/12/2022].

difficulties to relocate women from jail to shelters, both because of restrictive bureaucracy toward NGOs working in the field, as well as because of the general social environment, which as previously seen still stigmatizes those who experienced detention or are currently detained.

Since 2013, the growing dissent on the part of civil society against administrative detention, the precarious conditions of prisons in the country, and more broadly the government approach towards *gbv* led to the opening of the Um al-Lulu detention center, also with the final aim to re-collocate a number of women from overcrowded Juweidah: in this case as well, despite the structure being run entirely by female personnel, life conditions provided within it do not consent to call it an adequate safe place for its inmates. For instance, in Um al-Lulu, women do not dispose of a nursery, with medical personnel composed solely of male doctors coming from the men's prison; additionally, the center is located in a remote area, unequipped with any library, nursery, or recreational room. The example of Um al-Lulu is interesting in that "while it may have been opened to reduce overcrowding, in its current form it constitutes a clear backwards step".[262] All these aspects confirm to what extent the employment of administrative detention completely lacks any rehabilitative purpose, resulting instead in a highly discriminating tool insofar as, instead of providing women with concrete benefits, consider them as a crucial part of the problem.

In this context of highly coercive policies for women detained and lack of clear data regarding the law and the penal facilities scattered throughout the country, the numerous women's rights organizations present on Jordanian soil – such as the Jordanian National Commission for Women, Mizan for Law, Solidarity is Global Institute-Jordan, and the Jordanian Women's Union - started to harshly condemn the government and the administrative detention practice in particular, reporting the precariousness of inmate's condition within the prisons and asking for the introduction of protective measures more in line with the international treaties and agreements around human's rights, the CEDAW and the Bangkok Rules in particular. Despite still representing only the first step towards a concrete amelioration of the penitentiary system in the country, a significative change occurred in July 2018, when the Dar Amneh (Safe House) was formally established, a shelter house for women who experienced threats and violence within their home and are at concrete risk of being victims of honor-killings

[262] J. Baker and E. Søndergaard, "Conditions for Women in Detention in Jordan...", p. 28.

by their relatives. Inaugurated in the presence of the former Minister for Social Development, Hala Lattouf (1965 - ), Dar Amneh is a significative example of protection in that it can be considered a safe space in each of its aspects: its director indeed is a woman, the young Raghda al-Azzeh, who manages the shelter in an environment that resembles a normal family building rather than a proper prison. Within it, women can live their condition more peacefully, having access to recreational rooms and activities, psychological and legal aid, and reintegration programs within society. Located right outside Amman, in the first half of 2019 Dar Amneh guested around 75 women, 14 of whom voluntarily left the house in December of that same year. Although these very positive numbers, the local governor initially forbade at least thirty women to relocate there from Juweidah.[263] Reports and internal research conducted by the NGOs within the CRCs in Jordan make it clear how, if on the one side through the Dar Amneh establishment the Jordanian government accepted to take a significant role in the reform process of its penitentiary system, on the other, it continues to operate an arbitrary and coercive power over women, with the clear aim to discipline them and convince them to come back home under their male relatives' guardianship. In this sense, despite the beneficial contribution of Dar Amneh being clear, the administrative detention practice continues to be misused and employed nowadays in different situations. The objective difficulty in eradicating the problem comes from the unresponsiveness of the whole legal system. This indeed expresses the will to reiterate old, traditional forms of male guardianship, whose subject are not only the male relatives of the victims, but also the physicians enrolled within the penitentiary facilities who operated the virginity test, the prison personnel, the judges called to issue the judgments during trials. More recently, the government attempted to reform its approach to detention by implementing alternative tools, for example, the employment of modern equipment and training sessions for their guarding personnel, with the intention of adopting "the philosophy of rehabilitation and correction instead of punishment in old work methods".[264]

[263] Amnesty International Report, *Imprisoned Women, Stolen Children Policing Sex, Marriage and Pregnancy in Jordan,* 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1608312019ENGLISH.PDF [Last Accessed 25/06/2022].

[264] Rehabilitation and Correction Centers Department.

## 3.3. Feeding or challenging the hegemonic discourse? Jordan between securitization and online activism

Similar to the various regional experiences of activism in the MENA area, the question of gender equality has been employed by different subjects and with different degrees of participation also in Jordan, with the final aim of promoting transformation and alignment of the Hashemite Kingdom with the international community, especially in terms of women's rights and empowerment. Among those committed to this modernization project are also the monarchy and some of its main representatives, who in many cases directly collaborate with local and global organizations to promote initiatives and widespread the message of gender equality around the country from a privileged position, supporting the cause of Jordan as a model country in the region. One of the main representatives of this approach is Her Majesty, Queen Rania al-'Abd Allāh II (1970 - ), generally perceived in the country as both an element of power and a threat; indeed, although from one side she is particularly supported and appreciated by young generations for her efforts in promoting gender empowerment discourse in Jordan, on the other, she is frequently contested by her detractors for her Palestinian origin, especially for fear that she will favor interests at the expenses of the local ones.[265] Nevertheless, is undoubtedly true that in the Jordanian patriarchal panorama, Queen Rania can be seen as the element of change from within the regime structure. Nevertheless, the nature of this commitment to change should be further investigated. Indeed, from there she significantly advocates for youth and women empowerment, helping on the one side female organizations and small communities of women scattered throughout the country to raise their heads and proudly stand for their rights, while on the other she lobbies for women's rights with official institutions, international organizations, and politicians. Her pivotal role and the affection her figure generate in a large part of Jordanians, especially youths and activists, are undeniable. As some of my interlocutors highlighted, "in all times there was no queen whit such visual appearance in media or in television. This is a positive change and

[265] Queen Rania was born and raised in Kuwait, but her parents are originally from Ṭūlkarm and Nāblus. As seen in the first chapter, the identity discourse in Jordan is highly debated and contested in particular among Jordanian, Bedouin, and Palestinian groups.

maybe this is the beginning for a better future",[266] stressing the fact that they (the royal family) "always talk about gender equality, especially Queen Rania. You can't believe how much she supports gender equality".[267] As Dr. Tarawneh also recalled at the beginning of our interview:

> Her Majesty changed a lot in terms of society's perception of these issues [gender equality matters] here in Jordan. Fourteen years ago, I started working closely with her for two years. I remember working with her and the Jordanian National Center for Women, she encouraged us immensely.[268]

Highly present on all main social media, she is often portrayed wearing traditional Palestinian embroider clothes, while posing with old and young women within their local markets and stores. On her Instagram page[269] is easy to note highlighted "folders" titled "Education", "Advocacy" and "Empowerment", where footage and videos of her advocacy and institutional visits to women and young girls are collected. In her genuine effort, the Queen – alongside other members of the Palace, like Prince 'Ali bin al-Ḥusayn (1975 - ) or Princess Basma bint al-Ḥusayn (1951 - ) – gave birth to several initiatives, mostly through her Queen Rania Foundation, under which many other projects are developed. Among these, one of the most prominent is that of the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), established in 2001 and chaired by Her Majesty. The NCFA has the mandate to coordinate governmental and non-governmental agencies operating in human and social development and family affairs, with the final aim of contributing to the formulation "of policies and support efforts that enhance the status of the Jordanian family, optimize its role, and preserve its values and heritage".[270] As previously seen, the concept of family and its preservation is highly

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[266] Interview with Jumān, young activist of *HeForShe* movement, Amman 24/11/2022.

[267] Interview with Muhammad, young activist of *HeForShe* movement, Amman 29/10/2022.

[268] Interview with Dr. Mohammad al-Tarawneh.

[269] See Queen Rania Official Instagram Page. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/queenrania/ [Last Accessed 22/12/2022].

[270] National Council for Family Affairs, Official Website. Retrieved from: https://www.queenrania.jo/en/initiatives/national-council-family-affairs [Last Accessed 20/12/2022].

stressed at various societal levels, from individuals, religious factions, and royals as well. In this sense, the words pronounced by Her Majesty at the *HeForShe* IMPACT Summit in New York in 2018 are in line with this conceptualization of the family unit, when she argued that "Arab women are digging deep to hold their families together in the most testing conditions",[271] stressing once more the idea that women still represent the pillar of family's union and resistance at difficult times. In line with this view, in 2016 Queen Rania supported the creation of a "National Framework for Family Protection Against Violence", an additional tool that revealed useful in particular during Covid19 lockdown, when – according to official statistics by the FPD – Jordan registered a 33% increase of domestic violence. The numerous initiatives implemented by the Queen, as well as her public apparitions, are all part of a broader project initially sparked in 2000, when His Majesty the King 'Abd Allāh II embarked on a process of modernization of the country that affected not only foreign policy in terms of market and geopolitical relations, but domestic directions as well, in particular political participation, gender equality, and sustainability matters.

In this context, the approach of King 'Abd Allāh II's reign and similarly followed by his family, who effectively embarked on a form of online activism on different subject, is ascribable to what Culcasi defines as a form of "warm nationalism". Drawing upon Billig's concepts of banal nationalism,[272] according to which the idea of the nation is produced and reproduced through ideological habits carried out by its citizens "in a banally mundane way", [273] she suggests that, for the specific case of Jordan, nationalism is more something that "blurs hot geopolitics, palpable identity politics, and common symbols of the nation".[274] With this conceptualization in mind, the subjects of gender equality, women's rights, and female empowerment can all be read within the framework of nationalist discourse production through images, where meanings and values are constantly produced and reproduced in order to serve the cause of the regime's legitimacy. These elements can be both physical or virtual, as they may appear in form of panels and posters around the streets of Jordan or as pictures and posts on social media. In both cases, they strongly contribute to creating

[271] Queen Rania speech at the *HeForShe* IMPACT Summit in New York in 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNwAjUBjcrc [Last Accessed 22/12/2022].
[272] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, Sage Publication, London 1995.
[273] Ibid., p. 6.
[274] Ibid., p. 10.

an image of stability, safety, and unity under a common ideal that overcomes any identitarian specificity or crisis.

This tendency can also be discussed as the ability, on the part of the royal family, to occupy an interposition in the socio-political sphere of the country when it comes to very sensitive issues (especially concerning family laws, women and gender, or minorities rights) thus supporting its permanence and steadiness in the face of rapid changes. In this sense, while walking around the cities of Jordan it is not unusual to encounter giant posters, panels, drawings, graffiti, or mosaics of the royal lineage in the figures of late King Ḥusayn, current King ʻAbd Allāh II, and crown Prince Ḥusayn Ibn ʻAbd Allāh (1994 – ).

***Figure 3. Panels picturing King ʻAbd Allāh II and his son, the Crown Prince Ḥusayn Ibn ʻAbd Allāh next to a burger store on al-Rainbow Street, Amman.***

This imagery supply appears with extreme frequency everywhere, whether in suburbs or cities, within the *al-bādiya* or modern malls, hanging on highway bridges and market walls. Stemming from the idea of "warm" defined by Culcasi (2016), these visual elements can be considered concrete reminders of fatherhood, guardianship, and financial support coming in a reassuring and soothing way from the prominent male figures of the nation. These, alongside other visual elements such as maps and official logos, have been employed consistently since the early 2000 "to re-define the relationship between Jordanian citizens and the State",[275] bargaining the population

[275] K. Culcasi, "Warm Nationalism…", p. 7.

approval with a dominant sense of reliance, security, and protection from outside threats. Accordingly, I argue that their contribution is far more than just geo-political in a strict sense, but also, and most importantly oriented toward a specific gender configuration and expression that cannot be easily and immediately framed as hypermasculine or dictatorial, but rather as a mild form of blatant heteronormativity that permeates the everyday Jordanian gendered experience.

***Figure 4. Small flags of King 'Abd Allāh II hanging on al-Rainbow Street, Amman.***

While for some of my interlocutors the images and representation of the royal family "it's just a fake"[276] useful to sweep under the carpet the numerous challenges the country is experiencing nowadays, for some others they do not represent any form of domination or power, but rather of reassurance; in the words of Muhammad, one of my informants and young gender equality activist in Amman, the royals' iconic practice simply represent the statement that "he is a king, he's a president, he's someone who represents our country",[277] to which he added, "I would like to have someone who's that strong as a ruler".[278] The constant celebration and display of the King and the male lineage are not seen as "something that plays with the role of masculinity",[279] but more as the proof that the father of the nation "is

[276] Interview with an anonymous informant and activist, Amman, 11/10/2021.
[277] Interview with Muhammad, young activist of *HeForShe* movement, Madaba, 22/10/2021.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.

showing power not only by sitting on the chair, not only by mansplaining, but also by taking concrete actions".[280] Whether these actions are real or simply a "momentum", it does not really matter: they work, and they are enough to push Jordanian society, and in some cases also some activists for gender equality, both males and females, to recognize in the display of uniforms, weapons and military honors not so much an element of prevarication and hegemony, but more a sense of protection and belonging that transcends the very meaning they entail.

At a close look, these images combine together elements of tradition with those of modernity, a coexistence of different realities also visible in the inter-generational aspects of the depicted lineage. The male blood-line of royals, while on the one side represents the continuity and the history of the country, on the other also expresses the passage from an old, static model to a new and progressive project Involving the country since the beginning of the Millennium, a legacy to be gathered by the future King, the Crown Prince Ḥusayn. Interestingly to note, the image of this one – both visual and ideal – is voluntarily becoming predominant almost to the level of his father's one, in the clear attempt to prepare the country to the future succession.

***Figure 5. Princess Salma receives her wings from Jordanian Armed Forces, Husseiniya Palace, Amman – October 2020. Photo retrieved from Petra News.***

In this sense, the prince figure is being built on growing public appearances with international heads of State, members of tribes or "his

[280] Ibid.

brothers in arms"[281] from the army. If, on the one side, the elements of tradition and tribal roots are frequently adopted by the social media communication strategy of the prince, often portrayed wearing the traditional *kūfīyya*, on the other modernity, attention for new generations' needs and gender equality occupy a crucial space as well, as visible in his visits to the youth of the Banū Ṣakhr tribe, to a group of civil society volunteers or to the children of 'Azmī al Muftī Refugee Camp, all portrayed on his Instagram page. All these strategically appointed encounters, visits, social media pictures, and mainstreamed images contribute on the one side to inculcating in the Jordanian population the feeling of belonging to the larger Hashemite family, a safe nest from unstable circumstances, while on the other indirectly supporting militarism, corporatism, and obedience.

Accordingly, uniforms, weapons, and military honors are equally celebrated and displayed through the example of another member of the royal family, Her Royal Highness Princess Salma bint 'Abd Allāh (2000 - ), often portrayed in her aviator uniform as the first female pilot of her country. For traditional feminist studies, militarism long represented a crucial subject of investigation, often considered an undeniable mark of masculine hegemony, the most evident environment of differentiation between men and women: under hyper-simplification, while men, strong and violent, conducted wars and campaigns, the helpless and vulnerable women were completely exempted by this exclusively male dominion. In reality, militarism is not something that ends with masculinity but actually embeds femininity in itself as well. This incorporation happens in history by means of linguistic appropriations about femininity and women, stressing for example the idea – employed in many different countries – of "patriotic motherhood" or "liberated woman".[282] In this sense, as Hooks suggests in her essay *Feminism and Militarism: A Comment* (1995), thinking that women, by virtue of their sex, have had – and continue to have – no role in fostering imperialism and other systems of domination, "it is nevertheless risky, for it reinforces the cultural basis of sexism and other forms of groups' oppression".[283] The inclusion of women in the military, initiated with the late King Ḥusayn and then increased under King 'Abd Allāh II, followed a similar transformative

[281] HRH Prince Ḥusayn Official Instagram Page "alhusseinjo". Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/alhusseinjo/ [Last Accessed 19/10/2021].

[282] Cynthia Enloe, Maneuvers, *The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2000, p. 34.

[283] Bell Hooks, "Feminism and Militarism: A Comment", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23(3/4), Rethinking Women's Peace Studies, Fall - Winter, 1995, p. 59.

agenda of many other countries around the world;[284] this choice is extremely interesting as it is a strong case in point of how women came to be not only active subjects of hegemonic power but also passive objects in what I refer to as a process of "war washing" or "militarized feminism". From parading female soldiers, policewomen, and officials during military events or State occasions, to non-military women, soldiers' widows and activists supporting the idea that being in the army is actually a statement of equality, the simplistic view about gender roles and militarism is easily deconstructed by reality. Arguably, Jordan is not excluded by this gendered project, as through its royal members in particular, it actually sustains a subtle militarization of the country, adding bread crumbs of alleged equality to the society's increasing securitization, growing military public presence, street patrols, and weapons employment, considered as given elements of tradition and culture. As well summarized by Enloe, "nowhere is this easy assumption more pervasive than when patriarchy and militarization converge – in the gendering of militarization".[285]

From 2000 onward, the neo-liberal season inaugurated by the King became one of the most contested aspects of its royal mandate, with the old guard formed by tribal groups often criticizing his work and nostalgically recalling the late King Ḥusayn. This transformative approach, which as previously seen is part of a broader attempt aimed at strengthening the role of Jordan within the Middle Eastern arena – and most importantly its relations with Western donors – as well as at handling political domestic challenges (radical Islamism, Palestinian activism), actually entails a quite paradoxical weight. The country indeed is generally seen as a formidable example of democratic stability within the region, strongly differentiated by international political analysis from its fellow countries like Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and others. This general idea around Jordan is actually a long-dated misconception, as at a more accurate look it appears clear that there is a huge gap between social demands and political participation or, as Wiktorowitz highlighted yet in 1999 "between democratic principles and actual reform".[286]

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[284] See "Culture, Gender, and Women in the Military: Implications for International Humanitarian Law Compliance", Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, 2021. Retrieved from: https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Culture_Gender_Women_in_the_Military.pdf [Last Accessed 05/01/2023].

[285] Ibid., p. 33.

[286] Quintan Wiktorowitz, "The Limits of Democracy in the Middle East: The Case of Jordan", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 53(4), 1999, p. 607.

Possible reasons behind the mainstreamed façade Jordan gives back to the international community comes from the ability of the ruling power to stand still and never vacillate at times of domestic and regional crisis, as happened for example after the Amman Hotels' bombing in 2005, during the massive wave of protests of Arab Springs in 2010-2011 and those for bread rising prices in 2018.[287] Missing the opportunity to witness episodes of utmost violence and clashes resembling the severity of those that happened in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, or Tunisia, mainstream media – both local and international – corroborated and actually contributed to the creation and diffusion of an image of the country that doesn't actually coincide with its internal reality: lack of youth political participation, massive unemployment rates, heavy gender inequalities, growing suicide attempts, economic crisis further aggravated by Covid19 pandemic, and coercive laws shrinking the space for NGOs and civil society is the true substrate on which the Hashemite ruling family operates. Paradoxically, it is through this very same substrate that it continues to assure its legitimacy, balancing the periodic risks of revolts of the last years with outstanding public appearances, motivational speeches filled with national identity narrative and references, and a participatory approach to public interest causes both physical and online.

In this sense, although the highly contested nature of his reign, it is undoubtedly true that 'Abd Allāh II had the merit to navigate the country beyond difficult times while simultaneously producing some changes in society through the promotion of controlled waves of reforms and slight openings to citizens requests.[288] Under his rule the new millennium was characterized by the transformation of a small and resourceless peripheric country into a neo-liberal regime where autarchy, at the crossroads with globalization and neo-liberalism, is something only apparently dismissible while actually being extremely predominant, to the extent that it continues to produce "a growing gap between economic elites and political power on the one hand and an impoverished population on the other".[289] A crucial example of that comes from the December 2022 episodes which perhaps represent a turning point in the recent history of protests and dissent in the country.

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[287] "Riots break out in Jordan over bread price hikes", *The New Arab*, 05/02/2018. Retrieved from: https://www.newarab.com/news/riots-break-out-jordan-over-bread-price-hikes [Last Accessed 03/01/2023].

[288] See Chapter 2.

[289] Pénélope Larzillière, *The Jordanian Monarchy Islamic Social Hegemony versus Authoritarian Liberalism?* Draft Paper, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Paris 2008.

Indeed, at the end of the year, several clashes ignited by anger for unsustainable fuel costs and lack of subsidies started in the South of the country. Soon the protests reached all main cities, in particular in Ma'an, Zarqa, Tafileh, and Amman, showing Jordan's real face: security forces and police officers deliberately used the iron fist, charging protesters, using teargas and arresting several supporters and activists. On December, 17th the situation reached a peak in severity, as the Ma'an police chief, Colonel Abdul Razzaq Dalabīh, was killed during protests, to which other three policemen's deaths followed in consequent police raids against his alleged killers. In an attempt to take the situation under control and to firmly reaffirm the position of the Jordanian government and that of the royal family, King 'Abd Allāh II visited Ma'an along with Prince Ḥusayn, affirming that "we will not tolerate violence against our security personnel, who work day and night to protect Jordan and Jordanians".[290] Although this attempt, the recent protests are probably the strongest sign of discontent since 2018, when similar demonstrations started for bread-raised costs, and are definitely showing the fragility behind the last decades' economic and political directions, characterized by flawed fiscal interventions and rampant corruption. Interestingly to note, most of the recent threats and protests shaking the country in the last few years started in the South, notoriously seen as the enclave of royals' loyalists, while being at the same time the area most affected by these issues. This, alongside other small clashes, are a sign that social quiescence rarely translates into a total absence of dissent. The soft security approach inaugurated by 'Abd Allāh actually works within tight margins much likely to be overcome by a large part of the population under worsening economic conditions and livelihood frustrations.

Through this image of nationalist discourse and promotion of values like loyalty, protection, family, and corporatism, also the general will for modernization in the country appears to be at least controversial. In this sense, on the one side, the royal family, the government, and the political élite all demonstrate to be perfectly placed within modernity, using technologies and social media to spread messages of empowerment, gender equality, inclusion, and development; similarly, small openings to reforms and change serve the scope of pleasing everyone, from regime loyalists and conservative parties to

[290] "King extends condolences to family of martyr Dalabeeh", *Jordan News*, 16/12/2022. Retrieved from: https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-109/News/King-extends-condolences-to-family-of-martyr-Dalabeeh-25819 [Last Accessed 02/01/2022].

civil society and tribal groups. In this sense, the privileged tools are the renovated parliamentary elections, [291] thus granting the country a façade of pluralism; on the other, coercive power, corruption, popular dissent arrest and shrinking of civil society's space take the country undoubtedly anchored to a patriarchal model and security-oriented directions, "a climate inhospitable to hopes for increased democratization". [292] Moreover, while continuously chasing internal balance, securitization and militarism actually occupy the most determinant space within the domestic agenda of Jordan; this is particularly visible through the hyper-militarization of everyday spaces – especially in the Capital Amman[293] – a process started with the second *intifāḍa* in 2000 and the hotels' bombing in 2005. As Schwedler (2012) suggests, this growing militarization of the country should not be red

> […] as evidence of the regime's abandonment of the democratization project, but as an integral mechanism for the advancement of a particular kind of liberal reform project.[294]

This specific project is being pursued since early 2000 through a set of democratic tools and reforms, of which nationalist discourses production and militarism are an integral part, taking the forms of military parades (for instance, the June,10th parade for the National Army Day), or campaigns celebrating Jordan and the relation with its citizens ("Jordan First", "We Are All Jordan", and "The March Continues"). [295] In this regard, constantly displaying military forces and police officers is rather a sign of protection of those places that more than others are at the core of neo-liberal reforms and processes, such as international embassies, big malls, and upper-class neighborhoods.

In line with these considerations, despite being undoubtedly peculiar Jordan does not make a difference within the MENA region, but on the contrary suggests going deeper into its accurately built façade in order to

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[291] See C. Ryan and J. Schwedler, "Return to Democratization or New Hybrid Regime? The 2003 Elections in Jordan", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11(2), 2004, pp. 138-151.

[292] C. Ryan, *Inter Arab Alliance, Regime Security and Jordanian Foreign Policy*, University of Florida Press, Gainsville 2009, p. 23.

[293] See J. Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan Geographies of Power and Dissent*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2022.

[294] J. Schwedler, "The Political Geography of Protest in Neoliberal Jordan", *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 21(3), 2012, p. 261.

[295] See Chapter 2.

unveil processes of silencing, banning, and censoring whatever attempt at its historical stability. These aims are not necessarily reached by the means of violence, but more often unfold through coercive bureaucratic apparatus, threatening, harassment, intimidation, and fear. In this context, civil society, local and international NGOs, and young activists in particular, try to resist in a social space more and more limited and constrained, reluctant to accept and sustain values and behaviors no longer perceived as respectful of human rights and aspired democratization. In the next chapter, an account of these political actors will be outlined, describing their attempt at opening discussions and turning upside-down socially constructed patriarchal ideas considered anachronistic ballast for further developments of the Hashemite Kingdom, in a systemic separation from previous generations' habits and beliefs and highly informed by the theoretical legacy of 2010/2011 Arab revolutions.

# Chapter 4. Young *allies*: alternative masculinities and the role of gender equality activism in Jordan

## 4.1. The regional legacy of 2011 Arab Springs in the Middle East

The last decade of the 21st century carried out and consolidated a common perspective about the Middle Eastern and North African region as a place of strong, organized dissent that heavily challenged the old regimes. Accordingly, youth who participated in the 2011 Arab revolts – mostly referred to as "springs" – were revealed to be the training energies of these violent outbursts, often romanticized by media and the international community either as *heroes* or as *victims* of their own contexts. Undoubtedly, methodologies and processes affecting the activism of that moment in the past – predominantly a form of *street activism* – partially differed from that of today. To date, even though regimes' fall resembling those of 2011 is no longer the prevailing reality of the MENA region, a major and violent turmoil is represented by Iran's protests of 2022. There, with a significant degree of urgency, young boys and girls dug out late forms of resistance to challenge the *status quo* and liberate themselves and their country from the religious regime of Ibrāhīm Raīsī (1960 - ), President of the Islamic Republic. Yet we should be aware of the possible return of the *hero/victim* rhetoric enhanced by mainstream and most Western media.

Despite representing a tangible exception in a general panorama characterized by small, usually pacific, and organized dissent, Iran's mass protests are actually a strong reminder of the current regional instability that cannot be ignored. This consideration is further confirmed by other fires set out around the Arab countries in late 2022, like Syria, where four were killed in anti-governmental protests in the city of Sweidah, or Jordan, where in similar circumstances four police officers died after clashes in Ma'an. In both cases, extremely poor living conditions and raising fuel prices have been the wick that ignited the revolts. All these tumultuous events actually show how current regimes' ability to maintain their power is more similar to a walk on tiny glass rather than a clear political direction pursued with efficacy by dictators and governments. The recall of Tunisian martyr Mohamed

Bouazizi[296] or Egypt's April 6 movement[297] is perhaps extreme but not entirely wrong, as these elements showed how flawed these autocratic regimes may be in the face of worsening life conditions and consequent people's anger.

Indeed, by looking more accurately at today's Middle Eastern civil society response, it appears clear how this is actually caught up in a complex geopolitical system characterized by growing competition among Arab states, seeking primacy within the region and control of its peoples' opinions, economies, and resources. To do so, autocratic regimes often take advantage of the growing presence of CSOs (civil society organizations) and international agencies to advance their political structures and show an image of their countries that hardly correspond to their internal realities.[298] A pivotal example in this sense comes from the decision of Egypt to host the United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP27, in Sharm el-Sheikh on November 2022. With no surprise, this event created a major debate within and outside the MENA region, with activists and international observers highlighting the attempt of al-Sisi's government to shift the focus from the systematic violations of human rights in the country.

Within this general context, a first element of continuity between the revolutionary past and today is represented by a constant increase in the youth population of the region, one of the most rapidly growing globally.[299] Here indeed, people aged under 30 constitute 55%, more than half of the population across the whole MENA region, a large part of whom are aged between 15 and 20 years old.[300] This rate can be assumed both as an opportunity and a threat for the Arab states, as in the first case young people actually can provide their countries with significant changes and new perspectives on crucial issues, while on the other subverting their power and creating new spaces for

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[296] On December 16th, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid after police confiscated his vegetables. Mass protests organized by activists and trade unions started in the main areas of the country.

[297] The "April 6 Movement" was a youth-led Egyptian movement promoting protests on January, 25th 2011, in the immediate aftermath of Khaled Said's torture and killing by the police, a young boy reported for alleged use of drugs.

[298] Göran Therborn, "New Masses? Social Bases of Resistance", *New Left Review*, Vol. 85, 2014, pp. 7-16.

[299] See World Bank, World Population Prospects 2022. Retrieved from: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.1564.TO.ZS?locations=ZQ [Last Accessed 04/01/2023].

[300] See "Youth at the Centre of Government Action: A Review of the Middle East and North Africa", OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris 2022. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1787/bcc2dd08-en [Last Accessed 03/01/2023].

activism that regimes' apparatuses would eventually miss or challenge. These young actors who mobilized in the 2010/2011 revolts are still challenging and changing the political scenery of their countries, although following a different methodological basis, organizing in new and differently understandable ways, and promoting newly developed elements of discussion. Among these, the subject of gender equality is undoubtedly predominant within the agenda of numerous activist organizations around the MENA region; alongside democratization, economy, environment, and technological transition, young men and women from all over the region similarly started a fight for laws' reforms to implement women's rights within the national codes, female access to the labor market, empowerment, political representation, and contrasting *gbv*. Initiatives in this sense are present in every country of the region, with different degrees of freedom for activism, but equally thriving for the same final goal. Yet with 2010/2011 protests, and especially after the withdrawal of police and *baltajiyya*[301] forces began, several new subjects started to appear on the public scene in the form of little organized groups of men and women all over the MENA region. It is for instance the case of Basma Movement, an anti-harassment patrolling group created in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution to provide women with protection from public assaults,[302] drastically increasing during the clashes and mass protests. Similarly, the volunteer-based Egyptian initiative HarassMap, created in late 2010, worked on the so-called "bystander effect", supporting "individuals and institutions to stand up to sexual harassment before or when they see it happen".[303] Alongside, many other groups emerged on the Middle Eastern public stage, like Aswāt Nisā' and LET (League of Tunisia Women Voters) in Tunisia, Safe Streets Foundation for Development in Yemen, Kampüs Cadıları (Campus Witches) in Turkey, [304] Taḥrīr Bodyguard, Shuft Taharrush, Nazra for Feminist Studies, Birah A'mn (Safe Heaven), WenDo and OpAntiSH (Operation Anti-Sexual

[301] Generally, *baltajiyya* forces are civilians serving as military auxiliaries loyal to the regimes.

[302] Women used to be often beaten by the hands of *baltajiyya* forces. After the revolution, not only the problem was not sorted out, but it also incredibly increased, as it is visible by the events of *Eid Al-Adha* holiday in 2012, when more than 700 cases of sexual harassment all over Egypt have been officially reported to the police.

[303] HarassMap official website. Retrieved from: https://harassmap.org/en/who-we-are [Last Accessed 03/01/2023].

[304] See Sarah Fischer, "Young Women, Sexual Violence, and the Pursuit of Justice Amid Weakening State Institutions: The Case of Turkey's Campus Witches", *Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, POMEPS, Vol.36(1), 2019, pp. 37-40.

Harassment/Assault) [305] in Egypt. Interestingly to note, some of these movements were the first to deliberately promote and enhance the cooperation of both men and women inside intervention groups on the streets during the revolutions, rejecting the general concern about female participation in patrols and clashes. The approach started from an egalitarian point of view, according to which the focus was directed both on women's essential role during rescue operations against sexual harassment, as well as on men's decision to make a concrete and public step towards gender equality.

Some of these collectives, NGOs, movements and spontaneous groups born in 2010/2011 are still alive and continue their fight through adapted forms and strategies, while some others consumed their activism during the Arab Springs days, occupying those squares that would eventually become, in a short and emblematic lapse of time, everlasting symbols of resistance and resilience. Although most of their activities were limited to the revolutionary period, their efforts did not go to waste or became useless to the cause they were created for. Considered an ongoing process at that time, sometimes falling into the same constraints of hegemonic masculinity (guardianship, protection, possession) they wanted to overcome, they actually played an important conceptual role for future experiences of gender equality activism in the region. Indeed, these first movements opened the pathway to other possible forms of mobilization in which equality, horizontality, and significant men's agency became the predominant operational strategies. As the masculine presence in the street of Egypt during the Arab Springs appeared on the side of women and not only against them, the statement was also physical, with men's bodies becoming social vehicles for a political message of "disempowerment" with respect to the model of violence and machismo fostered by society, political powers, and police forces. Additionally, most of the groups involved on the ground against *gbv* and demanding reforms in 2010/2011 were the first to directly engage with complex issues previously unexplored or often censored by the regimes; by addressing sensitive topics in a dramatical moment like that of revolutions

[305] See Angie Abdelmonem, *Anti-Sexual Harassment Activism in Egypt: Transnationalism and the Cultural Politics of Community Mobilization*, Doctoral Dissertation Anthropology, Arizona State University, 2016; A. Abdelmonem and Susan Galàn, "Action Oriented Responses to Sexual Harassment in Egypt: The Cases of HarassMap and WenDo" in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 13 (1), 2017, pp. 154-167; Sandra A. Fernandez, Male Voices in a Cairo Social Movement, *Egypte/Monde Arabe*, Vol. 13, 2015.

and counter-revolutions, activists encouraged a renovated public discussion on *gbv*, street harassment (*taharrush al-jinsī)*, sexuality, and gender equality that didn't stop yet, laying the foundations for future revindications and ideological directions. In many cases, the relationship between the movements of 2010/2011 and contemporary activism is embodied, in the first instance, by the same individuals who participated in past experiences and continue to participate in those of today. In other cases, as it will be shown through the example of gender equality activism in Jordan, this element of continuity is represented not so much by the personal experiences of activists, but rather by the transfer of ideas, symbolism, and conceptual frameworks that have been incorporated by young boys and girls within their new and modern activism.

## Digital Activism vs Digital Authoritarianism

According to Rennick (2019), the period of time that followed the events of 2011 can be described as a moment of "demobilization" of political activism, "whether in form of state repression and violence or more general popular apathy",[306] due also to the controversial and still debated outcomes of the revolutionary waves. Although the apparent disillusion, a similar arrest of mass activism actually served as a rebuilding moment for new generations of young boys and girls in many countries, who moved from a form of strictly political activism to more "social and cultural" ones,[307] aiming at raising awareness around crucial subjects – gender equality, freedom of speech, global warming crisis[308] – rather than challenging the *status quo* through revolts or *coup d'état*. This doesn't necessarily mean that the events of today are less organized with respect to those of the last decade, but rather that the content and the meaning of the 2010/2011 protests, first addressed in that period, expanded to new subjects of interest delivered in more adaptive ways under rapidly changing conditions, beyond both the margins of political clashes and romanticization of their social actors. In this sense, the latter couldn't exist without the former.

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[306] Sarah Anne Rennick, "Beyond Mass Protests: Rethinking What Constitutes Arab Youth Political Activism", *Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, POMEPS, Vol. 36(1), 2019, p. 86.

[307] Ibid, p. 87.

[308] See "Young People Are Leading Climate Activism in the Middle East", *The Cairo Review*, 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/young-people-are-leading-climate-activism-in-the-middle-east/ [Last Accessed 03/01/2023].

New and complex experiences started indeed to emerge in the last few years, inspired in their goals and targets by the Arab revolutions. Arguably, many elements transformed the substrate of youth activism in the MENA region, sometimes in continuity, sometimes in a complete departure from previous experiences. If the human component, namely the youth category, in many cases didn't change or simply passed the baton from one generation to another, the way to conduct activism partially transformed. In this sense, organizations started to manage the core subjects of their activities with different tools and more horizontal, sometimes apparently passive methodologies, [309] employing different channels for proclaiming their instances and communicating with regimes' structures in less cutting-edge ways, also making use of international boards, programs, and communities to make their voices heard. A crucial link with the past is represented undoubtedly by the Internet's democratic potential and related new technologies. Until 2010, when social networks like Facebook and Twitter started to be employed as privileged spaces for criticism against autocratic regimes, the web was still an undervalued technology, and its applications were mostly dormant. After a period of blind optimism in its revolutionary meaning, today it actually represents a field of debate as well as a useful tool for social actors, NGOs, and civil society, that carefully and strategically employ it for their activism purposes. Accordingly, behind the immediate communicational use, the web came to represent more and more a form of "third space".[310] The concept, which developed from Lefebvre's analysis on space production, [311] generally refers to "an overlooked and disregarded space, a space that includes both the philosophical and social/physical and also the space that is 'in between'".[312] In this sense, by allowing social masses

[309] "Passive" here refers to the preference of cultural activism for democratic strategies in place of street protests and eventually clashes.

[310] See Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1996; Lyncoln Dahlberg, "Cyberspace and the Public Sphere: Exploring the Democratic Potential of the Net", Convergence, Vol. 4(1), 1998, pp. 70–84; Zizi Papacharissi, "The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Beyond". In: Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard (eds.), *Handbook of Internet Politics,* Routledge, London and New York 2009.

[311] See Henri Lefebvre, La Production de l'Espace, Éditions Anthropos, Paris 1974; G. C. Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography". In: Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak (Eds.), Selected Subaltern Studies, pp. 3-33; Homi K. Bhabha, "In the Cave of the Making: Thoughts on Third Space". In: Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner (Eds.) *Communicating in the Third Space*, Routledge, New York 2009.

[312] Chamari Edirisinghe, Ryohei Nakatsu, Adrian Cheok, and Johannes Widodo, "Exploring the Concept of Third Spae within Networked Social-Media". In: Junia C.

to store and manage ideas, values, and expectations, the Internet represents the place where counter-hegemonic discourses can be produced and reproduced; social media in this sense can be seen as an alternative for public confrontation and anti-hegemonic productions where not only discussions can be easily opened and carried out, but also a tool through which every audience, regardless of geographical or economic boundaries, can be reached out more easily and efficiently than in the early stage of its use.

Unfortunately, since the immediate aftermath of the revolutions its double face was also soon revealed, in that censorship or reversed forms of counter-activism emerged on social networks.[313] An example comes from the famous case of "A Gay Girl in Damascus": the story – perhaps one of the most online shared and debated of late 2011 – turned around Amina, an openly lesbian girl, who used to write on her blog about controversial matters such as sexuality and freedom of expression, inspiring thousands of people in her country to talk about those same topics. Incredibly, the real person behind the blog was not a young Arab lady proudly using the internet as an amplifier of her and minorities' voices but instead a white, European student, Tom MacMaster, who smartly and efficiently plotted the whole story from his apartment in Scotland. The story behind this scam was undoubtedly useful to make even those more enthusiasts reflect on the possible downsides of the Internet during revolutions.[314] A more recent case is instead that of the Instagram profile of a young Tunisian girl named "lady.samara" who through her social media affirmed that "the new generation is in grave danger because they see sassiness and homosexuality becoming normal. Stop this phenomenon!".[315] Similarly, during the 2020 lockdown in Morocco, a gay Instagram *influencer*, Sofia Talouni, posted a video on her social profile

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Anacleto, Sideny Fels, Nicholas Graham et al. (Eds.) Entertainment Computing – ICEC 2011, Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 6972.

[313] In order to inform about online spaces related risks, CSOs promoted knowledge sharing about safety measures for online activism. It is for example the case of the Moroccan organization *Damj*, which published a Security Guide offering advice on digital security, legal protections, health and mental wellbeing. Similarly, Tunisian organization *Mawjoudin* conducts in-person digital security workshops, training attendants on basic strategies and technical aspects of digital security.

[314] See "Straight Guy in Scotland. What the "Gay Girl in Damascus" Hoax Tells Us About Ourselves and the Media in the Era of the Arab Spring", David Kenner, *Foreign Policy*, 11/06/2011. Retrieved from: https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/14/straight-guy-in-scotland/ [Last Accessed 10/01/2023].

[315] "How the LGBT community rallied against a 'homophobic' Tunisian influencer", *The New Arab*, 07/10/2020. Retrieved from: https://www.newarab.com/features/how-lgbt-activists-rallied-against-homophobic-tunisian-influencer [Last Accessed 02/01/2023].

asking to out every fake account on gay dating apps (Grindr, PlanetRomeo), thus generating a tremendous wave of homophobia in her country.[316] Given the particularly dangerous nature of control over the LGBTQI+ community in most of the Middle East, the question of digital security is often addressed by activists and NGOs in strict relations with homosexuality, transsexuality, and other related issues. Nevertheless, the threats coming from the Internet and the use of social media make privacy a matter of concern for every citizen indiscriminately, especially due to the high securitization process involving the MENA region nowadays. Although the matter is starting to be addressed globally, autocratic regimes and security apparatuses in the Middle East "have adapted to digital activism in a variety of forms"[317] more often employing digital surveillance to spy, collect and analyze CSOs data for censoring and coercive purposes. According to Kausch (2022) the regimes' adaptation to the Internet and digital surveillance not only fostered control at the expense of privacy, but also enabled a dispersion and polarization of critical narratives through disinformation campaigns on social media against activists, journalists, and critics, in the attempt to turn down any *bottom-up* subversive initiative. It is of January 2023 the news about Wikipedia infiltration by Saudi Arabia, which according to activists of Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) and SMEX Lebanon, recruited the highest-ranked administrators in the country as government agents in order to control content published on the website and arrest journalists working on human rights violations in the country.[318]

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[316] See "Violence in Lockdown: Sofia Talouni and Gay Male Outings in Morocco under Covid", *Levantx*, 14/04/2020. Retrieved from: https://www.levantx.com/series-source/violence-in-lockdown-sofia-talouni-and-gay-male-outings-in-morocco-under-covid [Last Accessed 03/01/2023].

[317] Kristina Kausch, "Middle Eastern Civil Society's Struggles with the Primacy of Geopolitics". In: Richard Youngs (Ed.), *Global Civil Society in a Geopolitical Age: How Civic Activism Is Being Reshaped by Great Power Competition*, Carnegie Europe, 2022, p. 36.

[318] Founded by murdered journalist and activist Jamal Kashoggi, DAWN is a non-profit organization formed by analysts, researchers, lawyers, and activists who aim to promote democracy and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa. SMEX is a Lebanese NGO that works to advance self-regulating information societies in the Arab-Speaking region. The final aim is to allow anyone around the region to access the internet, mobile services, and other networked spaces in order to communicate and express themselves safely and without fear of censorship, surveillance, or repercussion. See "Saudi Arabia: Government Agents Infiltrate Wikipedia, Sentence Independent Wikipedia Administrators to Prison", *Dawn,* 05/01/2023. Retrieved from: https://dawnmena.org/saudi-arabia-government-agents-infiltrate-wikipedia-sentence-independent-wikipedia-administrators-to-prison/ [Last Accessed 06/01/2023].

This critical reality around digital surveillance has been further aggravated by Covid19 pandemic: for instance, thanks to health tracking apps collecting biometrics data, the monitoring activity of regimes increased without any formal accusation of privacy violation, thus strengthening a new phenomenon identified by researchers as "digital authoritarianism".[319] In this context, youth and civil society organizations all over the Middle East try to resist this increased and "updated" version of repression and censorship, using media tools with a high level of security-related awareness (VPNs, encrypted languages), promoting campaigns against violations of privacy, and adapting their strategies according to the freedom granted by law and regimes. It is precisely in this highly mutated context that the Jordanian civil society operates.

### 4.1.1 The post-2011 activism: a de-centralized, inter-generational mobilization

Emerged mostly unscathed by the first decade of his reign, 'Abd Allāh II epitomized once again the well-known and deeply described ability of his reign to navigate every moment of history without being overturned and destroyed. The reasons behind this, as we have seen, are multiple and directly tied to the ancient past of the country, far before the delineation of official national borders and identity, as well as a wise project of modernization that came in form of small and cosmetic reforms. In general, though, what is possible to say with few if no doubts, is that for over a hundred years Jordan had been able to intercept, understand, and translate the different societal needs at the right time, mostly putting internal necessities first, but also balancing them – if needed – with the international stage requests. Despite this internal ability to compensate and provide, the Arab Revolutions marked a crucial momentum in the history of the Jordanian regime as well, with a revival of street protests that could resemble those of 1989 or 2002. In this sense, it is true to say that the years 2010-2011 in Jordan have not been invested by the same incendiary strength of the revolutionary wave as witnessed in other countries - such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, or Bahrain. On

[319] See Ahmed Shaheed and Benjamin Greenacre, "Binary Threat: How Governments' Cyber Laws and Practice Undermine Human Rights in the MENA Region", *Digital Activism and Authoritarian Adaptation in the Middle East*, POMEPS, Vol. 43, 2021.

the other side, it is also correct to consider that Jordan's political and social fields actually saw a growing discontent among all different sectors of the population well before those two crucial years for the Middle Eastern region, due to a chronic fiscal crisis, lack of growth, youth massive unemployment, and rising tax of inflation in particular.

In this regard, describing Jordan's position within the revolutionary stage is not an easy task. The country indeed, on the one side represents an interesting example of an autocratic regime following the regional pathway of securitization and protection; on the other – as previously seen – it engaged in a fruitful project of modernization and reforms, thus characterizing Jordan as a perpetual example of "both continuity and change".[320] Although this, as the Arab revolts showed all their subversive potential, the need to protect itself from external threats and regional instabilities became the priority of the Hashemite political agenda. An element further weakening the internal position of Jordan during the revolutions was the boost for reformism initiated halfway between the end of the 20th and the start of the 21st century. This indeed did not entirely represent an endogenous process but is rather the result of international partners' pressures and financial aid, from which Jordan remains exceptionally dependent still today. This element further aggravated the country's conditions, caught between the web of its security fears on the one side, and the international partners' requests for development to satisfy on the other.

In his book *Inter-Arab Alliances: Regime Security and Jordanian Foreign Policy* (2009), Ryan well explains the question of security within Middle Eastern states, vastly interrogated by comparative political studies, by reassuming it under the "security dilemma" formula. According to this conceptualization, by obsessing over regional security, autocratic regimes actually enhance internal insecurity, thus undermining their own power apparatus. As Ryan (2009) shows, the relatively recent creation of Arab states – as in the case of Jordan –, along with several other internal factors, produced a lack of identification between the citizens and their rulers, inevitably encouraging more internal security threats than from outside. Concordantly, "as the coercive and military strength of Arab states steadily grows, so too does the domestic and regional insecurity of Arab regimes".[321] It is exactly in this *vacuum* that Jordanian protests raised and crossed the country, as soon as the political élite and regime's authorities lower their guard. As previously

[320] C. Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings…,* p. 13.
[321] C. Ryan, *Inter-Arab Alliances…*, p. 23.

seen, in analyzing the structure of political regime of Jordan, Ryan (2011) considers it as a clear example of a "hybrid regime". According to the scholar, its hybridity lies in a "perpetually liberalizing autocracy" [322] in which everything changes – for example, through the concession of small State-sponsored reforms – so nothing can really change. This is the reason why, for example, the idea that however reformist, the country is actually not moving forward is pretty common among different generations of Jordanians: it is precisely this idea that constitutes the theoretical key to read past, present and future protest experiences in the country. Accordingly, by looking at the recent past of the country, it is possible to understand how the international image of a democratic and socially "under-control" state never meant that Jordan was completely immune to any sparkle of protest or upheaval, but actually that this was experienced in a less massive or violent way with respect to other regional scenarios. This happened firstly from a geographic point of view, as Jordanian streets mobilizations were considered de-centralized from the core area of revolution and therefore mostly undervalued by international mass media, then methodologically, as protests usually started after Friday prayer, also known as the day of anger (*yawm al-ghaḍab)* and thus, being easily predictable, never followed the same night and day shifts of other countries. Also, weapons were usually not employed by protesters and police forces, who generally operated under a soft security approach.

Although its peculiarities, yet before 2011 and during that crucial year the Hashemite Kingdom proved to be not as static as it seems when it comes to grassroots mobilizations, activism, and demands for social reforms. Responsive to that spark of popular initiatives which challenged many of the MENA regimes and their *status quo*, Jordan was crossed by several strikes and protests throughout all of its main cities. Bound to the democratic instances advanced by their peers in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and other countries and influenced by a new awareness of social justice, the end of corruption, and a sharp break with older generations, Jordanian youth firmly replied to this broader call to action in different ways and through several methodologies, employing the internet, social media, and communication platforms to gather, meet, and organize protests throughout the country. As highlighted by many scholars, one of the main differences between Jordan and its neighboring countries lies in the fact that protests and discontents in

[322] C.R. Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings…,* p.15.

the Hashemite context were generally more oriented toward a request for reforms than to a threat of revolution, with common participation of different societal groups, from school teachers to private and public sector employees. Often, also unexpected representatives such as the military veterans had their say in the dispute against the centralization of powers in the hands of the King and the inability of the government to cope with the critical moment. Within this context, the country actually witnessed the first moments of street protests and strikes in 2010, yet before the Taḥrīr Square experience of Egypt: in the spring of that year, the National Committee for Retired Servicemen (NCRS) wrote a manifesto against the regime, reporting the deterioration of living conditions in the country as well as its being "antidemocratic, myopic, corrupt, and in danger of turning Jordan into the de facto Palestinian state or alternative homeland (*al-waṭan al-badīl*)".[323] In this way, a central and unquestionable element of the Hashemite pact with its society – the military – officially joined the youth-led protests, in a horizontal convergence of different political souls, but most importantly of generational powers,[324] that served as a watershed in the traditionally condescending Jordan. Conversely, another front was shaking the Hashemite crown, that of tribal groups, who pushed forward the accusations by directly appointing the neo-liberal reformist wave enhanced by the King and the normalization of relations with Israel. This front, similarly to what happened with the veterans, joined the mobilization and gave rise to several clashes all over the different main provinces of the country, forcing the central government to use violence to sedate the tumults. In November 2010 numerous other protests started in Amman, led this time by labor activists. In November/December 2010, the Islamic Action Front and the *al-Waḥda*/Unity party protested against the electoral law and asked for constitutional reforms. So, at the beginning of 2011, Jordan had already known several mass protests in its streets, from Amman to Karak, from Tafileh to Ma'an with hundreds of participants marching after Friday prayer. Despite the differences in numbers and methodology from their Egyptian and Tunisian counterparts, these moments signed a remarkable pick of anger towards the regime and its apparatus, mostly calling for the resignation of Prime Minister, Samīr al Rif'aī (1966 - ), and concrete changes towards a more constitutional and democratic shift in

[323] Ibid., p. 28.

[324] See Tariq Tell, "Early Spring in Jordan: The Revolt of the Military Veterans", 04/11/2015. Retrieved from: https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/11/04/early-spring-in-jordan-revolt-of-military-veterans-pub-61448 [Last Accessed 20/10/2022].

the monarchy. In particular, young activists of the Jordanian Popular Movement *(al- Ḥirāk al-Sha'bī al Urdunī)* or Jordanian Youth Movement *(al-Ḥirāk al Shabābī al-Urdunī)* – generally referred to as *al-Ḥirāk* –, the nationalist movement (mainly formed by tribal East Bankers), old members of the tribes (until that moment considered the backbone of the regime), Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood, and also some regime loyalists' groups, all convened for a drastic political and juridical change, in particular against corruption and flawed economy. The highest point in the history of the Jordanian de-centralized revolution was reached with the march 24 protest (#mar24), ignited by the movement "24th march youth" (*shabāb 24 adhār*) or 24th March Youth Movement with hundreds of thousands of youths who gathered in a very strategic place, the Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir Ḥusayn Street – or *Duwār al Dākhiliyya* – one of the main roundabouts of Amman, near the Ministry of Interior.

***Figure 6. "Our reforms, our future", shabāb 24 adhār official logo.***

There, the reformist wave of 2011 in Jordan experienced the most repressive charges by police, also backed by the thugs (*baltajiyya*), leading at the same time to the highest and lowest point of Jordan's *quiet* revolution. Again in 2012, Muslim Brotherhood tried to organize the largest mass protest

in the country's history, with few if no results. In general, police in Jordan continued to adopt the soft security approach during all the events of those few years, with some exceptions in 2011, when these mild methods were dismissed in favor of a more violent approach towards protesters. At the end of 2013, despite the rapid turnover of more than four Interior Ministers, again the regime managed to navigate the situation through small concessions and reforms. Another significant opportunity for reinvigorating activism in the country came from the gas deal signed in 2014 by Jordan's National Electric Power Company (NEPCO), issuing the importing of natural gas from the Leviathan oil field, controlled by Israel. The controversy laid in the belief of many that the field rightfully belonged to Palestine. This sparkle of activism reinforced the convergence of several different groups, in particular from the youth *al- Ḥirāk*, the Muslim Brotherhood, Pan-Arab nationalist parties, trade unions, women's rights movements, and members of the military sector.[325] The protests lasted grossly until 2014, but gradually lost their original power and significance within the Hashemite social context. Strong of this situation, during those years King 'Abd Allāh II gave birth to a new cycle of reforms and political shuffling, epitomized in particular by the election of 2013. As well described by Maggiolini (2017), the Hashemite Kingdom was able to navigate this transformative moment thanks to three basic matrices: 1) the promulgation of constitutional reform in 2011 – as happened many times in the past; 2) the ability to open dialogue with all the different components and forces of Jordanian society (veterans, tribes, Muslim Brotherhood); 3) a renovated spirit of collaboration with its long-dated Western allies. After more than three years of protests, the government engaged in a project of dialogue with those who marched among the streets of Jordan in order to "domesticate" them and their request, directly meeting the civil society organizations and in particular the representatives of professional associations like teachers, doctors, and engineers.

In this way, in the aftermath of the 2010/2011 Arab upheavals, the Hashemite Kingdom offered new but limited opportunities for civil society organizations and grassroots movements in order to avoid any extremization of violence against the regime, continuing that process of democratic liberalization initiated in the late 80s to reach the goal of legitimacy.[326]

[325] See C. Ryan, "Youth, Activism, and Protest: Jordan's Movement Against Israeli Gas", *Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa,* POMEPS, Vol. 36(1), 2019.
[326] See Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Civil Society as Social Control: State Power in Jordan", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 33(1), 2000, pp. 43-61.

Nevertheless, once created, these opportunities had instead been put into the bureaucratic spiral of the state in order to limit their ability to effectively produce any significant change. In Jordan the state, in the need to avoid mass protests caused by a shortage of resources and increased costs of living, tried to hold its citizens through administrative control and bureaucracy. The result today is a less visible autocracy nonetheless able to control, subjugate, and shrink the ability of groups and masses to effectively produce changes in Jordanian society. It is precisely because of this internal-external cycle of securitization and closure that Jordan, as no exception in the region, is today more exactly addressed as a *regime* in relation to its domestic political agenda, especially around freedom, space for civil society activism, and alleged democratization processes. Schwedler (2012) suggests to look at this circumstance from a different theoretical perspective, detaching the analysis from the "transformative" approach (from autocracy to neo-liberal country), and embracing instead the idea that Jordan today:

> […] is neither more democratic, nor more authoritarian [..] it is simultaneously more liberal and more autocratic, characterized not as a fully neoliberal state, but as a state marked – quite literally and physically – by neoliberal exceptions.[327]

In this sense, on the one side, the country continued and continues nowadays to pursue its modernizing project through reforms and prioritization of international investments, liberal-market enhancement, new infrastructures, and services. On the other, the government also started to reinforce its cyber-security apparatus and increased coercion, transnational repression,[328] and prosecution by law towards the regime's critics or activism. This picture is in line with the previously delineated reality of militarization of the country, which despite apparently being a pivotal example of developed and peaceful state in the MENA region, actually hides far less democratic aspects in its internal political and administrative contexts. Right at the moment this thesis is being written, the head of the Cybercrime Unit at the Public Security Directorate, Dr. Abd al-Hādi al-Tahat, announced a

[327] J. Schwedler, *The Political Geography…*, p. 269.

[328] See Marwa Fatafta, *Transnational Digital Repression in the MENA Region*, POMEPS, 2021. Retrieved from: https://pomeps.org/transnational-digital-repression-in-the-mena-region [Last Accessed 05/01/2023].

temporary ban on the TikTok platform – a social media widely used by millions of youths globally to film and post short videos – unless the platform starts to comply with Jordanian law requests in terms of contents and appropriate language. The decision was taken "after its misuse and failing to deal with publications inciting violence and disorder",[329] following concerns by the public authorities after the death of Colonel Abdul Razzaq Dalabīh. Similarly, on December 19th, 2022 the PSD released an official statement about fuel-related clashes, affirming that:

> […] the Cybercrime Unit, since this morning, has begun to monitor, summon and arrest everyone who published, commented, or contributed to spreading hate speech and incitement against police forces.[330]

Yet before the outburst of Arab Springs, it was precisely through social media and official websites that the youth activism in Jordan developed and unfolded, and it was again online that many other experiences emerged later, allowing a wider target audience to come into contact with them and their activism opportunity. During the last decade indeed, several spontaneous groups formed on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, calling young boys and girls to mobilize in particular against economic austerity, unemployment, and poor life conditions. These groups and initiatives had their say on different disputes, often intersected in one single or ideological matter, as in the case of the "Israeli Gas case" or against the decision of the government to implement nuclear power plants in the country.[331] Twelve years after the revolutions and despite growing freedom limitations, Jordanian activism has massively grown and continues to open fruitful debates on different social media platforms, in particular Instagram and Facebook, and more broadly on the web. It is in this new and vibrant online environment that the question of gender equality, *gbv*, sexual and reproductive health, sexual orientation, and relationships started to constitute

[329] See "Jordan bans TikTok after police officer killed in protests", NBC News, 17/12/2022. Retrieved from: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/jordan-bans-tiktok-police-officer-killed-protests-rcna62229 [Last Accessed 05/01/2023].
[330] Official Statement by the Public Security Directorate (PSD) of Jordan, 19/12/2022. Retrieved from: https://www.psd.gov.jo/en-us/content/news/?page=7&NT=&SC=&MC= [Last Accessed 05/01/2023].
[331] See "Jordanian Nuclear Power", Arwa Aburawa and Vanessa O'Brien, 06/14/2013, *DW*. Retrieved from: https://www.dw.com/en/jordanians-protest-plans-to-go-nuclear/a-16876432 [Last Accessed 11/01/2023].

a major subject of discussion, with several groups, online communities, and media pages created to spread information and knowledge on these usually dismissed topics.

### 4.1.2. From *maydān* to the Web: broadcasting gender equality online

In the history of the Middle East and more particularly Jordan, the Arab Revolutions period marked the growing presence of social media and platforms employed for activism and protests, with thousands of users mobilizing online alongside their commitment on the streets and squares *(maydān).* As previously seen, the Hashemite country doesn't allow the same physical opportunities as other neighboring countries when it comes to mass street protests and rallies, with events largely organized following a fixed scheme and usually right after the Friday noon prayer. Schwedler (2012) analyzed the connections between space and protest in Jordan, noticing how the reconstruction of Western Amman under the spin of neo-liberal injections seems to have provided a precise space for mobilization, as this particular area of the city intersects most of its capitalistic and globalization symbols (embassies, big malls, economic activities) and is directly under the sight of foreigners who live in its upper-class neighborhoods; accordingly, the government started to strategically regulate these stationary protests both in West Amman and in other areas of the city way before their beginning, for example through long bureaucratic delays in the form of permission papers, "around the principle of preventing and removing protesters from view as quickly as possible".[332]

In this context, the Internet and the various social media employed in the country came to be an alternative and prolific space for activism and mobilization that transcends the traditional, party-oriented methodologies of political participation. Indeed, since the beginning of the last decade and until today, various forms of online organized dissent and activist journalism grew enormously, developing around different topics and problems affecting the country throughout its transition to modernity (gender equality, youth's rights, environmental development). In pushing new forms of activism, the

[332] J. Schwedler, "The Political Geography…", p. 268.

youth in particular started to expertly use a wide range of social media platforms and new technologies for the purpose of public scrutiny, mastering communication skills and tools to reach their audience and grow in the number of campaigns' followers and activities. The internet, in this sense, came to be a privileged space of discussion that goes beyond and often allows circumventing – with some exceptions – governmental and bureaucratic restrictions on the part of the authorities. Thanks to the higher degree of freedom offered by these platforms in terms of anonymity, content diffusion and reachable audience, young boys and girls started to openly address sensitive and controversial matters generally outcasted from everyday Jordanian discussions. Among these spontaneous groups, an interesting case is represented by the online campaign *Ana 'aghayru* (I Change), a small and informal local initiative started in 2017 through a Facebook event page, created by the young student and activist for gender equality 'Iẓra Taysīr Khudair. Her invitation came under the slogan:

> Peaceful protest against honor killings aimed at repealing the law allowing perpetrators to receive a reduced sentence and ensuring protection for women in Jordan (article 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code). Protest is 100% legal and peaceful. *#No_Honour_In_Murder*. Please make an invitation to reach as many as possible.[333]

***Figure 7. A young activist of I Change in front of the Jordanian Parliament in 2017. Photo retrieved from I Change Facebook page.***

[333] *I Change* Official Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Ichangeorg99/?ref=page_internal [Last Accessed 11/01/2023].

***Figure 8. I Change activist in front of Jordanian Parliament holding the sign "Stop honor killings. There is no honor in murder".***

The girl indeed was able to call to action around 50 people to peacefully protest under the Jordanian Parliament against articles 340 and 98 of the Jordanian Penal Code - as previously seen, widely used by the JCC to accord mitigating circumstances to honor killing perpetrators.[334] Despite being numerically negligible, the *I Change* campaign was an important example of post-2011 *bottom-up*, informal, and youth-led experiences born and developed online, eventually able to transfer its activism on the ground. In this case, Facebook was the strategic space on which the movement grew and reached its goal of mobilizing both males and females for the same cause, as Tony, one of its male participants, suggested in an interview we held in the spring of 2019:

> […] actually, it was a Facebook event. Facebook is really a big part of life here in Jordan and it is the first social media, so you can basically know anything about anyone from it and it's very useful. Any huge events like this would be on the social media, so yes... most of our crowd was attracted by Facebook. Social media activism here is important because Jordan is a double-edge country. Basically, there are two groups: the one where we the youth stand, where you want to change people's mentality and take actions; and then you know, on the other side, there are customs and traditions. This side is

[334] See Chapter 3.

> so strict about the role of women in this part of the world and people are like 'just go to the kitchen and do your job', nothing else.[335]

Although small, in the winter of that same year the group was invited to join an informal conversation with the former MPs Nawāf al-Nuaimāt e Suleiman Huwaīlah al-Zabn, thus pushing for an actual change and encouraging the discussion within the parliamentary rooms around honor and violence in Jordan. As previously seen, in the same year article 98 of the Jordanian Penal code was amended in its most controversial parts. Interestingly to note, *I Change* group was probably among the first informal Jordanian experiences to directly encourage both males and females online to jointly protest after 2011 under strategic places of power such as the parliament. Exactly its informality – meaning that the organization was not officially registered as a CSO in the country[336] – was probably one of the keys for the participation of its members. More often indeed, the structured nature of some organizations for gender equality may discourage specific groups of people from taking direct steps and joining their activities due to the highly contested nature of their contents within traditional and religious settings. Since 2017 though, as the debate around these matters increased both within and outside the country, the situation of Jordan has changed also regarding the perception of gender equality activism, with several other experiences emerging and reinforcing their presence on the ground and trying to ameliorate the environment for future generations of activists.

Similar to *I Change* campaign, another interesting example of online activism in the country is represented by the case of the *feminist.movement.jo*, an open Instagram page born in 2019, dealing with different topics ranging from gender equality, feminism, and *gbv*, to law enforcement and politics. Founded by Emy Suzan Dawūd,[337] the page inspires to *al-Ḥaraka al-Nisawiyya fi'l-Urdun* (The Feminist Movement in Jordan). With its 128.000 followers, this is probably one of the most prominent examples of an online *safe space* where males and females daily debate controversial matters affecting their country at different societal levels without restrictions. Its

[335] Interview with Tony Dabbas, former activist of *I Change*, 12/03/2019.

[336] Civil Society organizations in Jordan, recognized by art. 16 of the Constitution, must be officially registered to freely operate within the country, under the Law on Societies No. 22/2009 (previously Law 51/2008).

[337] See "feminist.movement.jo" Official Instagram Page, https://www.instagram.com/feminist.movement.jo/ [Last Accessed 11/01/2023].

contents are delivered only in Arabic language and accurately divided into categories such as "*al-ʿunf ḍid al-marʾa* " (violence against women), *"al-marʾa wa ʾl-Islām"* (the woman and Islam), *"ṣaḥat al-nisāʾ"* (women's health), "*al-ʿalāqāt al-ʿāṭifiyya"* (romantic relationships), *"al-taharrush wa ʾl-ʿightiṣāb"* (violence and rape), "*taḥrīr al-nisāʾ"* (woman's liberation), *"fi ʾl-siyāsa"* (in politics) *"al-maḥākim al-sharʿiyyat"* (*sharīʿa* courts) and many others. Several men actively engage in the conversations through likes and comments, although the distribution of followers is still quite disproportional (79,8% women vs. 20,1% men). This doesn't necessarily mean that the male presence is utterly negative, as in the words of Emy:

> […] The page uses logical discourse, arguments, and realistic issues to convey the issue to its followers, away from sarcasm or ambiguity. Therefore, it is somewhat well received among males more than other pages, but unfortunately, this does not eliminate male preconceived notions about feminism, nor does it eliminate the intentionality of a large group of them to abuse and distort it, as it strips men of their privileges and calls for equality between the two genders.[338]

In some other cases men positively engage with gender discussion with a significant degree of openness and sympathy towards gender-related matters, more than they would eventually do outside the internet space. In one of its latest posts shared on January, 9th 2023, the page recalled the story of a woman who was allegedly battered by her husband in Irbid. Several comments were left under the post by both male and female users, with some arguing that the Family Protection and Juvenile Department (FPJD) should have been alerted, while many others suggested that spreading the news on Instagram won't help women or society in any way. Some men replied to the post expressing solidarity and understanding, sharing the hashtag *#almuʾannifat_Irbid* (the battered woman of Irbid), contesting the idea of masculinity behind the episode (Ameer's comment: "may Allah have mercy on you for the men you are"), or addressing the growing violence in the country (Shadi's comment: "the problem is that these news have become the norm"). Although stigmatized and still characterized by a largest female

[338] Interview with Emy Suzan Dawūd, creator of feminist.movement.jo Instagram page, online, 16/10/2022.

audience, the use of a social media to create contents about feminism, gender equality, and contrasting *gbv*, in the words of its creator:

> […] played a very important role not only in spreading awareness, but also in mobilizing public opinion, which prompted the government to amend many laws, punish many criminals, and save many victims.[339]

Similar to this experience conducted completely online, is the case of *MyKali Magazine* (mykalimagazine.com). This Jordanian magazine, as it is possible to read on the official website,

> […] is a conceptual webzine for/from the Middle East and North Africa. The magazine was established in 2007 by a group of passionate students with various interests ranging from design, to the arts, and politics. My.Kali strives to address social problems, and empower the youth to defy mainstream gender binaries in the Arab world. My.Kali is a new form of activism. It is a voice for social justice in oppressive societies.[340]

First inspired by the idea of Khālid Abdel Hādī – editor in chief of the magazine, among the first to openly come out as gay in Jordan – *MyKaliMag* immediately became a space where hegemonic manhood and patriarchal stereotypes are continuously dismantled and reframed through research, interviews, and reports around homosexuality, transsexuality, the relation between Islamic religion and queerness, and others. Entirely carried out and published online, as the magazine is not distributed physically, MyKali covers critical issues, in particular around the LGBTQI+ community in Jordan and in the MENA region as a whole, all matters not easily addressable within the public space of these countries. Several tools are employed to reach the aim of thought-provoking its readers, such as photography series aiming at "to be socially provocative and satirical, exaggerated, yet reflective of reality",[341] biographical stories, digital art

[339] Interview with Emy Suzan Dawūd, online, 16/10/2022.
[340] MyKali Magazine official website. Retrieved from: https://www.mykalimag.com/en/home-page/ [Last Accessed 11/01/2023].
[341] Ibid.

covers, interviews, and musical databases. During the fifteen years of its existence, all spectrums of *bottom-up*, artistic, and social production have been diffused and acknowledged by *MyKaliMag*, which can be rightfully defined as one of the first examples of disruptive online activism in the MENA region for its daring and controversial contents.[342] Moreover, *MyKaliMag* does not confine its activism to the solely Jordanian context, but actually covers multiple experiences coming from all over the region, with the final aim of addressing, spreading, and celebrating diversity regardless of geographical boundaries. In this sense, the online nature of this activity allows for a "transnationalization" of its contents, as well as the eluding of coercive restrictions on the part of authorities.

***Figure 9. MyKali cover featuring Mehdi Bahmad, 2021. Photo retrieved from MyKali Magazine online.***

In this respect, a thoughtful image of media freedom in the country should be drawn. First and foremost, on the international level the country

[342] Among these, another fundamental example of online activism is that of *7iber*, an online magazine born in 2007 as a safe space for public discussion, multimedia journalism, and critical analysis of Jordanian society. For more information see: www.7iber.com [Last Accessed 01/01/2023].

ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) asserting the right to freedom of expression; similarly, on a local level, the Jordanian Constitution guarantees a relatively high degree of freedom of speech and expression to its citizens. In this context, censorship is however enhanced by resorting to alternative juridical tools to contain and limit the practice of both online and "offline" activism and knowledge production. Among these, one of the privileged provisions is represented by the Press and Publication Law (PPL) of 1998, as amended in 2012. First promulgated as a sign of that late 90s democratization process inaugurated under King Ḥusayn, and for a long time limited to the print papers sector, through its amendments and application in the digital media era the law came to be the regulatory framework also of other kinds of journalistic distribution, online content, or electronic publications. Accordingly, the modifications to the law allowed for more stringent measures against websites and publications not complying with moral standards, as in the case of Article 5 and Article 38(a), (b), and (c) which:

> […] are essentially blasphemy provisions, prohibiting the publication of content which is pejorative or disparaging of constitutionally protected religions, which abuses the Prophets, which insults others' religious beliefs or which incites sectarian strife or racism.[343]

Strong of these provisions, in 2017 Dima Tahboub, former MP and member of the Islamic Action Front party, resorted to the PPL to restrict the operative margins of *MyKaliMag*, issuing a formal complaint to the Jordanian Audiovisual Commission. The politician argued that the magazine was operating without the license for publication as requested by the law. The reality behind the choice stood in the high degree of homophobia and opposition towards *MyKaliMag* content, especially those regarding homosexuality, transsexuality, and gender, and the general idea, on the part of the most conservative groups, that the website spread news and content against the Jordanian moral. Dima Tahboub is indeed noted within the Jordanian political context for being one of the most critics of LGBTQI+

[343] See Toby Mendel, *Analysis of the Press and Publications Law, No. 8 for the Year 1998, as Amended,* 2016. Retrieved from: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/updatedjordan.ppl-analysis.16-05-18ls-1.pdf [Last Accessed 13/01/2023].

discourses in the country, as she also made clear by trying to impede the Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila, well known for its LGBTQI+ rights advocacy, to hold a concert in Amman. In this sense, it must be highlighted also that homosexuality and other sexual orientations are not criminalized under the Jordanian Penal code, although the general perspective on the matter still suffers the spread of huge homophobic narratives and behaviors. Still, other juridical provisions are used to shrink and limit the space of LGBTQI+ rights activists and advocates in the country, such as for example the Information Systems Crimes Law forbidding any activity or speech that may offend public morals, or the same Penal Code, which through its article 319 prohibits any "printed obscene material, or a drawing, a photo, a sketch, a module, or any other thing that may lead to the corruption of morals".[344] Interestingly to note, these laws do not specify what exactly constitutes an offense for public morals, thus leaving a wide operational margin to public authorities and police officers against those allegedly responsible. After various attempts at restricting its presence online, *MyKaliMag* today is again operative and formally constitutes an incredible example of alternative content production from within a patriarchal and traditional country like Jordan.

These three examples help to delineate a first sketch of Jordan's use of media as a space for social mobilization. Again, moving from the street protests to the online content production around sensitive and controversial matters, it is possible to understand to what extent Jordan is trying to maintain a middle-ground position between democratic, liberal aspirations and repressive, autocratic, and securitarian directions. Accordingly, if on the one side, in the aftermath of the revolutions the government made it easier for civil society to establish new organizations, both physically and online, through for example the amended Law on Societies (No. 22/2009), on the other, it enhanced securitization of media platforms through several provisions whose vague nature helps censoring matters that the state considers risky for its value and moral structure. Within this context, the social significance and contribution of these alternative, controversial, and brand-new experiences should be interrogated. In particular, I argue that behind the practice of spreading the news on social media, making them viral through hashtags and other sharing modalities, a far more intricate reality

[344] See Jordanian Penal Code, Art. 319/1960: http://www.ahtnc.org.jo/sites/default/files/penal_code.pdf [Last Accessed 01/01/2023].

exists and should not be naively dismissed as marginal or minoritarian for the social understanding of contemporary Jordan. In this sense, questions must be posed not only about the content *per se* of these pages, websites, and online magazines, but more accurately on the extent to which they actually improve the quality of discussion about equality and alternative masculinity both in the local Jordanian context and in the regional Middle Eastern one, the nature and degree of agency embodied by the subjects involved in these virtual activism processes, and the possible future implications of these emerging forms of online activism.

In her critique of Habermas's concept of the public sphere, Fraser (1990) argues that women and marginalized groups like sexual and racial minorities have been systemically excluded by the modern bourgeoisie's participatory and democratic experiences on the ground;[345] traditional spaces of contestations indeed have historically come to represent domains of inequalities and power exercise in a male-dominated world. Through her analysis, Fraser suggests the overturning of the original definition of marginalized subjects from "alternative publics" – as they have been historically referred to – to:

> […] subaltern counterpublics, in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.[346]

With the advent of technology and the mass media era, digital virtual spaces for aggregation and criticism of exclusionary practices on the part of nation-state structures represented therefore the alternative realities in which these *subaltern counterpublics* operate, define themselves, and claim their authenticity; they indeed, overcome inequalities and constitute instead an inclusive, fluid, and subversive power with concrete repercussions in the real world. When dealing with contemporary, youth-led, and online activism in the Middle East, and specifically in Jordan, I would use the term "re-appropriation" of space to highlight: 1) the different methodologies employed

[345] See Nancy Fraser, "Rethink the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", *Social Text,* Vol. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56-80.
[346] Ibid., p. 67.

by virtual spaces activism with respect to the traditional streets and *maydān* one, which in Habermas's definition, is "a theater in modern society in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk";[347] 2) the gaining of a significant degree of agency of the *counterpublics* in post-modernity with respect to the past; 3) the rightful claim of alternative masculinities for spaces of revendication, partially dispossessed and centralized by radical feminism prominence and notoriety. Exactly on this third consideration, if the position of many women's protests relied on social platforms to encourage girls all over the world to embrace the equality cause, I'm arguing that this is nowadays true also for men's and their emancipatory practices from patriarchal traditions. The internet and in particular the numerous social media existing nowadays have come to represent an alternative space of debate and recognition not only for women – the group historically more marginalized – but for alternative masculinities and LGBTQI+ subjects as well. As G., a young transgender woman had to tell me during our interview,

> […] It put a lot of pressure on me to be a man, which I wasn't. I never was. It put a lot of pressure on me to try to be a man, which added a lot of conflict to my gender identity. And also, here in Jordan you know, usually, there wasn't much space for the community to talk about these issues. But then the website MyKali appeared. I'm sure you heard of it.[348]

Finally, another element should be added to the enlisted points above: the idea of "transnationalization" of online public space. This concept, first delineated at the beginning of the century with the advent of modern technologies and post-Westphalian states organization, has indeed produced some controversies, in particular around the idea that to be public, "is supposed to hold officials accountable and [..] correlate with a sovereign power".[349] In reality, despite the theory being still under scrutiny, most of the instances of the online public sphere are today argued, promoted, and discussed by a wide range of people that – for definition – do not physically

[347] Ibid., p. 57.
[348] Interview with G., Dali Cafè, Amman, 06/05/2022.
[349] N. Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere. On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World", *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 24(4), 2007, p. 7.

belong to the same state sovereignty, do not refer to the same cultural system of reference, and in many cases do not even speak the same language. According to this idea suggested by the public sphere theory, it is interesting to ask ourselves what happens when similar examples of transnational, online activism emerge beyond the margins of a single state, and sometimes, even continents. This particular example will be further investigated in the next sub-chapter through the case study of HeForShe, a global solidarity movement for gender equality first established online in Europe and America and lately developed in the Middle East, and particularly in Jordan.

## 4.2. *HeForShe* Arabic: men as *allies* for gender equality

*"Mish kul dakhar rajul"*
*"Not every male is a man"*
Jordanian proverb[350]

My first contact with the *HeForShe* (HFS) Solidarity Movement happened quite randomly: in 2019, while researching young men and gender equality in Jordan for my Master's thesis, I ended up watching a YouTube video[351] of its Jordanian branch founder and first coordinator, a 26 years old geneticist and entrepreneur from Amman, promoting HFS activism in his country. Two years later, I finally got to meet him in person and interview him, also sharing part of his activism on the ground. When asked about his experience as a young activist in Jordan, he told me:

> […] I like to travel around the world to discover new cultures and new countries, meeting and networking with new people; it is something I could reflect in my work with gender inclusion and creativity in general. So, traveling and meeting a new people from different backgrounds has always helped me, especially working on matters as gender equality, because as

[350] Transliterated by colloquial Arabic.
[351] "HeForShe Equality Story | Redefining Masculinity in Jordan" Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ePQiymLSNk [Last Accessed 14/01/2023].

> we know sex, it's something fixed everywhere, but gender it's not. I think it is really important to know the difference between gender and sex in Jordan, in Mexico and Italy, in France, in Turkey, and so on. So, wherever I go, I don't only travel for traveling, no; I make sure to attend events, meet the students, go deeper into the culture. […]I am an entrepreneur as well. In my free time, I'm trying to implement a project to enhance the culture through art in different countries.[352]

In the Hashemite country, and particularly in Amman, Layth represents a kind of super-star, known by everyone and followed by thousands on his social media accounts where he accurately posts pictures of his travels, activism, outfits, and entrepreneurial activities; alongside, he also resembles the ideal promoted by the movement of *who* and *what* a young activist of 21st century and post-revolutionary times should be: solid in its vision, always encouraging his fellow activists with a smile, and positively driven when sharing his perception of activism in an Arab country:

> I started my journey with HFS and being an activist supporting gender equality and women empowerment in 2015. Before that, I was an activist in the field of orphans' protection, supporting the community through education. But in 2015 I discovered HFS movement through Emma Watson online and from the logo. Since I am a biotechnologist and geneticist, when I saw the logo of HFS, I immediately knew what it was about thanks to my background, since it represents the symbols of male and female together. So, I started researching HFS and discovered it's a beautiful movement for gender equality whose first goal was to invite 500,000 men from all around the world to stand up and support women's empowerment and gender equality. So, I said: *yes, I want to be one of the first 500,000 around the world!* I subscribed, I signed up, I took a screenshot and I published it online using the hashtag *#HeForShe*. From that moment on, I started telling people that I had just join HFS

[352] Interview with Layth Abū Tāleb, former co-coordinator of *HeForShe* Arabic, online, 30/12/2021.

movement and that I was supporting gender equality in my country.[353]

I chose to start describing the activity of HFS through the words and experience of Layth because, just as in the beginning they sounded to me extremely encouraging and full of hope for the future, I find them extremely symbolic on many levels also today when addressing the practice of gender equality activism in the Hashemite country. In particular, my initial idea surrounding it was highly informed by those images that in 2011 permeated every media platform in the world: young boys and girls marching towards their future, thriving to change their countries from within and to overthrow the political élite that had governed over generations of Arabs by abuse and repression. After some years, that very naïve image did not reckon with the transformations and mutated realities of the Arab world during the last decade. If, in 2010/2011, the world seemed to have encountered and recognized the category of "Arab youth" as active social actors on the streets for the first time,[354] in 2021 these same subjects are everything but new and mostly changed their methodologies; today, young boys and girls are indeed highly involved by initiatives addressing global relevant issues, no longer relegated to the role of *saviors* and *heroes* within the sole space of their countries – a limiting and simplified definition – but more as *change-makers* within a globalized and interconnected world bringing new and crucial challenges for the future. It is precisely in this new context that HFS appeared as a UN Women, youth-led campaign. As previously mentioned, the initiative was launched on September, 20th 2014 at the presence of the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (1944 - ) and UN Women Ambassador Emma Watson (1990 - ), mostly known for her pluri-awarded career as an actress. The inauguration event was held at the UN Office in New York, during which Watson gave a heartfelt speech to mobilize youth, and in particular men, to commit to the gender equality cause:

> […] I am reaching out to you because I need your help. We want to end gender inequality—and to do that we need everyone to be involved. This is the first campaign of its

[353] Ibid.

[354] For a comprehensive understanding of youth relations with Arab Springs see Pamela Abbott, Andrea Teti, Roger Sapsford, "The Tide that Failed to Rise: Young Peoples Politics and Social Values in and After the Arab Uprisings", *Mediterranean Politics,* Vol. 25(1), 2020, pp. 1-25.

> kind at the UN: we want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality. And we don't just want to talk about it but make sure it is tangible. […] Men, I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too.[355]

The words of Watson well synthesize both the mission and the target of the movement: as a first instance, HFS aims at reaching the goal of gender equality in society and all different aspects of everyday life (work, family, economic emancipation, sport, language, religion, and so on), in line with the international standard of Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls".[356] To do so, the movement seeks to engage not only women but more importantly young boys and men in its activities, upon the belief that equality cannot be reached without a joint effort on the part of both genders. As the movement asserts: "the men of HeForShe aren't on the sidelines. They're working with women and with each other to build businesses, raise families, and give back to their communities".[357] In this sense, it is possible to say that men's engagement in HFS activities doesn't represent the final purpose of the movement, but rather the strategic direction of its intervention and the novelty element of its activism. HFS indeed aims at addressing the causes of gender inequalities from a global perspective, challenging negative masculinities, and helping young boys and men to take responsibility and share the privileged space that patriarchy has granted them. In order to raise awareness about *gbv* and parallelly bring young boys and men closer to the equality cause, HFS employs tools like public debates, social media campaigns, flash mobs, surveys, digital and visual arts, music, and others.

After 2014, as Layth described, the UN Women promoted initiative reached many African, Middle Eastern, and Gulf countries as well, with numerous volunteers joining the cause from Lebanon, Zimbabwe, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Uganda. Among these, Jordan was the first country to formally create an Arabic branch of the movement, officially started in October 2015 and firstly located at the UN Women's Country Office

[355] Emma Watson, *HeForShe* inaugural speech, New York UN Office, 20/09/2014. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkjW9PZBRfk [Last Accessed 14/03/2021].
[356] UN SDGs. Retrieved from: https://sdgs.un.org/goals [Last Accessed 14/01/2023].
[357] HFS Official Website.

in Amman. There, as Layth explained to me, papers, communications, official statements, and online campaigns started to be translated by the first volunteers from English into Arabic in order to make them intelligible to the wider audience coming from the Arab-Islamic region. At the time this ethnographic research started in 2021, the project of HFS – which operates in the country under the international agency's rules – was initially followed and implemented by the UN Women Country Office through the supervision of Sūsān al-Hilū, former Youth and Advocacy Officer. Her support consisted in helping the young Jordanian volunteers to implement the HFS project in the country following them throughout four specific phases (see Table 2). The movement today is organized around horizontal hierarchies, with two co-coordinators (a male and a female) following the group of volunteers, interacting with external offices and international partners, and engaging with governmental representatives.

Within the movement, a core group of experienced volunteers is selected by the Country Office to cover different roles, such as content creator, event coordinator, development and evaluation coordinator, coordinator's assistant, and others. The attendees of this initiative are all youth aged between 17 and 35 years old, coming from the most different personal, economic, and religious backgrounds, in the spirit of inclusiveness and openness to diversity promoted by the UN. The target of their initiatives is also diversified, as it often intersects with the most marginalized groups of society, in particular refugees, poor, and uneducated women and youth from the peripheries. The volunteers of HFS enroll in online training courses offered by UN Women Training Center, learning the basics of gender equality, as well as the correct glossary to be employed regarding sex, gender, and *gbv* related topics.

In 2021, the co-coordinators of HFS Jordan were Mays al-Shūbakī and Ibrahīm "Barhum" Kollāb, two young activists from Amman who truly and passionately devote their time and efforts to the cause of gender equality in Jordan. I first met them, alongside Sūsān, in a very informal and friendly cafeteria in Jabal al-Weibdeh, near the historical center of Amman, on September 27$^{th,}$ 2021. This quarter is known as the place where non-Jordanians usually live, because of its position near the foreign embassies as well as the presence of many Arabic schools all around the neighborhood. This detail, I argue, is not trivial but actually important to locate the whole experience of UN Women activism at the very center of economic and social

Jordanian life, also as many of the meetings and activities with my informants were held exactly in this same area.

| Phase Number | Year | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| *Phase 1* | 2015-2016 | Online training of volunteers (*gbv*, gender equality, sexual harassment) |
| *Phase 2* | 2017-2019 | Public Debates, Theatre Club, Language groups, University Tour 2018, WikiGap, Flash Mob 2018 – 16 Days Against *gbv* |
| *Phase 3* | 2019-2020 | Online Campaigns, 16days against *gbv* Campaign, "*Isma' tuah min-nih*" Campaign, Online University Tour, WikiGap |
| *Phase 4* | 2021-2022 | Cooking Classes, Self Defense, Jubilee Ceremony, WikiGap, WeRise, FreezMob 2021- Int. Women's Day |

***Table 1. HeForShe Jordan: phases of activity; courtesy of Ibrahīm Kollāb and Mays al-Shūbakī, co-coordinators of HeForShe.***

During that first informal encounter, I had a preliminary conversation with my informants, through which I tried to grasp first impressions on *who* they are, *why* they volunteer for gender equality, and *how* they perceive their personal involvement for such a crucial matter for Jordan. From those first words, many different topics of interest emerged, which I subsequently investigated throughout the interviews and observant participation conducted with the rest of the HFS group. During the nine months of research in Amman indeed, I had the chance to follow them

through different experiences and activities, alongside all the other young volunteers.

## The activities of HFS: horizontality and shared leadership

The Jordanian branch of HFS started thanks to the passion and the dream of one single young boy, Layth Abū Tāleb, but eventually transformed a personal experience into the multi-faceted and vibrant movement of today, with over 500 volunteers throughout the country. In this sense, the form of activism witnessed today in Jordan, and more generally in the Middle East, is quite different from that of the revolutionary period. During the Arab Springs indeed, protesters often found in the figures of single actors or set of leaders the symbol and the epitome of their contents, methodologies, and ambitions, as happened for example in the case of ʿAlāʾ ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ in Egypt;[358] today's activism instead rather relies on a networked and horizontal level of representation, preferring "atomistic connections between protesters sewn together by common defiance of authority or shared pursuit of an issue".[359] Precisely this horizontality is one of the distinctive marks of HFS, especially promoted and fostered by international agencies' *modus operandi*. Once asked about the value of this shared leadership between men and women, and if it represents in any way a form of disempowerment for girls involved, Raghad, a 23-years old psychologist and HFS volunteer, told me that this actually helps create:

> […] a healthy environment where people are there for their abilities, for what they have to offer, not because of their gender. Why would I be disempowered? I know we all have

[358] ʿAlāʾ ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ is an Egyptian informatics expert, blogger, and activist, unjustly imprisoned during the Arab Springs, and again in other two occasions, as political opponent of the regime. He is currently serving a five-year sentence. For a comprehensive understanding of the case of al-Fattāḥ, see Human Right Commission, United States Congress, Alaa Abd El Fattah. Retrieved from: https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/defending-freedoms-project/prisoners-country/egypt/alaa-abd-el-fattah [Last Accessed 16/01/2023]. https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/defending-freedoms-project/prisoners-country/egypt/alaa-abd-el-fattah [Last Accessed 16/01/2023].

[359] Sean Yom, Marc Lynch, and Wael al-Khatib, "Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa", POMEPS, Vol. 36(1), 2019, p. 3.

> different abilities and we are all putting them into the same goal.[360]

In Ibrahīm's opinion, volunteering alongside female peers changed him in many ways:

> […] I guess I'm a different person since I joined HFS; now, all of these things I've learned made me better. I feel I am more comfortable and that I can understand my community in a deeper way. I can handle a lot of things, conversations between men and women, for example, understanding how they think.[361]

Volunteers in general share a positive consideration of their joint efforts, feeling like this is not a downside of HFS activism, but rather its element of strength. In line with this horizontal strategy, one of the first national initiatives implemented by HFS Jordan was the University Tour held in 2018 during phase two, which saw a group of volunteers traveling the country on a bus and reaching not only central sites like the University of Jordan in Amman but also those of peripheric provinces as well.[362] The tour first aimed at strengthening the collaboration between the UN Women-led movement and the Jordanian educational structure while contemporarily raising awareness among young students around *gbv*, toxic masculinity, controlling behaviors, equality, and sexuality. To do so, activists had the responsibility to lead and involve their peers in the audience through recreational activities and, most importantly, interactive meetings and conferences in which everybody was invited to take part. Similarly promoted in many other countries where HFS is active, the University Tour marked the end of the second phase and the beginning of the third one for the movement, after a first phase of theoretical preparation around core gender equality related subjects. The University Tour of 2018, to put it in the words of Mays:

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[360]Interview with Raghad, young *HeForShe* volunteer, Abdali Boulevard, Amman, 24/11/2021.

[361] Interview with Ibrahīm, co-coordinator of *HeForShe* Arabic, Dar Na'hme, Amman, 15/11/2021.

[362] The first University Tour involved: 1. University of Jordan 2. Al-Hussein Technical University 3. Petra University 4. Ma'an University 5. Jordan University of Science and Technology 6. Al-Hussein Bin Talal University 7. German Jordanian University 8. Al-Albayt University 9. Al-Zaytoonah University 10. Tafilah Technical University 11. Arab Open University.

> […] was the first time of such an initiative in Jordan and the Middle East. We shared awareness and we had more than 500 students involved and volunteering. We did more than 150 different activities during the tour in all the different universities. We inspired more than 20,000 people, and the movement keeps going![363]

During interviews with volunteers, I often came back to the University Tour experience of 2018, as it definitely signed – by what many told me – a remarkable moment in the history of this Jordanian youth-led movement as well as one of the largest initiatives on the ground before restrictions imposed by Covid19 pandemic. In particular, I was interested in understanding the modalities through which HFS activists were able to overcome the traditional barriers and beliefs surrounding the university environment. This indeed, in Jordan, is everything but an aseptic space: on the contrary, as Cantini (2016) suggests, universities, and more in general the educational sector of the country, can be looked at as an "institution", namely a place which – despite being bodyless – have the semantic power to produce discourses of resistance, also inadvertently, thus contributing to create reality. Indeed, university campuses in Jordan are both an element of pride for the regime when compared to the same sector in neighboring countries and

> […] one of the principal *loci* in which some form of opposition to the regime might emerge, and therefore it is simultaneously sponsored and censored, developed and yet kept under tight control.[364]

In this sense, university campuses are therefore highly political in that their social actors, both males and females, daily engage in or contrast with socio-political practices at different levels. This happens for instance through strict gender segregation of spaces visible within the universities' courtyards, where boys and girls respectively spend their free time in same-gender groups, rarely mixing. Similarly, the faculty of choice also reflects the

[363] Interview with Mays al-Shūbakī, Old Town Amman, Amman, 30/10/2021.
[364] Daniele Cantini, *Youth and Education in the Middle East, Shaping Identity and Politics in Jordan*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York 2016, p. 23.

role of traditions and common beliefs in determining personal and professional pathways, with humanistic and scientific subjects being highly informed by gendered norms and therefore respectively chosen more by women in the first case, and by men in the second.

***Figure 10. The HeForShe Bus on October 2018, courtesy of HFS Arabic.***

Here, different political ideas and discourses affecting the country on various levels often collide, giving birth to heated debates among the numerous partisan groups existing on the Jordanian campuses. Additionally, the geographical areas in which university are placed also affects their internal social experience, as they hold a strong symbolic and historical meaning. Precisely in this sense, the Jordanian cabinet recently approved a bylaw that regulates partisan activities within universities, thus producing an intense controversy among students, professors, faculty members, and partisan leaders.[365] The highly politicized nature of the campus space in Jordan obviously makes it both a crucial and a problematic element of interaction for the activists involved. There, questions and debates around gender equality, *gbv*, and toxic masculinity are not easily addressable topics with local

[365] "New Jordanian Rules on Student Political Activities Divide Opinion", *Al-Fanar Media*, 17/12/2022. Retrieved from: https://al-fanarmedia.org/2022/12/new-jordanian-rules-on-student-political-activities-divide-opinion/ [Last Accessed 16/01/2023]; "Egypt: Woman stabbed to death by fellow student in 'revenge' attack", *Middle East Eye,* 10/08/2022. Retrieved from: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-college-student-stabbed-death-revenge [Last Accessed 16/01/2023].

students. Indeed, as the young volunteer Muhammad recalled about youth participation "[…] in the beginning, at least 70% of the students used to come only because of their teachers".[366] These issues are as truer as farther we get from the Amman epicenter:

> […] I would say that when we went to governorates out of Amman, where students didn't know what gender equality is or even never heard about feminism, giving the sessions in those areas was very dangerous […] being people there very conservative. It was dangerous because they had some instructions about us. But exactly in that area, I took my heart off and I said to myself "*I'm gonna do it, whatever the consensus*".[367]

Similarly, Layth highlighted how:

> […] going to the university and talking with the students on the field of course was not an easy journey, especially because at the beginning it was about sharing new concepts. Not all the students know what gender is. And coming from Jordan, a country where people really care about culture and traditions, they were [the students] skeptical. Sometimes, I got verbally and physically harassed at universities while doing the tour because a lot of people felt I was talking about something against the religion.[368]

Raghad's personal experience is also significant:

> […] universities are generally safe spaces, if we're talking about Amman. But outside Amman, it's a little bit harder. I studied in Karak and I studied here in Amman and I noticed a huge difference. The university there wasn't exactly that safe for me as a female, while a private university in the

[366] Interview with Muhammad, Madaba, 22/10/2021.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Interview with Layth, online, 30/12/2021.

> capital is way safer, which kind of portrays the amount of effort we do for private spaces compared to public schools.[369]

Quite paradoxically, despite representing a challenging environment for the activists, that of university is a crucial matter around which the need for debates and spreading knowledge seems now more necessary than ever; this is due in particular to the growing *gbv* episodes within the campuses, as shown by the two recent cases that shocked the Middle East last summer: one is that of the 21 years old, nursing student, Imān Arshīd, murdered at the University of Applied Sciences of Amman by a man who later committed suicide; the second is instead that of Salma Bahgat, a 20 years old media student, stabbed by a fellow boy at the al-Shorouk Academy in Egypt after having refused his advances.[370] Additionally, many social interactions within the Jordanian university environment are also highly informed by tribal linkages among the students, as the experience recalled by Muhammad suggests:

> […] a significant threat that we've received was at al-Zaythoona University [Amman], where one of our volunteers was trying to give his speech; unfortunately, he was stopped, harassed, and discriminated because gay. People in the audience started laughing and asking *"what are you here? Where did you come from? Don't talk to our girls"*. I had to step in and introduce myself by my family's and my tribe's name to avoid problems.[371]

The event of the University Tour was welcomed by students, in particular by the male ones, with different kinds of reactions towards the activists. Indeed, many of the young boys attending the activities on campuses used to be quite appalled by the idea of men volunteering for gender equality; often, volunteers found themselves being questioned by their male peers, especially from tribal and conservative areas, on the choice to support women's equality in such a public way and how they cope with religious

[369] Interview with Raghad, Amman, 24/11/2021.
[370] "Man fatally shoots Jordanian woman on university campus", *Al-Arabiya News*, Amani Hamad, 23/06/203. Retrieved from: https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2022/06/23/Man-fatally-shoots-Jordanian-woman-in-university-campus [Last Accessed 16/01/2023].
[371] Interview with Muhammad, Madaba, 22/10/2021.

prescriptions and stereotypes about gender roles once they do it. This initial skepticism received by many from their targeted audience relied upon a strict and wrongful correlation perceived by the students between equality discourses and sexuality, as Layth described:

> […] I discovered later that the key was in the words we used. At first, they thought we were talking about sex, something related only to the biological parts. So, they used to reply "no, God created us male and female. We are different in our bodies, not equal".[372]

Similarly for others, a young boy thriving and volunteering in public for gender equality is a "simp", someone who simply wants to get women's attention "[…] during our meetings or University Tour we had lots of people saying, *"ah, you're a simp!"* in front of the audience".[373] The international environment of this form of activism is another element characterizing the HFS Jordan experience. As the University Tour showed, the intervention methodology of the movement does not consist in working autonomously, but actually in engaging as much as possible with national official institutions, other CSOs, NGOs (both local and international) as well as international agencies operating on Jordanian soil. The final aim is to create an extensive and efficient network of intervention against *gbv* and for gender equality in the country, enhancing the capillarity, accessibility, and diversity of all the activities proposed. Precisely for this reason, HFS Jordan is part of the GBV-Sub Working Group (GBVSWG), created by UNHCR in 2014 and joined by more than 30 different NGOs, movements, and international organizations scattered throughout the Jordanian territory, in order to ensure the "prioritization of life-saving activities and gap-filling as well as disseminates guidance to enhance the quality of services"[374] for a variety of targets (men, women, refugees, children, employees, and others). Together with the sub-group, on December 2021, the boys and girls of the HFS Movement – today in its fourth phase – were among the promoters of a public event on the occasion of "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

[372] Interview with Layth, online, 30/12/2021.
[373] Interview with Muhammad, Madaba, 22/10/2021.
[374] See GBV Sub Working Group – Jordan, UNHCR portal. Retrieved from: https://data.unhcr.org/en/working-group/72 [Last Accessed 15/01/2023].

Campaign"[375] for that year, simultaneously held in five different locations (Amman, Mafraq, Irbid, Zaʿatarī Refugee Camp and Azraq Refugee Camp). HFS volunteers were among the activists participating in the Amman event, hosted by "Shams el-Balad", a co-working space and café in the very central neighborhood of Jabal Amman. The group indeed, alongside Plan International Jordan (PIJO) and the Institute for Family Health (IFH), involved participants on a whole training day organized around different and interesting moments: a public debate on the sub-theme "controlling behaviors: limiting my choices and my power",[376] the presentation of a musical video on the theme, as well as a self-defense class against physical harassment facilitated by a Syrian refugee trainee from IFH (see Fig. 12). On that occasion, HFS promoted the launch on digital platforms of a "Bingo" game against *gbv* (see Fig. 13). During this training session, a conspicuous number of people of different ages and coming from different backgrounds attended the event and actively engaged in all the activities proposed throughout the day. In particular, the training session against physical harassment was the moment of highest engagement of participants, both females and males, who interestingly stepped out on the stage altogether to learn the basics of self-defense and share personal experiences on the matter. What is more interesting is that the organizers didn't limit the possibility to train to the sole women present in the hall, but encouraged that of males too, highlighting that men's harassment is a real and serious problem as well, in particular when young boys and men address violence on the streets, trying to stop violent episodes in public.

[375] The 16days Campaign is celebrated yearly from the 25th of November - the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women - to 10th of December.

[376] The sub-theme was identified through the Focus Group Discussions (FGD), held by 11 organizations members of the GBV SWG "16 Days Campaign" taskforce.

***Figure 11. HeForShe volunteers on the stage, December 2nd, 2021 - Shams el-Balad, Amman.***

In this regard, the image coming back from the event, hosted under the patronage of the Swedish Ambassador in Jordan, Ms. Alexandra Raydmark, was a powerful moment for the deconstruction of what is usually seen on the streets of the Hashemite country, where street harassment and physical violence are everything but rare and often accepted as normal according to common beliefs. In this sense, the recent IMAGES Report/Jordan (2020), undertaken in partnership with University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS), Information and Research Center at King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) and Equimundo (former Promundo), revealed that 64% of surveyed men and 80% of surveyed women agree that women who dress provocatively deserve to be harassed.[377] Several other activities were organized around the question of harassment, both domestic and public, central to the HFS Jordan movement's approach.

[377] The country report is a project developed under the framework of the UN Women's regional programme 'Men and Women for Gender Equality'. See IMAGES Report - Jordan, p. 12. Retrieved from: https://haqqi.info/en/haqqi/research/understanding-masculinities-international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-jordan-0 [Last Accessed 16/01/2023].

***Figure 12. HFS volunteers participate in the self-defense training session. Courtesy of Muhammad Barakat. December 2nd, 2021, Shams el-Balad, Amman.***

***Figure 13. "Bingo Domestic Violence" flyer distributed during the event – 02/12/2021, Shams el-Balad, Amman.***

In December 2022, to celebrate International Women's Day, a freeze mob was organized by the volunteers, choosing the Mecca Mall of Amman

(the largest mega mall in Jordan) as the central location to launch this initiative (see Fig. 14 and 15). Using large spaces attended by mass of people is another pivotal element in HFS strategy, alongside public interest places like schools and universities, to reach a number of different social groups and diversify their actions. The event was held in partnership with SketShow Theatre Company, and volunteers – after four weeks of training with professional theatre actors – created freeze images through their bodies, representing *gbv* episodes and equality-related dynamics. Attending the event, the interest in the audience was palpable, as after the show several boys and girls, families, and groups, approached the activists and engaged in fruitful conversations about the images replicated and the meaning behind them.

The activism of HFS doesn't run out with public events or conferences within educational institutions. A great part of the movement's work is actually implemented online, particularly through social media apps. In this sense, since the beginning of its activism, HFS committed to ending gender inequalities not only within the social and physical sphere but online as well. To do so, the movement participates in the global campaign *WikiGap*.[378] Promoted since 2018 by the Sweden government on the occasion of International Women's Day, "the #WikiGapChallenge aimed to give voice to Women Human Rights Defenders, whose stories often go unheard, [...] to improve the gender imbalance in Wikipedia content and contributors".[379] In particular, the volunteers aim at strengthening the participation of women in the growth of the internet and in the sharing of knowledges online, celebrating great female role models through edited articles on the famous online library Wikipedia. So far, the *WikiGap* campaign reached the result of over 50,000 articles and more than 100 million views globally.

[378] WikiGap Campaign. Retrieved from: https://www.ohchr.org/en/get-involved/stories/wikigap-challenge [Last Accessed 16/01/2023].
[379] Ibid.

*Figure 14. HeForShe Freeze Mob, Mecca Mall – Amman, 22/03/2022.*

*Figure 15. Flyer distributed during the Freeze Mob at Mecca Mall, March 2022.*

The social media field is thus constantly implemented and renovated by HFS volunteers through a yearly media campaign, envisioned and implemented under the supervision of Mays al-Shūbakī, and different other activities aimed at spreading the news and contents on gender equality (video messages, Instagram posts, music), as well as co-opting new youth subjects within the movement. Since Covid19 irreversibly marked the lives and habits of thousands, the fight for leveling up the quality of gender discourse moved more consistently online, with a significant expansion of the field during and after the 2020 curfew imposed by the authorities globally. Within this field, the possibility to access knowledge highly intersects with different vertical areas, such as education (E-learning), small or mid-size businesses, and artificial intelligence-based gamification solutions, with the gaming sector, estimated to grow at a compound growth rate (CAGR) of 26,1% from 2022 to 2028.[380] In line with these considerations, Jordanian activism, and particularly that of HFS, also benefited from this successful area of development. One example in this sense is constituted by the game app "WeRise",[381] a game imagined and developed entirely by the young HFS activists in Jordan, but later shared globally, with the support of UN Women and the Kingdom of Netherlands. The game consists of little challenges around gender-related topics, building glossaries, and learning about prominent female figures of recent history, as well as a dedicated space that encourages players to discuss the subjects with the help of podcasts, competitions, news, articles, and other learning resources. Additionally, an event section promotes both national and international youth-led initiatives on gender equality. HFS promoted the launch of the app in 2021 through a series of virtual open days in partnership with Jordanian schools. The promotion and the implementation of the app in the Middle East today is under the leadership of Layth Abū Tāleb, recently appointed International Gamification Consultant for UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States,

[380] Gamification Market Forecast to 2028 - COVID-19 Impact and Global Analysis Report, The Insight Partners. Retrieved from: https://www.theinsightpartners.com/reports/gamification-market [Last Accessed 19/01/2023].

[381] "We mobilized 40,000 men and women who are ready to stand up for gender equality - The WeRise game and UN Women", *PocketGamer*, 21/01/2023. Retrieved from: https://www.pocketgamer.biz/interview/80690/we-mobilised-40000-men-and-women-who-are-ready-to-stand-up-for-gender-equality-the-werise-game-and-un women/?fbclid=IwAR2y9gn9D6Khp0kmd02xn9soeCVclgiLc3m6a7_h3Fyq72fw0mlW5hOzpBs [Last Accessed 24/01/2023].

who summarized the role of social media as "a great tool, an effective tool, a strong and powerful tool to deliver gender equality contents".[382]

## Theoretical basis and internal controversies

Besides being clearly ambitious, the activities of this heterogenous global movement strongly rely upon a tradition of *feminism (nisawiyya)* in its original meaning, namely – as described during the inaugural speech – "the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes".[383] Accordingly, as Watson herself was careful to clarify in 2014 at the UN inaugural speech:

> […] I decided I was a *feminist* and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word. Apparently, I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men, and unattractive. Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?[384]

This last question introduces one of the most controversial aspects of this research, as well as a critical component of that globalized activism that was earlier noted. Regarding this matter indeed, almost the totality of the volunteers I interviewed shared the same negative idea around feminism, considered more as an exclusionary and foreign label rather than a positive theoretical direction to be followed, thus positioning themselves – more or less consciously – in strong opposition with the original idea promoted by the global HFS movement. In this sense, during many of the interviews and focus groups, this word was often described as "extreme" and connotated by an aura of "outwardness", as something coming from outside and not applicable to the Jordanian social and religious context. Through the lens of "outwardness", the HFS Jordan group itself – although developed under the direction of a UN agency – is paradoxically considered existent only on local terms by most of its participant. This theoretical controversy was confirmed by the answer I

[382] Interview with Layth, online, 30/12/2021.
[383] Emma Watson, *HeForShe* inaugural speech.
[384] Ibid.

was given when I asked both Ibrahīm and Mays about their idea around the feminist concept: Ibrahīm, for example, made me notice in a very polite but shearing way that "no, I do not consider myself a feminist!".[385] He then proceeded to explain that feminism in Jordan is considered a "bad word", something you should not be proud of because it is a kind of activism that usually exclude men from the arena where rights and changes are at stake. The majority of those interviewed agreed on this extremely negative meaning of the word feminism and what it inherently means, especially once used in public: "you can be easily considered a man-eater", "the definition of feminism here in Jordan is very stigmatized", "I hate feminism", many activists, both males and females, suggested in a quite explanatory way. In other cases, this avoidance of the feminist label comes from a place of fear:

> […] Generally, people here in the Jordanian culture treat people who call themselves feminists poorly. Here, if you call yourself a feminist, you get bullied. So, people kind of try to avoid that, even if they do believe in it and all that feminism stands for them.[386]

As the young volunteer Jūd described:

> […] activism started to be challenging when I went to the university tour and I held the speech in my university. It was online. The hate messages I received afterward were a lot. Yeah, they were a lot. And I think at some point I thought that there's no reason to do this because it's too much. You wake up to ten messages every day telling you that you're the reason that the divorce rates are high, and *you feminists* are doing bad things and you want people to lose their religion. […] I don't like to be labeled. So that's part of why I don't call myself a feminist. I do believe that I'm an *ally* for gender equality in all of its forms. When we label something, it becomes extreme.[387]

Interestingly to note, the idea of "being labeled" – fostered also by other volunteers – is applied by activists when called *feminists* but not to its

[385] First informal meeting with HFS co-coordinators, Amman, 27/09/2021.
[386] Interview with Raghad, Amman, 24/11/2021.
[387] Interview with Jūd, Amman, 29/10/2021.

alternative term, that of *allies*. Again, in HFS volunteers' perspective, being referred to as "allies" stresses the idea of inclusion and cooperation inherently promoted by the movement. As the co-coordinators recalled, the concept of *feminism* was indeed one of the main topics the activists discussed when they first started their journey as HFS Jordan in 2015, mainly because many of the original participants did not agree on the common definitions proposed by the theory of feminism, seen as too radicals and surrounded by repulsion and mystification of men and masculinities, often epitomized as the only reason behind inequalities. One of the reasons behind these misconceptions comes to a certain extent from the Jordanian educational context, which deliberately avoid to address sensitive topics like sexuality, gender identity, or reproductive health, often considered visible products of the westernization of costumes in the country.

Accordingly, given the dismissal of *feminism* as a proper concept to describe the Jordanian movement's ideological perspective, remains to understand – if not this – what theoretical and ideological horizon are the activists engaging with. As almost all of my interlocutors made clear during our interviews and focus groups, the activities promoted by HFS can only be described under the umbrella definition of *equality* (*musāwāh)*, a much more comprehensive and inclusive word, useful to describe a form of activism that pays attention not only to women but on both female and male individuals without excluding anybody, also entailing a direct connection to Islam and its precepts of tolerance and respect. The main concepts and basics around gender equality have been generally internalized by many of the volunteers through the UN Women Online Training; most of them indeed often come from a place of complete lack of knowledge about core topics (i.e., the difference between sexuality and gender). Once asked about the learning process behind the choice to volunteer in HFS, Ibrahīm told me:

> […] I just got trainings. I didn't previously read anything about these matters. I hate books, but I got a lot of trainings with UN Women about gender equality, the difference between gender and sexuality, stereotypes, forms of *gbv*, and many other things. I kept studying from 2017 to this moment, but I'm still learning and taking trainings. So, basically...I didn't know anything about gender equality in the

> beginning and this is a bad indicator that we don't get this knowledge in school, for example.[388]

An online preliminary survey I let circulate online among youth and activists in September 2021 ultimately underlined and reinforced the general idea around the concept of feminism; indeed, once asked about activism commitment, one of the respondents answered:

> I'm not a feminist, and I am against some types of feminism. But I support gender equality matter which helps both genders to grow up. Feminism just supports females without caring about males.[389]

Interestingly to note, despite at least ¼ of my interlocutors professing to be devout Muslims and that their activism was directly inspired by the Islamic belief of equality, only a general and basic idea around Islamic teaching against violence, segregation, and inequalities emerged in our conversations: "Islam does care about gender equality", "there is nothing in my religion telling me that I have to be silent or accept discrimination"[390] or, as Ibrahīm had to say, "the first thing that we have to know is that Islam is the first to support women, is the first thing giving them rights and not steal them".[391] In addition, none of them have ever read or heard anything about Islamic Feminism and its crucial instances. The discussion on labels and definitions is also highly informed by the feeling, on the part of many young males, of 1) having been historically excluded and set aside from gender instances when promoted under the common definition of traditional feminism – namely the Western-born women's liberation movement asking for wider recognition of rights around abortion, pay gap, domestic and public violence, sexual and reproductive rights; 2) having been considered, by traditional feminism, the prime and fundamental cause of gender inequalities.[392] In this context, also the practical terminology of activism is impacted by this theoretical position: the vast majority of HFS volunteers indeed stressed the feminism/gender equality dichotomy by calling

[388] Ibid.
[389] Preliminary Online Survey on Masculinity, September 2021 – Google Modules.
[390] Interviews with HFS activists.
[391] Interview with Ibrahīm, 15/11/2021.
[392] See Chapter 1.

themselves not feminists, but *allies* of women and their battle for rights. According to Layth, one of the reasons behind the choice lies in the idea that "if I call myself feminist, I believe I'm showing the woman that they are weak, that they need more people to stand by their side".[393]

Such a detachment from feminist instances, meaning, and history can be read in line with a global backlash against the women's liberation movement and its related experiences. Indeed, more and more men worldwide share initiatives against what they perceive as a "men-eating" kind of feminism, creating and participating in activism and counter-movements that promote men's rights, heteronormative masculinity, and the defense of traditional family.[394] In this sense, while the non-involvement of HFS in this category is absolutely out of question, since it does not represent a counter-movement against feminism, many of its participants give a nod to these alternative narratives. The extent to which this personal endorsement is being pursued consciously or not remains an open question and object of study.

### A de-politicized activism

In line with these considerations, the excessive preoccupation with the terminology employed by the activists becomes a crucial device for understanding how globalization and neo-liberalism shaped activism in the Middle East and in the Global South as a whole in its most profound aspects, particularly that of youth unemployment. In an interesting article, Fraser (2013) analyses the role of feminism in the capitalistic era, arguing that its ambivalence has been resolved "in favor of liberal-individualist scenario".[395] For many scholars, this scenario is considered a *de-politicization* of the feminist movement within the MENA region, with autocratic, patriarchal

[393] Interview with Layth, online, 30/12/2021.

[394] For a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in the MENA region, see for example: Hande Eslen-Ziya and Margunn Bjørnholt, "Men's rights activism and anti-feminist resistance in Turkey and Norway", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 2022. doi: 10.1093/sp/jxac011. [Last Accessed 14/01/2023]; Funda Hülagü, "Organized Anti-Feminism in Turkey: A Quick Picture", Heinrich Böll Stiftung Institute, online. Retrieved from: https://gwi-boell.de/en/2020/08/03/organized-anti-feminism-turkey-quick-picture [Last Accessed 14/01/2023].

[395] "How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden - and how to reclaim it", *The Guardian,* Nancy Fraser, 14/10/2013. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal [Last Accessed 14/01/2023].

regimes taking over the movement's battles for the sake of legitimacy, promulgating small and controlled reforms to appease the masses, and subjecting the instances of feminism to free market-oriented logics. If in the recent past women have been highly emphasized as the main political actors by international observant, activists, and regimes too, today the situation has partially changed. As political and religious repressive regimes grow, youth and women are less prone to mobilize as political actors in traditional ways. One of the reasons lies in the tendency of activist's substrate to subject itself to capitalistic constraints that force them to rely on NGOs and international agencies to receive fundings for their activities, campaigns, awareness sessions, training, and so on. In this sense, donors, international investors, and project-oriented intervention strategies represent a large part of today's Middle Eastern civil society. As previously seen, this is reflected also in the growing presence of social and cultural activism in the region, with small groups of people working and focusing on single-theme activities that hardly engage and intersect with the political field in its traditional sense (mass street protests, political parties).

The experience of HFS volunteers perfectly pertains to this process of *de-politicization* and *NGO-ization* of activism in many ways. In general, most of my informants openly declared the "apoliticality" of their activism, conversely stressing the idea of "raising awareness" and "submitting papers" to governmental institutions instead of calling to strike or protests in the streets:

> […] we don't work with politics; we work with people trying to change their minds on crucial matters by *raising awareness.* We also implement *partnerships* […] we *submit* our *al-awrāq al-niqāshiyya*, [discussion papers]. We write proposals and ideas and then we *apply*, so they can *evaluate* and incorporate them within their future activities and *plans*.[396]

The movement undoubtedly represents today an effective example of how international agencies and donors constitute the financial, theoretical, and operational basis for activism in many global-South countries. Terminology is just one of the signs of this process of detachment and re-

[396] See interview with Mays al-Shūbakī, Amman, 30/10/2021.

signification of the women's rights movements within their contemporary activism strategy; the volunteers, by considering themselves "allies" instead of "feminists", highly de-politicizes the meaning behind youth activism, securing them from directly engaging with the most controversial – or "extreme", to use the word of a volunteer – issues debated within the women's liberation movement. An example of this de-politicization coming from the field-work is that, on numerous occasions, my informants gave away the belief that a gender-equality movement like HFS Jordan cannot be open to non-heteronormative subjectivities. In some cases, this is explained only as a matter of time, as it "is not an option at the moment because Jordan is not ready to deal with these discourses";[397] for other volunteers, this rather is a voluntary and convinced exclusion of LGBTQI+ community both from targeted audience and possible volunteering basin for their gender disruptive meaning. Again, as in the case of feminism, topics such as homosexuality, transsexuality, or queerness are generally learned but later translated through a local lens that undersize and excludes them. As Rennick (2019) describes, this apoliticality of youth movements "can be read as a discursive device that is utilized both to distinguish themselves and to protect their work in the particularly repressive contexts of the post-2011 period".[398] According to the scholar, this doesn't necessarily mean a total lack of political perspective on the part of the young generations, but more a strategic use of their political knowledge and power. Actually, as emerged from the field work, criticism towards the regime and political perspective on Jordan's future are nonetheless visible constituencies of youth involvement, as vivid analysis of parliament, institutions, royal family, and political elite were common references in many of our discussions. Another evidence of this ongoing process in Jordan, and in the MENA region as a whole, is the significant growing use of English as a second language for activism. Almost all the volunteers I interviewed speak and often employ this language throughout their activism; in particular, the social-media campaigns of HFS are always presented both in Arabic and English.

The reasons behind this decrease in political activism are many and lie not so much in youth decisional laziness, but mostly in a regional MENA context characterized by a massive and unstoppable presence of international NGOs and governmental agencies as well as a systemic lack of political representation and employment opportunities. As Gordner (2019) described

[397] The source asked to remain anonymous.

[398] S.A. Rennick, "Beyond Mass Protests…", p. 87.

by analyzing the Tunisian context, "the "projectization" and "professionalization" of welfare, development, and democratization often serves to depoliticize and distracts from the imposition of neoliberal modes of governmentality".[399] HFS is precisely the case in question: the movement's efforts, despite being undoubtedly directed at the amelioration of women's and men's rights in the Jordanian country, do not aim at pushing for crucial changes in a strictly political sense. In this regard, the HFS activists never engaged in street protests and did not attend sit-ins in front of powerful political sites such as the parliament, ministries, or other symbolic buildings as in the case of other *bottom-up*, informal activist groups. Moreover, they neither plan to. Rather than threatening the *status quo* and pushing for reforms from the ground, HFS volunteers aim at collaborating with governments and official authorities from a complementary spot. More often, the economic reliability behind the giants of international cooperation is indeed one of the main factors prompting young Arab youth to mobilize in these soft, democratic ways. In this sense, for many volunteers, the "NGO system" represents more the guarantee of a secure job and fixed income than a tool for actual political change. Accordingly, despite strongly believing in the mission of HFS and definitely contesting the lack of crucial reforms in their country, for young boys and girls the UN Women-led movement firstly represents an extremely relevant opportunity to enter the international working arena from the backdoor. As proof of the relevance and economic return of the civil society sector, it is enough to say that for the year 2021, the European Union has disbursed 250 million in micro-financial assistance (MFA) to Jordan.[400]

These considerations help us understand to what extent the economic crisis and the lack of trust towards local institutions is hitting hard on many Jordanian youths, who often seek to start a career within the same international agencies in which they started their activism as volunteers or trainees. Following this picture, it is understandable why many of my informants used to work or are currently working for a variety of western international agencies in Jordan (UN Women to UNHCR, UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF, International Red Cross, and many others). As Layth recalled during our interview:

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[399] Matt Gordner, "Youth Politics in Tunisia: Comparing Land/Labor, Leftist Movements, and NGO-ized Elites", *Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, POMEPS, Vol. 36(1), 2019, p. 15.

[400] See European Commission, Official Website. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3787 [Last Accessed 17/01/203].

> […] the UN Women's Country Office in Jordan contacted me. They asked what I knew about the HFS movement because actually HFS was launched by the UN woman. So, I give them all the information that I knew by doing my own research before I *sign up* for this movement. And after this, I *applied for an internship* with the UN Women's Country Office in Jordan. I applied for this internship and I started *working* with them as a Coordinator for Arabic HeForShe in Jordan.[401]

Today Layth, as previously seen, is International Gamification Consultant for UN Women, coordinating the expansion of the "WeRise" mobile App in the MENA region, especially in Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt. Alongside, after a long experience within UN Women as volunteer, Ibrahīm became Field Monitor for UNICEF in Jordan. Similarly, one informant started to work UNFPA in Amman. If, as understood through the description of Schwedler (2012), protests in Jordan are affected by spatiality, we can also say, in a reversed reading, that spatiality – in the capital Amman in particular – is strongly affected by the above-described processes of NGO-ization and "projectization" of civil society. Regarding this, once asked about the biggest challenge of his activism, Ibrahīm replied:

> […] the economic side. There are many events and activities that I didn't attend because I don't have enough money for transportation or something like that. This is a big issue, not only for me, it's not just about me. There are many guys, there are many youths like me in other areas of the country who cannot participate. We are thinking about what we can do in the near future to solve the problem.[402]

The geographical element appears relevant in this sense, as most of the NGOs and agencies' offices are located in central, upper-class neighborhoods of Amman, far from crucial targets (youth, unemployed, refugees, tribes) but definitely near the core economic and political institutions of the country.

[401] Interview with Layth, online, 30/12/2021.
[402] Interview with Ibrahīm, Amman, 15/11/2021.

### 4.2.1. Masculinities at stake: the case of Ahmad

As seen by the contributions of many informants, skepticism towards male activism for gender equality is everything but unusual within the Jordanian society. This possibly stems from different reasons, mostly ascribable to the reading of the socio-political context traced in the previous chapters: 1) traditions, tribal values, and common beliefs in terms of basic freedoms and responsibilities make it harder for men to step out of their comfort zone, hardly questioning their own gender roles for fear of receiving internal forms of discrimination within their own male social group; 2) lack of education and basic knowledge around gender-related topics and issues, with strong theoretical misconceptions and overlapping of meanings as the case of gender/sex shows. In this sense, as Ibrahīm suggested, "gender equality should be implemented more in school, in the education sector, because all of us know that children are the base for change".[403] Accordingly, the fear of reversing the hegemonic discourse through alternative views of *ally* masculinity represents the biggest issue for HFS activism, as if addressing counter-narratives within institutional contexts or directly engaging in gender equality activism may produce as a direct result an emasculation of the subject involved; 3) fear of exclusion from the masculine-dominated social circle if engaging in gender equality activism and consequent loss of the role of breadwinner and provider for the female counterparts.

Concordantly, it is inevitable to ask ourselves what is the difference between HFS activists' masculinity and that of their non-activist peers in the contemporary context of the Hashemite country. First of all, one of the central beliefs of the HFS movement's volunteers is that men, although on different degrees with respect to women, should be consciously recognized as subjected to the same pressures imposed by patriarchal society on women. In particular, psychological pressure regarding the "performance" of their masculine gender role is considered one of the most draining weights for the vast majority of boys and men, who are not always able to recognize, analyze and understand this evidence. Arguably, the activism of young male generations involved in gender-equality initiatives represents the most efficient tool for boys and men to look at their behaviors as both producers

[403] Interview with Ibrahīm, Amman, 15/11/2021.

and products of patriarchal society. As Sūsān al-Hilū suggested in our first conversation, "if many things are expected from women, for men it can be as much as difficult".[404] Even if women in patriarchal societies carry – without any doubt – the heaviest burden of gender disparity on their shoulders, it is difficult to avoid some considerations about what being a man in the 21st century Jordan means, where patriarchal pillars and traditional values represent the cultural basis for the social and private life of those into account.

In particular, as seen in Chapter three, the private nature of the "honor system" and its deep-rooted presence on the local level of Jordan is an example of how the male claim of control implies to some extent psychological and social consequences for men as well, fostered by the collective imagery, the silence of the public opinion and law anachronism, all elements which still contribute to feeding the narrative of hegemonic, dominant narrative on men and masculinity. Nowadays, it is hard to deny the burden of respectability, virility, and strength on men's mental health, constantly alimented by the "honor-shame" binomial, the need to prove their masculinity, as well as the burden of economic independence. Accordingly, men within Jordanian society are compelled by several expectations, thus accepting to engage – more or less consciously – in compliant behaviors and mechanisms which often produce, in turn, other gender inequalities. Failing in their role as female guardians and family breadwinners, as well as not performing their masculine gender role in a collectively accepted way (both in inter and intra-gender relationships), are the biggest disgrace to personal credibility. As a last resort, some also accept the idea of physically eliminating their own blood relatives, perceived as the object of dishonor, to avoid the unsustainability of shame.

Under these circumstances, the reality of gender roles and expectations in a contemporary patriarchal society like that of Jordan may result far more intricated and entangled than one can suppose. In this sense, the interview I held with Ahmad, a 25-years old HFS activist from Amman, epitomizes exactly this complexity, with a clear grey zone existing between Ahmad's need to perform his compliant, heteronormative masculinity and the choice of being an activist for gender equality in HFS. Arguably, the two things can coexist more frequently than expected. In this sense, as Connell states:

[404] First meeting with Sūsān al-Hilū, Amman, 27/09/2021.

> […] to recognize more than one kind of masculinity is only a first step. We have to examine the relations between them. […] A focus on the gender relations among men is necessary to keep the analysis dynamic, to prevent the acknowledgment of multiple masculinities collapsing into a character typology.[405]

Following these considerations, Ahmad's story starts from his struggle within a toxic, macho environment, while contemporarily being the only male brother to four sisters, and what he had to give up to defend them, their reputation, and that of the whole family:

> […] During the last three years, I got appointed by a Ministry[406] for a job. Almost at the beginning of that same period, there was a strike here in Jordan by the workers' unions against the government, which eventually became way more political than expected, dealing with more than just workers' rights. At that time, I participated in the strike, strongly believing in what they were protesting for, the need for a higher salary. But when I saw the protests becoming more political, in my opinion, I shifted my position from agreeing with the strike as part of that community to calling myself out. So, at that time, my sisters, me, and my mother went through some difficult times and days because we started receiving a lot of messages, bad messages, and a lot of threats because of what happened with the strike…they thought I was against the workers' union. Imagine a man against 10,000 men. Now imagine it in a bigger situation, where society and unions are against the government, but you, a worker yourself, are not. It was a really difficult time for me. [407]

From the specific experience recalled through the story of Ahmad, the social structure in which a form of dominant hegemonic masculinity first

[405] R. Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity". In: *Masculinities*, 2nd ed., University of California Press, Oakland 2005, p. 9.
[406] Ahmad asked to not share informations about the Ministry, the kind of job and the specific workers' union in which he militated for fear of personal repercussions.
[407] Interview with Ahmad, Old Town, Amman, 30/10/2021.

emerged was that of workers' unions, a social dominion where corporativism often overtakes one's personal will, and which configures itself not as a place of absolute hegemony – as working-class men do not necessarily equate the hegemonic model – but more as the place where subordinate and marginalized masculinities intersects with other social inequalities, in this case in particular class inequalities (the working-class category dispossessed of its salary). The case of Ahmad rises some observations in this sense: arguably, Ahmad's self-exclusion from the group's political claims against the Jordanian government – what he calls *more political* – put him in a condition of marginalization from his own group of belonging, with whom he shared until that moment not only the working environment and institutional reference but also his male gender performance, particularly during the strike. Precisely the gender configuration within the protests is highlighted, in Ahmad's narration, by the idea that were not "the workers" seeking revenge against him, but "10,000 men", stressing that women were not a constitutive subject in this collective event, highly characterized by toxic and intimidating behaviors. Significantly, in the words of Ahmad, the tool of threats was used against him by directly appointing his female relatives, his sisters, and his mother. Formally, Ahmad found himself in what Connell (1987) identifies as a form of "marginalized masculinities", namely those subjects internally discriminated against on the basis of unequal relations in terms of class, race, age, or ethnicity. Indeed, taking the choice to leave the protests caused him to be ostracized and perceived as a danger by the other men; the group, who saw in him an individual alienated by the class they were representing, consequently enacted a form of intra-gender discrimination or "internal hegemony". As Ahmad's story proceeds, more intimate questions arise:

> […] So, my sister said to me *"that's because of you, because of your situation, because of your beliefs. If you really love us as you are saying to us daily and you want to protect us from everything, don't put yourself in a situation where there are a lot of criticism, fights, or controversies"*. Such an experience taught me that I don't want to enter a situation where my sisters' social profiles like Facebook, Instagram, etc. may be known, reviewed, or controlled. In that specific case, people thought *"this guy is attacking us, saying we are bad workers! So, we will send messages to his sisters to pull him out of the situation that he's taking in"*. This is something I will never ever forget

> and of course, taught me to be in a safe situation where I am alone. Also, I promised my sisters that personal stuff and personal things that happened to us during our childhood and when we were kids, will never be public. […] So yes, all of those things that I did mention affected me in some ways, so I want to protect them.[408]

In particular, Ahmad's story epitomizes the consequences of toxic and internal hegemonic masculinity on the intimate and private levels:

> […] as an example, when men fight in my village, I don't even think about entering into any fights with them. I can't do that at the end of the day. I totally believe in the idea that I can't save the world alone.[409]

Indeed, after this episode, Ahmad – whose personal story is filled with numerous other experiences of intimate violence and toxic masculinity which he asked not to be shared – decided to join the HFS movement because *less political* and risky than previous experiences: "with HFS I don't feel alone, I'm not in my village anymore, where I definitely can't stand in front of 10,000 men saying they are wrong".[410] Once asked about the choice to join a movement like HFS and become a volunteer for gender equality, he replied:

> […] this is actually something that makes me sad. I don't like having to be an activist. Of course, I am one and I believe in it, but when I go back home tonight and I'll take public transportation, if I see a man harassing a girl, I would not go get myself in the middle of a fight. Not because I'm weak, I can do it, but because I do want to be in a safe place. As I said, I can't save the whole world because I'm barely getting myself back to normal again.[411]

[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid.

Listening to his story, different levels intersect at the same time: first and foremost, the need to step out and enjoy *mild* forms of activism for gender equality in order to protect his family; in this sense, as previously seen, the a-political activism enacted by HFS is a device to avoid entering critical questions in highly repressive contexts, therefore partially in contrast with his previous experiences of street protests and strikes. Ahmad's urge to be in a safe environment and take part in forms of community and youth-led activism that will eventually produce significant changes for the future of his sisters collide with his past experiences, signed by trauma and pain. As seen, the apoliticality of activism in today's Jordan reflects different needs, from economic to intimate ones. Being the only man in charge of financially providing for his family, put Ahmad in the condition to recalibrate his activism and eventually enter a safer space he can also benefit personally. Secondly, the need to avoid entering into more *political* forms of activism translates also into the need to reaffirm his male gender role in the social environment in a non-violent way. Indeed, as he described me during our conversation,

> […] a lot of men are coming to me telling me that my sisters should wear *ḥijāb*, that I shouldn't hug them and be loving with them; so, they recently started criticizing and spreading bad rumors about me, saying I am not *a real man*. In Arabic they call me "*mu'annath*", it means I am not a man in their opinion. I heard this a lot and I still hear it. So, I keep myself away. I just say to all of them, just leave me alone, leave my sisters. We are not requesting anything from you, we don't depend on you financially. I used to try to convince them more, but at the end of the day, I know I won't change their mind.[412]

Ahmad's story is probably one the heaviest I collected during the fieldwork research conducted in Amman. All the events that marked his life, many of which he asked me not to report, are experiences of severe psychological, physical, and economic violence at the expense of a young man who, having grown up in a patriarchal and conservative social

[412] Ibid.

environment (a small, village in the Irbid governorate) in poor economic conditions, had to rearrange his personal ambitions, both in the political sphere of activism and in his private everyday life, giving up also to the idea of getting married or leaving his household to live autonomously. Under these circumstances, HFS undoubtedly offered him an opportunity to better navigate his situation, which himself defines conflictual:

> […] To summarize it for you, I do want to be in a place where my voice is heard […] but at the same time, I'm done with all the battles that I went through because I am a man.[413]

This story helps to shed light on less-known experiences of subordinated and marginalized masculinities within the activism setting of the HFS movement in Jordan and to deconstruct some of the simplistic theoretical assumptions on what being a man in the MENA region today means. Ahmad's experience in this sense represents both the need and will of young generations to rearrange their ideas about being a male and "do" it in a highly patriarchal environment, as well as the ability to maintain a certain degree of hegemony as males: if on the one side indeed the traditional masculine behaviors are expressively avoided, on the other Ahmad still searches for a space to exert his brotherhood role, although in a less hegemonic way, forced by the burden of duties towards his family. As he had to say:

> […] what my mother uses to tell me is that we can die and leave this word, not expecting anything else, only when all of my sisters get married.[414]

Masculinity doesn't come costs free: as seen, Ahmad's personal ambitions and preoccupations are entirely avoided in favor of the family's good, to the point that his life is considered just a temporary situation until all of his sisters get married. In this sense, the story here recalled opens up also to other less explored questions in the Jordanian context, in particular the efforts of civil society and institutions to prioritize mental health among the

[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.

youngest, providing them with specific and professional support to navigate challenging experiences and contexts.

# Conclusions.
## *Positive honor: the future of gender equality in Jordan*

The research here proposed tried to delineate an exhaustive picture of contemporary Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and its different social actors, focusing in particular on the youth, male component and its receiving of patriarchal, traditional values such as honor and shame. In Chapter one, the work tried to delineate the interesting role of masculinity within emerging fields of analysis, in particular, the Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) and queer studies. As previously seen, by the mid-21st century, these subjects have left the anonymity and the traditional essentialization operated around their roles as partners, brothers, fathers, or as Islamic terrorists and violent individuals when addressed in the Middle Eastern context, in order to reach a new level of inquiry on the part of different fields of study, from sociology and anthropology to psychology and security studies. In this sense, the Jordanian context, in which part of these new subjects of interest emerged, has been described in its historical and symbolic meaning throughout Chapter two, in order to delineate what forces and identitarian revendications shaped the contemporary political and social reality of the Hashemite country, starting from the mandate period, with the creation of the Emirate of Transjordan, until today. In doing so, the present work sought to describe that process of both *continuity* and *change* characterizing the Kingdom of Jordan, not only from a political point of view but most explicitly from the socio-cultural one.

Among the constitutive elements of Jordanian society mapped by the research, there are for example the State-sponsored process of inclusion/exclusion of its tribal component, through which today the promotion of a common national discourse is enhanced. Since the early 2000s indeed, alongside a reformist project aimed at positioning itself at the core of the international political and financial arena, the Hashemite Kingdom started to build and spread a public discourse of "Jordanian identity", useful to reinforce and replicate what Köprülü defined "a never-ending process of nation-building".[415] Part of this nationalist narrative is on the one side based

[415] N. Köprülü, *Minoritization and Identities in Jordan*, Online Seminar organized by the Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 15/03/2022, personal notes of the author.

on the idea of belonging to the wider, over-arching Hashemite tribe, while on the other gives a nod to neo-liberal, capitalistic rationales through a modern "tourist-directed rhetoric".[416] This, in turn, fosters a form of "selling" tribalism as a consumer product for foreigners and tourists, strengthening the national identity discourse in the eyes of both the regional neighborhoods and the international community.

Accordingly, tracing a historical profile of the country through its crucial turning points helped understand and clarify how traditions and tribal values are translated into the modern reality of Jordanian citizens, continuing to exist both within physical and online spaces, in particular in the everyday gender experience of new generations of Jordanians. In this sense, tribalism and traditions in recent years came to be not only the key elements to trace back the history of the country in the past but also a cultural horizon and intimate heritage for many who today dialogically rely on it to describe their national affiliation in front of the complex regional context experience, waved by growing insecurities, economic frustration, and endemic unemployment. Although undoubtedly reinterpreted in a less sharp way with respect to the previous generations, elements like tribal affiliation and traditions are indeed employed by youth to navigate both an uncertain and growingly coercive social context. For example, this use of tribalism as a coping strategy in specific contexts was evident in Muhammad's case, who eventually resorted to its family affiliation to avoid problems in a traditional district during the University Tour of 2018.

In line with the regional trend, in the last decades the country has been characterized by authoritarianism and repressive methods enacted by the Jordanian regime, in part the result of new and modern geopolitical and economic factors. In this context, authoritarianism is visible – with different degrees of severity – on various levels of society, not only through the application and use of long-dated laws and juridical devices that understand *gbv* and honor-related crime as acceptable or even necessary but also through a growing militarization of everyday spaces on the part of the ruling power, in line with a general regional tendency to securitization from external threats. As seen, this process actually produces more internal instability than expected, putting the regime in a condition of perpetual "security dilemma", as Ryan (2009) described. In this sense, the final goal of legitimacy relentlessly pursued since 1921 by the royal family appears hardly achievable

[416] L. Layne, *Home and Homeland...*, p. 12.

only through *top-down* strategies in Jordan, given the multitude of identities claiming their rights within the social sphere of the country.

To overcome the problem of recognition, the ruling power operates therefore through a nostalgic celebration of the father figures of the country, oriented at instilling values of power, strength, and virility in their mildest form. This strategy – to use Culcasi's theorization – fall into a form of so-called "warm" nationalism, aimed at nothing but a new way of building and reinforcing the existing hegemonic discourse. It is in this context that social media and the web opened the space for different forms of interaction and offered new opportunities for organized mobilizations, and it is again in this "third space" that the Jordanian youth emerged as a new category of dissent, informed and inspired by its predecessors from 2011 protests, and equally prone to collectively mobilize for its future on crucial matters like gender equality, environment, and freedom of expression. Precisely the gender equality matter appears to be one of today's most critical issues addressed both locally and globally, as the adoption of SDGs No. 5 by the international community in 2015 and the issuing of different international agreements and conventions recalls (CEDAW, 1979; Beijing Declaration, 1995; Istanbul Convention, 2014; Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality, 2019). In this sense, transcending the traditional reading of Arab Muslim masculinity operated by Western scholars in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 as well as the binomial *victims/heroes* employed during Arab springs of 2011 to depict youth involved in the protests, the relationship between this new generation of young men and their gender role within the Jordanian patriarchal society inevitably becomes a constructive and worthwhile domain of interest for research.

Indeed, the MENA region as a whole is witnessing nowadays a growing presence of new forms of "cultural" activism oriented at achieving gender equality, both in the forms of grassroots activism and local NGOs as in that of international agencies' promoted campaigns. This predominant youth component of society represents at the same time a resource as well as a threat to regimes, given the lack of internal redistribution of resources and welfare, one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the region, and a general disenchantment towards institutions and active participation in the official decision-making processes. In this general context of marginalization from political spaces, NGOs and international agencies usually play an interesting role in filling the voids left by politicians and official institutions, trying to create opportunities to address core social

issues and questions, ranging from environmental development to gender equality, from tech transition to entrepreneurship. Influenced by a new awareness of social justice and inspired by the 2011 events, the end of corruption, and the need to expose and bring to light sustainable issues in the countries, many young boys and girls took part in these different local and internationally promoted initiatives, also in the attempt to avoid economic and social marginalization.

Among these groups, *HeForShe* Solidarity Movement probably represents the most important and effective experience of activism in the Hashemite country, with hundreds of volunteers operating in Amman and many more mobilized online throughout the nation. The strategies, efforts, and activities implemented by the UN Women-led group well represent the growing need, on the part of youth, to shed light and take to the surface complex and less analyzed questions that affect their everyday gendered experiences in a highly patriarchal society. Accepting and encouraging men's active participation within a historically women-dominated space like that of gender equality activism means reversing long-lasting, extremely harmful beliefs that permeated the Jordanian – and significantly the whole Mediterranean – society for centuries. According to the IMAGES MENA Report (2017), Arab men are in this sense directly subjected to different levels of familial, social, and economic distress that affect their mental health and stability to different degrees. For instance, the research revealed that 72% of interviewed men experience their role of family's breadwinners as a huge burden; 44% of men in the Middle East and North Africa would like to have the option of parental leave for fathers.[417] In line with these considerations, during our interview, Mays, HFS co-coordinator suggested that:

> […] as HFS volunteers, we don't work only on women's rights. We also thrive for men's rights. They have the right to choose what they can wear, as pink isn't for girls only for example; they need to have the choice to study whatever they want. Like, I don't know…interior design isn't something necessarily girly. Again, when the mother gives birth, she can take two months of paid leave from work, while the father takes three days only. He's a new daddy, it doesn't make sense. New

[417] IMAGES Report - MENA Region 2017, UN Women and Promundo.

> dads deserve paternal leave also. They need to see their baby and spend time with her/him.[418]

The presence and numbers of activities of HFS in Jordan in recent years are just some examples reporting an ever-changing situation, much more complex than the traditional and reductive representation of Arab Middle Eastern masculinity operated by Western scholars and media, which can be analyzed and interpreted in a multi-faceted way. First of all, the experience of masculinity in Jordan is more than an individual one: it is, first and foremost, a collective experience filtered and informed by that sense of belonging which, according to Connell, "is revealed not merely as individual attributes or styles, but as a collective agency, constrained and enabled by social structures".[419] In this context, it is possible to say that HFS male volunteers have access to more practical and theoretical tools that help them to deconstruct their own beliefs in terms of equality, sexuality, and gender both in the private and the public spaces of their everyday life; additionally, this position also reflects in their attempt to galvanize and share the process with other young boys and girls not involved in any form of activism or not interested in the cause of gender equality. Accessing knowledge, participating in training sessions, and meeting international and local experts and stakeholders for gender equality constitute for the young activists both an educational basin and a tool for contrasting socio-economic marginalization. On a more intimate level, among the reasons behind male engagement with HFS activism there is – as came out from numerous interviews – the private familial environment: this indeed often plays a central role in paving the way to future activism of children who, inspired by the support – and in some cases, by the activism itself – of one or both the parents, are more prone to the idea of engaging themselves in these contexts. Many of my interlocutors fall into this category. Moreover, being an activist for gender equality also helped their relatives and closest friends to rearrange their habits, with fathers engaging, often for the first time, in household duties and mothers enjoying more freedom than before. Under these circumstances, it is possible to conclude that HFS male participation is undoubtedly contributing to a radical change of the patriarchal Jordanian society, with young boys and men giving the word *honor* a new and positive meaning; this, to put it in Muhammad's words, can be well summarized as follows: "as an activist for gender equality

[418] Interview with Mays al-Shūbakī, Amman, 30/10/2021.
[419] J. Messerschmidt and M. Messner, *Gender Reckonings…*, p. 36.

I must say: if you have *honor*, you have to defend the concept of being a human".[420] The number of men and women mobilized by the HFS group in Jordan and the several initiatives carried out during the last six years, are the sign of a growing belief of youth in the gender equality matter, considered as both an element of democratization for the country but also as an opportunity of empowerment for both new generations of Jordanian men and women.

Conversely, some motivations behind the decision to embark on activism and the outcomes of this activism itself may be more blurred than expected: as the research suggested, participation in gender-equality initiatives does not always come voluntarily; in particular, youth – both males and females – are more prone to support gender-equality activism as well as forms of mobilization involving other crucial matters when there is the possibility of a concrete benefit, particularly in forms of social status improvement; to put it in the words of the activists, "youth participate when they can gain something concrete from it in a short period of time".[421] This idea partially reflects the question of career opportunities behind activism within international agencies and NGOs. Arguably, if the activism of HFS puts Jordan in relation with a global movement for gender equality, helping to recognize extremely positive aspects of contemporary youth in Jordanian society, at the same time it allows us to debunk less visible consequences of neo-liberalization and so-called "NGO-ization" of the Global-South. As Gordner (2019) described in his study of Tunisian NGOs, this process of youth work-force cooptation on the part of big international actors "became a sub-culture in itself replicating a "Silicon Valley" model"[422] impregnating the "NGOs and youth organizations with neoliberal values and discourses".[423] This neo-liberal tendency to dominate the Middle Eastern civil society space inevitably produces a number of flaws and fails: as a remarkable example, HFS generally privileges the urban areas to the sub-urban or rural ones, almost exclusively promoting the activists' training and meetings in Amman; accordingly, even though part of its activism is carried out in some marginal areas of the country, a large part of the most marginalized sectors of society are excluded by its activities, thus perpetuating "developmental unevenness in access and assistance".[424] More explicitly, this unevenness is evident in the

[420] Interview with Muhammad, Madaba, 22/10/2021.
[421] First informal meeting with the co-coordinators, 29/09/2021.
[422] M. Gordner, *Youth Politics in Tunisia…*, p. 15.
[423] Ibid.
[424] Ibid.

question of feminism and the general concern about the terminology employed to describe the activism of young Jordanians, revealing the controversial nature of this global movement operating in a traditional and conservative context. There is confusion, indeed, around crucial concepts which are not easily incorporated by all the activists, thus creating a gap between the realm of ideologies (NGOs and international initiatives) to which their activism refers and that of internal, personal beliefs, in part related to cultural and pre-existent norms coming from tradition (feminism and gender equality as symbols of a foreign political agenda). This happens for example through some volunteer acceptance of religious prescriptions around relationships' control and coercive behaviors towards women's freedom, something appearing in contrast with the mission of their activism and the very same idea of Islam as a means of equality and acceptance.[425] This partial incommunicability between the local and the global represents one of the biggest questions and the crucial elements currently jeopardizing the very nature of the globalized, internationally funded form of activism promoted by HFS within the Hashemite Kingdom.

From another point of view, if on the one side volunteers thrive to make matters such as gender pay gap, women's empowerment, and mental health familial concepts for everyone, also helping other youths to deconstruct their own beliefs on their gender role in a patriarchal society, on the other, they enact to some extent a form of *compliant* masculinity, namely that kind of masculinity which, despite not embodying hegemony "yet through practice realize some of the benefits of unequal gender relations and consequently when practiced help sustain hegemonic masculinity".[426] A good example may come from Ahmad's experience: this indeed can be read within the framework of hegemonic masculinity as a discursive practice, as defined by Howson and Hearn (2019), which always exists in relation to an antagonistic "other". Accordingly, exploring the "otherness" of Ahmad's role – who abandoned a space considered hegemonic (that of workers' unions) to enter that of HFS movement – every essentialization of masculinity should be overcome. In this sense, his deprecation of direct engagement against street harassment, for example, although not readable as a direct exercise of power in a strict sense, still represents a form of unconscious complicity with the

[425] In five cases, my informants suggested that is good for the family to have the final say on the daughter partner's choice, in order to avoid divorce.

[426] J. Messerschmidt, "The Salience of Hegemonic Masculinity", *Men and Masculinities* Vol. 22(1), 2019, p. 86.

hegemonic model. The reason behind Ahmad's position comes, as previously seen, from fear, economic needs, or the necessity to navigate a life full of challenges and difficulties posed by the patriarchal environment in which he is called to behave as a man. Of course, this consideration does not take away the positive meaning behind his engagement in the HFS movement and those of other male activists but rather highlights how far more intricate, blurred experiences of maleness can exist in relation to the hegemonic model and the quest for gender equality, fighting against and contributing to it at the same time. Moreover, if fear of personal repercussions by society is often one of the reasons behind complicity, I argue that this is also fostered on some levels from the very nature of international agencies' promoted activism, which through their corporate-oriented and pragmatic methodologies support mild forms of dissent which take the activists outside the political dominion, that of the streets, the squares, and the institutional symbols, thus disempowering the very message behind it.[427]

The tendency to the *de-politicization* of activism is most importantly seen through the exclusion of crucial subjectivities from operational targets, particularly all those experiences of *subordinate* masculinities who do not conform to the hegemonic model. The LGBTQI+ community is in this sense representative of this group, as it is not officially embedded within the activities of HFS Jordan.[428] This exclusion, representing an additional jarring element for the correct enhancement of youth mobilization and contrasting violence in Jordan, comes more in the form of not prioritizing and not addressing specifically related contents for the LGBTQI+ community than as a direct ban or homophobic behaviors, also as a strategical avoidance of repressive repercussions. Still though – as some of my LGBTQI+ informants had to tell me – the first consequence is that none of them ever considered openly talking about their sexual orientation or identity within the HFS space, except with a very small circle of friends, depriving the movement of any safety connotation. According to this picture, the limits and doubts around the effectiveness of the movement's activism may be well synthesized by the words of Ibrahīm, who says:

[427] See Ana Bela Ribeiro, Andreina Caetano, Isabel Menezes, "Citizenship Education, Educational Policies, and NGOs", *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 42(4), 2016, pp. 646-664.

[428] Interestingly to note, HFS global actually promotes, defends, and fights for the LGBTQI+ rights.

> […] okay, we write proposals and papers, we claim our decisions and we make awareness to other people, *mashi* [Jordanian slang meaning "okay"]. But then? What's the next stage? What's the next level?[429]

Although the above-explained considerations constitute today a relevant set of data for the comprehensive understanding of major agencies and international NGOs' presence within the Jordanian environment, the extent to which their strategies and alternative practices are actually producing a significant change is still in question. Conversely, it is certainly undeniable how, over and above the internal controversies and characteristics of UN Women and youth-led HFS activism, the movement represents today an incredible opportunity for personal growth and economic emancipation for many of its participants. At its very beginning, this research project started with an audacious assumption, according to which the masculinities involved in Jordanian pro-gender equality activism were undoubtedly *transformative* in a disruptive way*:* it was only necessary, back then, to understand *how* and *through what* strategies. Thankfully, the field research and the hands-on experience of the Jordanian context allowed me to abandon those naïve misconceptions about both gender deconstruction processes and activism significance within Jordan. Indeed, as Burke suggests:

> […] research is an on-going process and does not stop once we complete disseminate the findings. For research to be valuable from the perspective of process over product, the value must lie beyond a sense of completion.[430]

The results in this sense are today much foggier than expected, as problematizing the youth category opened the path to multiple possibilities regarding the future of civil society and activism in Jordan. First of all, as previously seen, questions remain around the role of this cultural, well-mannered, elitist form of activism, and to *what extent* this will be able to reach concrete results without excluding anyone from its mission; similarly, it is inevitable to ask ourselves *how* will the Jordanian civil society evolve in light of fast pacing socio-economic dynamics and *if* these will contribute to re-

[429] Interview with Ibrahīm, Amman, 15/11/2021.
[430] Brian Bourke, "Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 19, 2014, p. 1.

politicize the battle, bringing back youth on the "political" scene in its original, pure meaning, through new forms of activism; finally, remains to consider *who* – in light of above-described omissions on the part of global movements' activism – will take the lead in the political battle for the equal rights of sexual and gender discriminated minorities.

In this regard, I argue, the following years in Jordan will probably witness a growing mobilization of the LGBTQI+ community. This yet nowadays exists and resists the dominant hegemonic discourse through alternative spaces, experiences, and processes of knowledge production, more and more organizing in communitarian experience. It is for example the case of several safe spaces such as art galleries, clubs, cafés, and libraries proliferating within the Amman area and in other major cities. Similarly, online spaces are crucial for allowing the youth queer community to make its voice heard, as seen through the example of the above-described *MyKali* Magazine online. In this context, a first group of interviews in this direction has been conducted during the last part of the fieldwork, in particular with informants of the Jordanian LGBTQI+ community in Amman. Indeed, as one of my young informants had to say, in the last five years the Amman LGBTQI+ scene has grown immensely, providing new spaces and opportunities for youth:

> […] I believe it kind of all started five years ago. Actually, people before were just hooking up, this kind of things and then block each other on meeting apps. As for me, actually, when I got into the Amman gay community, it helped me better understand my sexuality. From there I knew that I'm gay and I knew that there are a lot of others like me here in Amman. I didn't know at the time that there was a whole community, many people doing gatherings, sitting with each other, having fun, parting, talking [..] and they can be feminine, manly, all kind actually. I was so surprised that I asked him, do you usually do this, this kind of gathering?[431]

As G. told me:

[431] Interview with M., 15/04/2022, Dali Café, Amman.

> […] I think we will see more and more open spaces for the LGBTQI+ community here in Amman in the next few years; the community itself is going to grow a lot with respect to its current numbers. Maybe, this community will be also big enough to push for change in the law which I am very hopeful for...it's a tough question honestly. But I think that the community is going to grow enough to make it easier for LGBTQI+ people to live here.[432]

The initial insights resulting from these conversations opened the path to future lines of research around masculinities in Jordan, expanding and enlarging also the study to other subjects like masculine internal discrimination, physical and mental health support, and community-based activism for LGBTQI+ rights. These new lines of research may involve exactly the spaces earlier described, both physical and online, on the one side following the results gained by global gender-equality movements and initiatives in terms of raising awareness about gender-related issues, while on the other inquiring about the more and more structured and organized dissent of significantly subordinated sections of society.

[432] Interview with G., 06/05/2022.

# Appendix.

## Notes on Methodology

The following section briefly reviews some methodological issues that affected the present work, highlighting the main factors altering the research relationship between me and my interlocutors in order to assess possible solutions and adjustments for the future. With this premise, the question of "positionality" appears crucial when describing the methodology of this research. Commonly referred to as "the situated and partial nature of our understanding of 'others'",[433] positionality reflects the interference of the researcher's biography and personal bias with the field-work and the interlocutors, thus irremediably affecting the quest for *objective* truths. Ontological assumptions (the idea one has of social reality) and epistemological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) are ulteriorly shaped by religious, sex, race, gender, and political bias, leading – more or less consciously – to wrong assumptions on the researched subject. In this sense, my positionality undoubtedly played a role in the dialogical process that took place between me and my informants:

1) in relation to the political context, as the field-work was conducted by a Western, non-local researcher;

2) in relation to gender, as the researcher is a woman interrogating particularly young masculinities as the core subject of her research.

These two elements often combine within the research process. In particular, I want to stress the second gender-related point in the need to clarify a counterintuitive and quite surprising aspect of my presence on the field. In general, the Western belief around females researching the Middle Eastern context often superficially describes them as courageous subjects facing unspeakable difficulties and dangerous restrictions of personal freedoms – with the most representative example in this sense being the idea of compulsory *ḥijāb* use. In reality, as Schwedler (2006) had to say:

[433] Kim V. L. England, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research", *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 46(1), pp. 80.

> […] many female scholars actually enjoy *more* access than male researchers, because the latter are usually unable to meet privately with women in the region, particularly in the informal and casual settings that are essential for ethnographic research.[434]

Schwedler calls this ethnographic peculiarity "the third gender",[435] meaning the interposition of female researchers between the alleged difficulties imagined by outsiders from the field and the male challenges to enter such space of research. This assumption is in total adherence to the personal experience I had in the context of Jordan: entering the gendered space of male activism for equality was everything but difficult. On the contrary, at first my identity as a young female researcher somehow opened the doors to contexts that a man would probably not have been able to access. This, more than the HFS activism setting, is referred in particular to official and institutional environments dominated by upper-class, well-behaved, and notable people with whom I had the possibility to interact, ask questions, and make official interviews. But where do this openness and readiness to answer my questions come from? As Schwedler (2006) further describes, there are multiple reasons behind it. Among these, one can be tracked in the social meaning that holding a Ph.D. candidate position inherently brings on the ground. Indeed, especially in developing countries, higher education levels are deeply respected and consequently allow for an "instant promotion"[436] of researchers in the face of their interlocutors, even if the scholar still didn't complete the doctoral program. In the case of this research, this particular aspect applied more often to interlocutors belonging to official institutions and upper classes, while rarely came out with youth, as will be further shown. Indeed, another explanation is in the implicit belief on the part of many – in particular men – that female scholars are far more harmless that their male colleagues. Indeed, with the exceptions of highly political and religiously conservative groups, like for example security forces institutions or Islamist parties, the civil society settings, and in general the everyday context of many Middle Eastern countries, looks at female researchers as quiet bystanders

[434] J. Schwedler, "The Third Gender: Western Female Researchers in the Middle East", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 39(3), 2006, p. 425.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Ibid., p. 426.

interested in specific subjects, often reducing their work at the level of mere curiosity.

This particularly gendered bias, more than other threats coming in a strictly political sense, relatively affected the results of the research, producing a skepticism often related to my exterior appearance: *"Why is a white girl interested in Arab people?", "You don't look like a researcher, why is this topic so important to you?".*[437] Being mostly males, I noticed two different directions in my interlocutors' behavior: on the one side, some of them found it extremely important that a female researcher was interviewing them, striving to show all of their support and interest, recognizing in me both an individual and a subject part of a collectivity (women, activist for gender equality, feminist). On the other, the vast majority of them found it hard to open up and express their feelings in front of a girl. This sounds particularly interesting if we bear in mind that all of them were activist for gender equality promoting the cooperation and collaboration of both females and males, but at the same time leads us to think about the nature of their activism and in particular how much the economic, occupational element, played a role in their decision. In this sense the informants' skepticism constituted a concrete challenge when intertwined with class and economic factors. From the experience on the ground, two main elements may be accountable for most of the assumptions made:

a) my personal economic status:

- *"I am sorry to say that, but I was very skeptical about this at the beginning. I just thought you were a European, young woman with enough money to travel the world and ask questions to people".*[438]

Although a significant growth of Jordanian Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the last decades, the recessive economic structure and Covid-19 pandemic crisis ulteriorly limited the possibility of external funding and financing Ph.D. grants in the country. Many of my young informants from HFS, mostly enrolled in university degrees, were surprised by the idea of a young scholar receiving a monthly income for conducting research in another country and at first, used this element to minimize the importance of the

[437] Extracts from different interviews with HFS activists.
[438] Interview with Muhammad, Kempinski Hotel, Amman, 29/10/2021.

research itself, frequently addressed as "entertainment" or "hobby". Only the deepening of the subject of research and the slow attempts aimed at building trust with the informants helped to overcome this belief. This final aim was indeed reached through a constant process of negotiation, often referred to the University environment I was coming from. In this sense, many asked to be involved in academic activities and meeting within my institution in Italy, also as a way to promote their activism abroad. At that point a different perception of the research process unlocked, understanding the potentiality behind this study as a megaphone to amplify the activists' initiatives.

b) the geographical context;

- *"You live in al-Weibdeh alone? You must be rich!"*[439]

Most of my field has been conducted in the urban area of Amman, mainly in the neighborhood of Jabal al-Weibdeh and Jabal Amman, two of the most open, foreign-friendly areas of the city where locals and expats use to rent houses, hang out and spend most of their time within Western-style cafés and pubs. Here, the cooperation and humanitarian sector created a lot of jobs with higher incomes, sadly contributing to the gentrification of the area. The growing presence of NGOs, multinational corporations, and Western workers in the cooperation sector placed a strain on health and social services, created competition with locals, and overburdened labor markets. This is particularly visible in Jabal al-Weibdeh, as the residential area in central Amman has now become one of the most expensive neighborhoods of the capital, mostly unaffordable for locals in favor of foreign inhabitants who can generally pay higher rents. The post-pandemic ulteriorly exacerbated the problem, pushing the real estate prices to unbelievable limits.[440] In this sense, also the economic factor, that is to say my capability of paying rent in that neighborhood in 2021/2022, has been employed in the beginning as an element of disbelief by many of my interlocutors. These elements are crucial

[439] Ibid.

[440] In 2020, during Covid-19 pandemic, Jabal al-Weibdeh local residents started a campaign called "*ma7alli*", meaning local in Arabic, against international corporations encroaching on local businesses and the consequent neighborhood's loss of authenticity. For a comprehensive understanding of the problem, see "Gentrification and grassroots resistance in Amman's historic Jabal al-Weibdeh district", *The New Arab*, Marta Vidal, 03/04/2020. Retrieved from: https://www.newarab.com/analysis/gentrification-and-grassroots-resistance-ammans-oldest-district [Last Accessed 27/01/2023].

but not exhaustive when we try to address to what extent gender and economic factors play a role in determining the relationship between researcher/researched and the results achievable in the field. Undoubtedly, under these factors the field need to be always negotiated, bearing in mind that mistakes and misunderstandings are always around the corner, in particular for young and unexperienced researchers.

In conclusion, considering the above-mentioned examples from the field as valuable data, we should interrogate ourselves on further insights and methodologies adjustments that can prevent jeopardizing both the outcomes and the relationships involved, bearing in mind that the results of interviews and other inquiry methodologies always determine – in the end – what can be seen as a cultural product.

# Register of Interviews[441]

| | Gender | Date | Place |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | M. | 22/10/2021 | Kawon Bookshop, Madaba |
| A | M. | 29/10/2021 | Kempinski Hotel, Amman |
| A/L | M. | 29/10/2021 | Kempinski Hotel, Amman |
| A | F. | 29/10/2021 | Kempinski Hotel, Amman |
| A | F. | 29/10/2021 | Kempinski Hotel, Amman |
| A | M. | 29/10/2021 | Kempinski Hotel, Amman |
| A | F. | 30/10/2021 | Old town, Amman |
| A | F. | 30/10/2021 | Old town, Amman |
| A | F. | 30/10/2021 | Old town, Amman |
| A | M. | 30/10/2021 | Old town, Amman |
| A | M. | 15/11/2021 | Dar Ne'meh, Amman |
| A | F. | 24/11/2021 | Abdali Boulevard |
| A | F. | 24/11/2021 | Abdali Boulevard |
| A | M. | 19/10/2022 | Online |
| A/L | M. | 1/12/2021 | Dar Ne'meh |
| K1 | M. | 1/10/2021 | Online (Facebook) |
| K2 | M. | 4/12/2021 | Online (Zoom) |
| N1 | M. | 18/10/2021 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | M. | 13/04/2022 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | M. | 15/04/2022 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | M. | 15/04/2022 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | M. | 18/04/2022 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | M. | 19/04/2022 | Sukun Cafe, Amman |
| L | F. | 6/05/2022 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | Non-binary | 15/05/2022 | Dali Cafè, Amman |
| L | M. | 17/05/2022 | Books@Cafe, Amman |
| FOCUS GROUP | 13 HFS Activists | 29/10/2021 | Old town, Amman |
| FOCUS GROUP | 10 HFS Activists | 30/11/2021 | T.A.W. al-Weibdeh, Amman |

[441] *Legenda*: (A) refers to *HeforShe* activists; (K) refers to Key Informants; (L) refers to LGBTQI+ individuals; (N) refers to subjects not involved by any of these categories.

# Sample of Interview questions

The following sample reflects the main questions asked to the informants of HFS during the semi-structured interviews held with activists between September and May 2021/2022. Other interviews[442] with non-activists have been carried out following a setting of questions tailored on the specific informant's role.

*Introduction to the interview: Tell me a bit about you, your age, and your personal background.*

1. *Why did you decide to become an activist?*

2. *How does your family see your involvement in gender equality movements?*

3. *Is there any difference in how you perform your gender role in private and in public? Tell me something about your experience.*

4. *What is honor for you? Can you recall any story, event, or incident related to it?*

5. *How do you call yourself as a youth being involved in gender equality movements?*

6. *Why do gender equality movements in Jordan need young boys as activists?*

7. *How does HeforShe engage young males in gender equality efforts?*

8. *Where does your theoretical knowledge on gender equality come from?*

9. *What is your personal opinion on the efforts made by the Jordanian institutions for gender equality?*

10. *What is, based on your experience, the biggest challenge of being an activist for gender equality in Jordan?*

11. *Do you consider Jordan a country where gender equality is achievable?*

12. *How do you see the presence of western NGOs, donors, and agencies promoting gender equality in Jordan?*

[442] Interview with Dr. Muhammad al-Tarawneh; Interview with Director Bāssel Ghandūr.

# The Interviewed

The following section describe more in details the profile of some of my informants, in particular those of whom gave more fruitful and useful insights about the research questions. I would like to thank each of those who spent part of their time answering my questions and engaging in conversations around the topics of this research. They allowed me to touch with hands the incredibly faceted and interesting reality of contemporary Jordan and the beauty of its amazing, heartwarming people.

**Layth:**

Layth is a young biotechnologist and geneticist from Amman, first coordinator and volunteer of HFS in Jordan. He started his journey as an activist for gender equality and women empowerment in 2015. Before that, he was working on different projects to support orphans, the community, education, and others. He first discovered HFS movement through Emma Watson online and from the logo, representing the male and female together. From that moment on, Layth started looking for more news about it and discovered it's a beautiful movement for gender equality whose final goal was to mobilize 500,000 men all around the world to stand up and support women empowerment and gender equality. He likes to travel around the world to discover new cultures and new countries, to meet and networking with new people, which he says strongly reflects in his work around gender inclusion and creativity matters. For Layth, traveling and meeting a new people from different backgrounds, it's definitely empowering. Also for these reasons, in 2020 he left Jordan and moved to Mexico to study at the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). He is an entrepreneur, activist, social-media content creator; from 2021, he is also Youth Mobilization Specialist for UN Women.

**Mays**

Mais al Shoubaki is a 27 years old Social Media manager living in Amman. At the moment we took the interview, she was the co-coordinator of HeforShe Jordan alongside Ibrahīm. She studied language interpretation and translation at al-Zaytoonah University. In 2020 she became co-coordinator of HFS

alongside Ibrahīm Kollāb. She always shows a strong attitude toward managing and mentoring within the movement, and firmly believes that every volunteer of HFS needs to be comfortable regardless any difference in age, economic background, or gender. If anyone faces problems in the group or feel uncomfortable, she will just manage the situation and do something for each one of them. In her personal experience, Layth Abū Tāleb represented the most inspiring person. Before HeforShe, Mais was working with refugee children in a small organization called Innovation Labs.[443] She volunteered with them and then worked with the same NGO as their manager. There she learned to be patient and attentive to situations and people. She then started volunteering with Ramī Samhuri, a fellow activist in HFS. At first, she felt like a guest and only tried to help with little things; later on, after volunteering alongside Layth Abū Tāleb, he encouraged her to lead more important roles in HFS. In 2019, Layth left Jordan and suggested her and Ibrahīm as new co-coordinators in charge of the movement, convinced by their passion and ability to do this "job". She didn't understand this choice at first; as she described, they were just two normal people who randomly became very important in the activism context of their country all at once. Today, Mays tries to inspire others, both in Jordan and abroad through her role. She is very proud of how this young group is trying to make a real difference within the Jordanian reality. She feels blessed by these friendships and outgoing people. She says "We face a lot of obstacles but we always try to make good things out of them". Being a volunteer for gender equality, according to Mays, it's not an easy task but she luckily has the passion to do it.

**Ibrahīm**

Ibrahīm is a 26 years old activist from Amman; he studied interior design at Khawarizmi College in Amman and recently enrolled in a Business Administration and Management Press degree at the Arab Open University. He worked with refugees for an Italian NGO here in Jordan for almost three years. He travelled to Romania for 3 months of Erasmus and when he came

[443] The Lab supports events, convening actors around humanitarian challenges, problem analysis, promotion of tested innovations, and the matching of problems with solutions. The lab acts as a sectoral innovation capacity within the country and supports any actor working within the humanitarian space. See https://www.responseinnovationlab.com/jordan [Last Accessed 28/09/2021].

back, created his own little business, the Kheit Handmade company.[444] Through this business, he's trying to realize innovative ideas related Jordanian culture, so that people can feel more connected and part of it. Ibrahīm started volunteering with the HFS movement in 2016 as a normal volunteer; after a while, he became one of the members of core team and in 2020 the team co-coordinator. He first joined the movement because he believed in Layth Abū Tāleb dream: "no words can describe Layth. He inspired us all a lot". He and Layth indeed became very good friends while working step by step on the cause, first with the university tour, then later through debates, meeting, and several other initiatives aimed at raising awareness among their generation of young boys and girls of Jordan, trying to collect a real commitment from people. He doesn't believe in supporting women alone, but that gender equality should be implemented both for men and women together in order to create a change. The university Tour was a crucial moment in his activism, it made him feel more blessed and passionate than ever. Unfortunately, they had to stop their activities on the ground in 2020 because of covid. He thinks that his work as co-coordinator is very difficult and demanding, as he understood after Layth left. Luckily, as he said, he has the passion to do all of those things, certain that hfs is today immensely growing. Today Ibrahīm is Field Monitor for UNICEF Jordan.

**Ahmad**

Ahmad is a 28 years old boy from a small village near Irbid; he works as an English teacher and recently graduated in language and translation. His story with the cause of gender equality "is a little bit complicated" as he told me: when he was 12 his father passed away, so he was forced to take care of his mother and his 4 sisters, defending their rights to study and live a happy, healthy life. He did it all alone, for a long time, as there was not such a thing as an ONG or HeforShe helping them at the time; he eventually managed to help his sisters in the last few years by working hard and always be there for them when they needed. He discovered HFS thanks to the Emma Watson video, being a big fan of the British actress. At first, he was very captivated

[444] Kheit Handmade is a startup working on goal 13 of SDGs (climate Action) by mainly producing Fruity Bags, Recycled Bags, & Tote Bags as a replacement for Plastic Bags with unique touches of different designs on them. November, 3rd, 2020 marked the launch of the first theme. The theme was spreading awareness about environmental issues, with solidarity to gender equality and women's empowerment.

by the idea of an organization with "he" in its name, he felt represented. He saw then that the movement started in Jordan too, thanks to Layth Abū Tāleb. During covid, at the beginning of 2020, Ahmad contacted Mays asking to participate in the initiatives; he truly felt it was the right moment to have a positive impact not only on his sisters' lives. He considers himself super introverted but always ready to give his best, as also Mais suggested: "he has positive energy even if he experienced many bad situations".

**Jūd**

Jūd is a 22 years old designer from Amman. After earning her design and visual communications degree from college, she started a fellowship with the Goethe Institute for Product Design. She started volunteering with HFS in 2019, and is now member of the core team of the movement. She's been a volunteer at the Hult Prize[445] for a couple of years, and a member in the Erasmus virtual debate club. Jūd has always demonstrated a great passion for the gender equality cause, already interested in women's empowerment since high school. She recalls two major incidents that really did shape her interest and made her want to go deeper into understanding gender equality. Her journey started already in high school, when after working on a book on honor killings discovered that those were all real stories. That's when she decided to do something and be responsible. After the University Tour of 2019 she received many hate messages, accusing her and the movement of encouraging people to divorce. Nevertheless, she is convinced that there is hope, especially with new generations. That's why she keeps working with younger generation in HFS. Recently, Jūd is working to move the University Tout also to high schools.

**Muhammad**

Muhammad is a 31 years old activist and English teacher from Salt. He currently works in Amman, where he usually come to participate in HeforShe initiatives. He started is activism with the movement from the very beginning

[445] The Hult Prize is an intercontinental, annual, year-long competition that celebrates innovative and empowering ideas from university level students committed around topics such as gender equality, food security, water access, energy, and education.

and took part in most of its activities, holding speeches and conferences during the University Tour. Muhammad has always been passionate about gender equality, reading about it and sure that his country and its people definitely need to work and improve on the equality matters. For these reasons, he decided he needed to take a concrete step and be supportive. He strongly believes in HFS movement, in all the volunteers participating in it, and in the idea that these young people are going to do something really good. Part of the reasons he joined is that he wants also to make my family first understand what is the difference between gender equality and women empowerment.

**Jumān**

Jumān is a 23 years old Jordanian girl, graduated from the University of Jordan and currently involved in Save the Children as a volunteer. She comes from a big Palestinian Jordanian family, with three sisters and two brothers. Jumān studied English linguistics. She is very interested in gender roles, gender equalities because, by how she introduced herself, “as a girl in Arab societies we all face discrimination and gender roles and we want to break them, we want to change the country. We can start from now”. She firmly believes that the generations to come will experience a different Jordan and completely different situations that those she and her peers have been through.

**Isrā’**

She is not Jordanian, but actually comes from Iraq. She has volunteered in many NGOs in the country, like Save the Children and Princess Basma Refugee Center, and Norwegian Refugee Council; she felt the need to empower women, in particular refugees, and help them to reach gender equality because they suffered a lot; in particular, she thrives for psychological support. For this and many other reasons she decided to join HeforShe.

**Abdullāh**

Abdullāh  is a mechatronic engineering student; he started volunteering for HFS in 2019. He had volunteered in several other NGOs before actually founding its own, the National Aid Foundation. HFS is a crucial and effective experience for him; he thinks his country needs HFS more than ever in order to reach the goal of gender equality. When he was still a university student, while volunteering there he realized how much people have a negative perception of everything related to gender-equality. He joined HFS because youth there work as a family to achieve their goals, supporting all of the members in this sense. He considers Ibrahīm very inspiring. For him, HFS could be not only a volunteering opportunity, but the real chance produce change.

# The Interviews

## On activism and men involvement

### Layth

*So, I started researching HFS and discovered it's a beautiful movement for gender equality whose first goal was to invite 500,000 men from all around the world to stand up and support women's empowerment and gender equality. So, I said: yes, I want to be one of the first 500,000 around the world! I subscribed, I signed up, I took a screenshot and I published it online using the hashtag #HeForShe. From that moment on, I started telling people that I had just join HFS movement and that I was supporting gender equality in my country.*

### Mays

*I decided to become an activist because in my country unfortunately we always say "I wish my country was better. I wish that something happens". But what did you do to make it happen? What did you do? What did you give? We're just only waiting... but no one will change it for us. If you're hungry but you don't say that you are hungry, do you think that anyone will give you food or buy you food? No! Or if you don't have money because you don't work, are you going to live by just praying to God to make a miracle? No, you need to do something. And that's the problem in Jordan. I can start from my experience when I traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark: while I was there, I was wondering why such a country is much better than ours. It's not perfect, but it is definitely better than Jordan. So, I was wondering why. I met some people there and I was wondering if we can raise our children the way they raised theirs, maybe this will make some difference, but how can we do this if the old men and women who raised us since we were small children strongly believe in habits and tradition that don't mean anything, that don't make any sense to us anymore? It's totally annoying, everything, the habits, the traditions, the stereotypes. It it's driving me crazy. Like literally, you can see from my facial expressions how much this depresses me. I'm devastated. I just think that every generation has its own rules: those of our grandparents don't work anymore. They don't work in our times, for our generation, and plus are*

*totally wrong. Everyone, especially every woman, has the right to choose. I'm not obligated to follow you or follow my father or my mother or anyone, because I have the right to choose what I want for my happiness, what I can wear, what I can eat, what I can do with my life, if I want to put on makeup or not. It feels like we're alive as humans for breathing only. Here in Jordan, we don't have a purpose. And that's very devastating. So, when I got back to Jordan, after my travel to Copenhagen and Sweden, I started volunteering with HFS and that was like a huge step for my personal life. I wanted to do something for my country because I love Jordan. Okay, yes, for sure I want to leave, but I love my country anyway. I truly love it. And exactly because I love it, I spent a lot of my time working with HFS. I work for two hours and a half for my job as a technical advisor 6 days a week. The rest of the time is for them, for the HFS movement, because I need to fix these problems or at least try to fix them.*

*Why do I think that boys need to be there? Let me tell you something. Let's pretend we want to talk about something related, for example, to poverty. If you want to create and implement a movement to help poor people, would you get wealthy people in it? No, because we need to take someone who is really experiencing the problem on the ground. In this sense, at first HFS movement slowly started by focusing only on girls and women having issues with their freedom and basic rights because of their gender. But then at some point, we knew that if men and boys did not participate in this effort, then the whole HFS activism would have become something exclusive, an initiative with no outcome. Young boys and male volunteers are those helping their peers understand there's a problem, in particular a problem with gender equality education. We, as HFS, need them with us: it's not about girls anymore, it's a fifty-fifty thing.*

**Muhammad**

*When it comes to my answer on men in HFS I would use the Arabic say "one hand doesn't clap". For me, if you want to actually do something about gender equality, you especially need the support of men, not because of the traditional concept around needing them to do things, but because just imagine how much you could change if you have all men believing in this, especially in these areas. So, I would say yes, working within a group, making focus groups, brainstorming on methodologies, coming on the stage as a man,*

*and talking about gender equality helps a lot because you get and understand these things first for yourself. Within this group, you make the road to the final goal shorter, and this happens also through the different intelligent minds of boys and girls and all the ideas that come out during the meetings that we've had.*

## On the private familial context and activism

**Muhammad**

*Okay so, about my family…or I should say why I believe in gender equality and why I started to believe in it, well, it all started when we moved here to Jordan, we were living in Dubai and then we moved to Jordan with all my family. Here, the number of people who judges judge and harass women was a lot. In the past Levant women were workers and also farmers. They were working hard with men. Back then there was no blaming. In the early nineties instead, let's say it all changed a lot, people started to suggest that women should be at home, and should not be working. I come from a family in which my mother, for example, used to work a lot, in Dubai, far away from her family. And for me, she's the strongest person on earth. I learned from her a lot, I learned to work hard, how to actually work hard, and also how to care for the house at the same time. For example, when we were in Dubai, my father used to work far away from our house too and my mother used to take care of us while working at the same time. It is for that reason that when we first arrived, I found a lot of people, some of them were my cousins, judging her, believing that only the husband should work. When I compared this idea with the model of my mother, it was so different….she worked, and she was very successful, she brought a lot of successful stories to the family. She also opened her business with my father here in Jordan, he benefited from her actual support, and most of it came economically wise from her past job in Dubai.*

**Jūd**

*I think my activism came from my mother, who is very supportive of the question of gender equality. This is because she grew up as an orphan without her father, and my grandmother was able to provide for eight children, financially too. These eight also went to universities. So, my mom was somehow very interested and involved in in the ideas themselves of gender equality. My father has a kind of rigid view on feminism and gender equality. He thinks of them as a bit of a westernized ideas, and we don't really talk about it a lot. I just know that he's not really interested in these subjects. So, I just try to avoid the whole conversation. But my mom is super supportive of it. […] But as in home, it's kind of a bit defensive. He never told me not to go to those meetings or not to participate. I always do participate. He knew that I did the university tour. He knows my involvement. He doesn't approve or disapprove. He's just kind of his old idea absent. But at the same time, he does throw comments every once in a while. Oh, sweet. Yeah, you have to, okay, you're going out. I just hope you don't come back supporting abortion or something like that.*

**Ibrahīm**

*To be honest, they didn't reject the idea of me doing activism, they told me it's okay. It's up to you. If you are going to be a part of this movement, of this journey, it's totally up to you. We are always supporting you in what you believe in. My family doesn't know a lot about gender equality, but they know me well and they trust me. For example, when I'm to do something new, something different, they give for granted that is the right thing. I just initiated convincing my family to review the patriarchal masculinity culture by suggesting that man can do something at home too. My father, for example, helps my mom in the kitchen, cooking and washing dishes, cleaning the house, stuff like that. Actually, he used to do that already once in a while, also before I started my activism with the movement. It's a normal thing in my house. I just stressed and put a light on this matter by talking a lot about it. Also, I have two brothers who believe in equality and rights too. Maybe they won't say out-loud "I'm supporting gender equality", okay, but this is because they are following the Islamic rules. This means that they don't need the label; by default, if you are a Muslim, you support gender equality by following the religious rules. Not every Muslim follows the rules of Islam. By following the rules of Islam, they support gender.*

**Abdullāh**

*Well, my father is working on the army. This is definitely supposed to be a very masculine environment with masculine thinking. Truth is, he doesn't behave like this at all. He is always supporting me to go, be a part of this incredible movement, supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in general. Like my father, also my mother, brothers and sisters are involved for gender equality matters, always supporting me to continue this journey.*

**Mays**

*So basically, as I told you before, my mom works within the gender equality field; she works for مؤسسة التدريب المهني which in English is the Vocational Training Cooperation Corporation (VTC) . There, she implements projects' funding for women. And she has a very high position within the company. She really believes in gender equality as a person, way before having us as her children and also after becoming a mother, but she never expected me to have that passion too because I had never volunteered when I was younger. My dad instead is a religious man. In the first place, he didn't like my choice to volunteer because he thought - like every other person in Jordan - that gender equality and related things like the CEDAW for example are something related and coming from a foreign agenda. And therefore very, very unhealthy for an Arab country. But I didn't really credit his opinion and I did what I wanted to do. So, I participated in HFS without telling him in the first place. At some point, with HFS we were organizing a big event that I needed to attend; they started asking me, "where are you going?" so, in the end, I told him; I explained that I want to be part of this group of people. My mum was like, "I'm totally okay with it. Yes, go!". My dad instead didn't really like it, but he didn't say anything. He generally agrees, but he doesn't like it, I can feel the vibe. I can say, in the end, that my family is mostly open-minded, even my dad, although he doesn't like most of my decisions. He probably believes I need to try so I can learn. He has a totally different mind from mine, but we never argue with each other. You know, he's a very educated man, he reads and writes a lot because he is a writer. But education is not enough: I think that regarding gender equality he simply doesn't believe in the concept, even though he lets me do whatever I want. I can say that on the one side, he just goes and agree with the common ideas of the Jordanian community and society, but on the other, he never made anything to make me think he's really*

*against gender equality or women's empowerment. His actions simply don't match what he says. When I told him I am the co-coordinator of HFS, he simply said "good for you! That's it? Congrats". Now it's been already a year and a half with HFS and he never argued I have to stop. I feel like maybe this is because my mom agreed in the first place, so he doesn't want to disappoint her. The rest of my family are so very proud of me. I don't have aunts because they passed away. I have uncles and they are all proud of me. They always tell me "Bravo Mais! Keep going, keep doing the good work!". Especially one of these uncles, who is Danish and whom I went visit in Copenhagen. Well, he always strongly supported me from day one. He says "go volunteering, go do your stuff!". I love him so much; he is so supportive. I also have two brothers and one sister. My brothers are ok with this whole gender equality thing, but not that much, you know. There's always that little part of the Jordanian typical mindset there.*

## On theoretical background

### Layth

*HeForShe operates not only in Jordan, but in the Middle East and North Africa and other continents as well. In Jordan, we started our work by translating all the content that the head office was producing in English, French, Spanish, and other languages into Arabic. I started studying to know more about the difference between gender and sexuality, taking a lot of courses, reading, making a lot of research to know how I can make this fit into a Middle Eastern context like that of Jordan. […] So, I learned enough knowledge by accessing to the UN Woman training center, which is free for everyone. Anyone can go there [UN Women Country Office] and take the introduction to the "I know Gender" training course. And it's really helpful to know the basics about all that we are talking about. After a while, I finished my internship with the UN woman and I started working on HFS as a founder and coordinator in the Middle East for five years or more. […] I learned that gender, the idea around it, can be different between one family and another, between my neighborhood and your neighborhood. Now imagine Jordan, imagine how small the communities could be here, and what a huge difference can I make when I explain them these simple things.*

## On working opportunities

**Layth**

*[…] I started working with the UN woman, and of course it's all connected because it's always helpful when they see [UN Women Office] what someone is doing on the ground. I started doing that, but of course it wasn't an easy process because I applied for my job at the UN Women following the same process of anyone else: preparing my CV, applying, making my financial proposal, filling the forms, the cover letter, following the whole procedure. But while I was doing this, I was putting in also all the information based on the actual experience that I had on the ground. So, I believe this was the main reason they selected me for this opportunity. I started working with them in an official way and I'm super happy because I am doing the thing that I love, motivating youth, working on gender, woman empowerment and so on. So, this is my whole background working on gender and how I moved to the UN.*

## On honor

**Muhammad**

*I believe, as someone who believes in gender equality, that sharaf should be a positive value used by both sides, women and man, if you really have to use this word…I mean, I don't support its use in general, because everyone in the end should do whatever they want without risking anything from others. Our families should be more focused on the future of their children than their honor. How the kids, either they were girls or boys, are gonna live their lives in the future, if they are going to be successful or not successful, not if they carry honor or not. New generations approach it really differently, no more blaming women for making them ashamed of their honor.*

**Isrā'**

*In Jordan, in honor-related cases, the men are never punished. And even if they are punished, they are punished in a different way, not equally as the blamed girl. The whole blame is going to be on her, not the man, not the man.*

*From my experience, I really want to let their voices [those of the girls] be heard from everyone because they are afraid even to speak and to tell anyone their stories. Of course, the HFS movement here in Jordan is working very hard, and throughout the activities and the programs we can reach the point where honor can be defined differently, in a positive way.*

**Mays**

*The word honor, for a Jordanian typical mind, represents a very bad habit or tradition which is part of the community; men here generally assume that the girl is something more similar to a tool rather than a subject, a tool that doesn't have feelings. As such, she is totally related to the men of her family, the father, the brother, and the husband. Men here usually deal with women as a toy, if we can say: they have it, no one else can. if you engage in a relationship, you have to let the family know and be ok with it. I should say that with this principle I am totally fine because you just need to get to know someone, fall in love, and have a real relationship. And then, only in the end, to get married.*

*From my experience, we can look at positive honor as something we can educate people about; we can teach men, since childhood, that their daughters, their mothers, and their sisters are not a tool. Most importantly, we can teach them that just as females are their honor, males hold honor too, something to be cherished and protected. So that in the end, they mutually become each other's honor. I believe that if we start educating people about this idea with shared awareness sessions, it might work, and the situation might improve. Maybe men will think there's no need to commit a crime.*

**Sayf**

*For me, if I think about honor, I immediately think about the whole idea of being a human, to acceptance, I don't know how to say it…I think about modesty, an extreme form of modesty. It's definitely not something related to women's biology, if you know what I mean. Unfortunately though in Jordan, this word is always used to refer to that part of a girl's body. But for me, no, it's everything but negative, is absolutely something positive*

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