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Societal and Contextual implications on Female Leadership in the Jordanian Hotels Sector

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to contribute to the embryonic literature about the contextual, organisational and other causes of the women's limited advancement into positions of power. Following gender and leadership theories, individuals are stereotyped against different expectations of gender and leadership that are invoked from cultural and societal traditions. Drawing on a in depth study on gender and leadership in the hotel sector in Jordan, this paper offer new insights about the overlapping between gender culture, religion and legal context. Following inductive-content analysis of 178 responses, the study reveals that despite significant governmental interventions to promote gender equality, there are pervasive tribal and cultural obstacles embedded in organisations in Jordan.

Keywords: Culture, female leadership, gender, legislation, religion

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, Muslim Majority countries (MMCs) confront challenges of social justice, or lack thereof, and inequality practices against females (Metcalf, 2008). The literature on female leadership indicates the unbalanced representation between males and females in positions of power and the negative stereotypes of female-gender roles (e.g. Eagly & Karau, 2002). Hence, it is important to understand what factors may contribute in shaping such negative stereotypes and discrimination against female leaders.

In the Arab countries, practices of management and leadership are generally premised on tribal Bedouin traditions that may be described as the 'Bedou-crazy' and 'Sheikho-crazy' models that are manifested in the HR practices (Khan, 2011). Such trends and tribal systems in are largely reflected in the way people perceive and stereotype women.

Moreover, it is important to focus on religious context in the Middle East because “religion is still an important regulator of everyday life and of a source of female identity”, and plays important role in shaping economic and identity relations (Metcalf, 2008: 97). For example, in her study of paradigm of Arab management, Sabri (2011) examines implications of religious and cultural practices for management that may encourage complementary and diversity. Syed and Van Buren (2014: 257) claim that “like other religious traditions, Islam lends itself to multiple interpretations of doctrine that are plausible in different contexts”.

Legislative context is another key factor which shapes gender equality in a society. For example, in Jordan, there are some regulatory reforms that endorse and promote gender equality (World Bank, 2013). However, it is noteworthy that some of these reforms and laws can be a problematic when they contradict the social norms because while there are no provisions that restrict women’s freedom, some restrictions rooted in social customs (World

Bank, n.d). Therefore, in this paper, our focus is on exploring the implications of religion, culture and legislation on women's advancement into leadership positions in Jordan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of key issues such as religion, culture and legislative framework in Jordan with a particular focus on their implications on female leadership.

Religion

Despite the fact that most countries in the Middle East region consist of Muslims population, there are different languages and ethnic backgrounds as well as major differences in the role of religion within these countries (Kabasakal & Dastmalchian, 2001). Women's issues too differ from country to country. Metcalfe (2006) conducted a study on the experiences of female professionals in the Middle East. The results show that there are complex interrelations between genders in organisations and Islamic values. This section reviews the Islamic view of women in term of women's rights and equality to men with reviewing some examples from the principal Islamic texts (i.e. Quran and Hadith) to better understand women employees from the Islamic lens.

One important factor that plays a role in the practices of employment relations is the Islamic faith (Syed & Ali, 2010). Syed and Van Buren (2014: 257) conducted a study to investigate gender equality within Islam in MMCs with the aim of developing a heuristic ethical framework for businesses. They note that in Islam, there are some directions that encourage complementarity and diversity, nevertheless, they claim that "like other religious traditions, Islam lends itself to multiple interpretations of doctrine that are plausible in different contexts". In relation to women in MMCs, interpreting Islam through the patriarchal lens influence women in the workplace by enforcing them to get "their legitimacy in the society"

(Afiouni, 2014: 316). In addition, Arab societies stereotype female's roles as mothers and take care of others (Dougherty, 2010) which in turn women in these societies suffer more in term of hiring and promotion to higher positions.

Moreover, Syed and Ali (2010: 465) conducted a study to illustrate the perspective of employment relations in Islam by reading the Islamic texts. They note that the Islamic teachings "remain heavily influenced by local cultural traditions". This indicates that the interpretation of Islamic values can't be separated from "Bedouin" cultural traditions in Arab world, and affect the perception of female leaders in the workplace.

Different historical and political factors are embedded in the way of interpreting Islam. For example, Islamic scholars after the Prophet Muhammad started to justify the tribal system and the hierarchical models of family which led to a deviation from gender egalitarian teachings in Islam (Marlow, 1997 cited in Syed & Van Buren, 2014).

Based on the literature, there are several verses in the Quran that encourage equality between males and females. For instance, one verse says that "O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;- reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for Allah ever watches over you" (4:1). In addition, one hadith (tradition of Prophet Muhammad) asserts the importance of women's rights in Islam, in the well-known sermon of "the Farewell Pilgrimage", the Prophet said: O People! It is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women but they also have rights over you...Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers (Prophet's Last Sermon, n.d.). The Quran places a high value as well on the differences between males and females in term of their roles to be consistent with their life cycle. Islam shows that women are exempt from any

financial responsibility within the household; however, they still have the right to decide whether they want to contribute financially or not (Hassan, 1999 cited in Syed, 2010). Accordingly, in Islam, women are generally not deemed responsible to support their families economically and the literature suggests that this may explain why women are less likely to seek for jobs.

In the Islamic principles, discrimination against gender, race, colour and other attributes is not allowed. Both of the Quranic teachings and the sayings of the Prophet encourage people to avoid discrimination and nepotism (Syed & Ali, 2010). However, despite these directions by the Quran and Hadith, there is overwhelming gap between males and females in the work place in MMCs and thus, it is remarkably important to understand why it is exist.

Although there are ample laws for anti-discrimination in MMCs, still, women have “career and development constraints” (Metcalf, 2006: 93). Next section focuses on the cultural and tribal traditions in the Arab and Jordan context as well as it sheds lights on legislation and regulations in Jordan to explain how such issues may justify the underrepresentation of women in the labour market.

Culture

Different ancient civilizations have shaped the culture of Jordan massively (e.g. Nabateans in AD 37 – c. 100, Roman from 138-161 CE and Greek in 63 BCE and they last four centuries). Jordan remained for long centuries under the regime of Islamic and Arab dynasties (Abu-Tayeh, 2007). Thus, today it is classified as a Muslim Majority country, 92% are Muslims and 8% are Christians (Tobin, 2012) with majority of Arab people. However, different ethnicities are living in Jordan (e.g., Palestinian, Caucasians, Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian). Hence, the official census conducted by the Jordanian government shows that in Jordan, the “majority are not ethnic Jordanian” (Tobin, 2012: 97).

Jordan is a centre of different Muslim and Arab countries as it is bordered by countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Abu-Tayeh, 2007). Hence, the Islam religion and the Arab culture are embedded in Jordan. Moreover, majority of the population (55.2 %) is aged between 25-59 years old, representing a youth culture (Social Security Corporation, 2014).

There are different ways of perceiving culture. The literature shows that this concept is complicated because cultural components are intangible or non-material (e.g. traditions, language, values). Hofstede (1984: 82) defines culture by arguing that culture “is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or society from those of another”. Therefore, he claims that culture is embedded in the meanings of different aspects of life; in the way of perceiving the world, in the values, and thus, cultural background influence how people distinguish between good and evil, true and false, beautiful and ugly.

According to Sawalha and Meaton (2012: 85), culture in organisations “represents a socially constructed system of shared behaviours, values, and beliefs that are learned by the members of the organisation”. Afiouni (2014) shed lights on the cultural outlook in the Middle East is essential to better understand how women’s careers are shaped. In the context of the current paper, the following discussion concentrates on the Arab/Muslim culture with a particular focus on the gender traditions and customs in Jordan.

People in Jordan are described as hospitable and friendly (Terhaal, 2016). Families are generally quite traditional especially those living in rural areas. Jordan’s culture shares common traditions and cultural background with the Arab world. For example, one of the priorities in the Jordanian life is the importance of family whereby traditions revolve around the extended family (Jordan Travel and tourism, n.d).

However, despite the Bedouin culture and the Arab traditions in Jordan, compared to other countries in the same region (e.g. Saudi Arabia), it is noticeable that Jordan has various traditions that combine both Bedouin and modern lifestyles. For example, Jordanian women enjoy relatively more freedom, with full access to education, vote, drive, and to contribute in the business (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010). Nevertheless, some reports show that women in Jordan have limited economic participation and they face different types of discriminations due to some gender-related biases. According to the World Bank (2014), one major explanation behind limited participation and continued inequality is the restrictive social norms, and a discriminatory legal framework. Hence, even when women succeed in getting a certain job, they still have fewer opportunities to reach executive and decision making positions because of the home centred image that is linked with women and the masculine image of leaders.

The cultural context plays a significant role in constraining business and management in any society (Hofstede, 1984). According to a study by Sawalha and Meaton (2012) that aims to understand the Jordanian and Arab culture with further attention on tribalism and how it influences women in business, the Arab societies classify as conservative societies in which the tribal system protects family values and norms. Moreover, the family honour is important in which women's activities are more restricted and hence, gender segregation is one of the Arab societies' features. In Jordan, the traditional tribal system largely comes from the Bedouin culture which has a great impact on businesses and their management practices. In comparison to other countries in the region, tribes in Jordan that have been established too many years ago still have extremely crucial role in politics and in assisting the government. In specific, it is remarkable that there are considerable influences by the Arab culture on organisations. Hence, organisations in Jordan are well-known with their Arab culture (i.e. based on tribalism, bureaucratic, difficult to change).

Another important dimension that may explain the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions is the “culture’s masculinity and femininity” stereotypes (Türetgen et al., 2008: 592). Masculinity refers to a culture that places high values for heroism, achievement and resoluteness. While femininity refers to a culture that respects relationships, caring for others and places value on modesty and the quality of life. This dimension of culture allocates different roles for different genders (Hofstede, 1984). Likewise, Soares et al. (2007) claim that in feminine cultures, the pervasive norms are quality of life and caring for others, while in masculine cultures, the dominant values are success and achievement. According to Hofstede, the Arab culture is generally masculine. Therefore, it is arguable that Jordan classified as masculine country and different standards are set for men and women in which women are restricted more than men to have professional jobs (Sawalha & Meaton, 2012).

The foregoing discussion suggests that as a tribal country rooted in Bedouin traditions that place high values on family honour toward protecting the family values, Jordan is a conservative society. Women in Jordan suffer some contextual challenges and restrictions that prevent them from getting involved in the economic life. Hence, it is arguable that the Arabic culture and gender traditions as well as some legal provisions explain the rarity of women in the work place.

Legislation

The Jordanian constitution states that “Islam is the religion of the State and Arabic is its official language” (Jordan Const. article II S2). Thus, like some other Arab/Muslim countries, Jordan has an Islamic cultural background that is embedded in the economic life. In term of female workers and women in the economic realm, there are directions in Jordan toward human rights and justice as well as obligations to enact fair laws. All regulations in the constitution are applicable equally to men and women. Therefore, texts that protect human/citizen rights are taking into account issues related to women rights (JNCW, 2011).

Furthermore, Article six in the Jordanian constitution clearly states that “Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion.” (Jordan Const. article VI, S1). Moreover, the Jordanian Parliament approved a law for political parties that allows women to be in advanced positions (World Bank, n.d.). However, although equality in Jordan is recognized, discrimination and unequal practices remain present in Jordan.

Despite the fact that laws and regulations in Jordan embody positive provisions for women, some labour laws have potentially negative influences on women’s economic participation. For example, according to the labour law (i.e. Article 69), the Minister of Labour can decide on industries and jobs prohibited to women (Lohmann, 2011; Peebles et al., 2007) whereby women’s freedom of choice will be restricted.

Jordan is a part of the International Bill of Human Rights that includes six conventions of human rights and it has been very responsive to gender equality obligations (JNCW, 2011; UNDP, 2012). In 1980, Jordan became a signatory to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and ratified it in 1992. However, it has some reservations to some articles (e.g. 9, 15 and 16) regarding parents’ equal rights, mobility, choosing the family name and nationality right of children. In 2007, like other Arab countries (e.g. Oman, Bahrain and Syria), Jordan endorsed CEDAW with keeping the old reservations. This decision has his own opponents and supporters (World Bank, n.d.).

Another step toward improving women’s situation in Jordan was the establishment of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) in 1992 as an initiative from Prince Basma to appreciate Jordanian women. 22 members are representing in the JNCW including private and academic sectors, civil society organizations, national institutions, women agencies and ministries (JNCW, 2011).

The government of Jordan has implemented some legislative and regulatory reforms that may increase and enhance women's agency by some revisions to the Personal Status Code and through the application of other laws that have the potential to give women equal rights to men (World Bank, 2013). However, it is noteworthy that some of these reforms and laws can be a problematic when they contradict the social norms because despite the fact that there are no provisions that restrict women's freedom, restrictions have its social roots (World Bank, n.d.).

Overall, serious steps have been taken by policy makers and the government of Jordan to address gender equality issues by producing legislative and regulatory reforms. However, as clearly shown in the literature and reports, females face unequal treatment whereby the gender gap is massive in the economic work place. Hence, the present paper was attracted to deeply understand the overlapping between the legislative framework and other contextual and societal beliefs that may explain the rarity of women in the work place.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: FEMALES IN JORDAN'S HOTEL SECTOR

Because of its service oriented and shift-type nature, the hotel sector in Jordan is generally perceived to be a less likely place for female employment. It can be argued that job responsibilities in the hotel or tourism sector may pose some incongruity with female social role, such as, contact with unrelated (*Non-mahram*) people. Similarly, working long hours at night is prohibited by cultural and religious norms (Majcher-Teleon & Ben Slimène, 2009), because jobs requiring social contact with strangers, travelling and long hours of work are less preferable for women. Accordingly, in the hotel sector, there may be gender practices, stereotyping and prejudices against females (Marco, 2012) that could prevent women to reach upper echelons. For example, research suggests that women generally prefer not to work in some tourism occupations (Peebles et al., 2007) and they are less attracted to this sector

(Majcher-Teleon & Ben Slimène, 2009). Table 1 illustrates some key fact about gender segregation in Jordanian tourism sector.

Table 1 Employment and wages by gender in tourism and hotel sector

Total tourism employment in Jordan		38,294	
	Male	Female	Gender Gap
Numbers of employees in tourism sector by gender	35.460	2.833	32.627
Numbers of employees in hotels (as a subsector) by gender	12.847	1.147	11.700
Monthly wages in tourism sector by gender	416 JD	425 JD	-9 JD

Source: Adapted from Majcher-Teleon and Ben Slimène (2009) and Social Security Corporation (2014)

According to the Social Security Corporation (2014), the highest gender gap exists between males and females is found in the tourism sector (i.e. 85.2%). Therefore, the current paper scrutinizes such a massive gap in the tourism sector. Several sectors are classified under tourism (e.g. hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tourist shops and diving centre). Table 2 shows these sub-sectors illustrating the numbers of females' participation vs. males in each.

Table 2 Numbers of females vs. males' participation in tourism subsectors

Tourism sectors	Numbers of females participation	Numbers of males participation	Percentage of females participation to total population
Hotels	1.147	12.847	8.2
Tourist restaurants	1.549	13.949	10.0
Travel agencies	982	2.698	26.7
Tourist shops	155	577	21.3
Diving centres	9	36	20.0

Source: Adapted from Majcher-Teleon and Ben Slimène (2009)

While Table 2 indicates that female participation is at the lowest level in the hotel sector, Table 3 shows the numbers of employees distributed in 4-star and 5-star hotels by gender and governorate.

Table 3 Number of employees distributed in 4-star and 5-star hotels by gender and governorate

Governorate	Amman		Aqaba		Dead Sea		Petra	
Hotel class	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Five star	4.244	389	1.235	24	2.090	169	590	9
Four star	1.798	132	290	12	366	17	276	3

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (2015)

Although studies reveal that tourism industry is strongly related to economic prosperity, there is a lack of research on gender practices in this industry (Ferguson, 2011) to understand the reasons behind such a huge gap between males and females. Therefore, considering gender dynamics in hospitality studies is a promising avenue and merits further research (Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2015).

METHODS

Research Procedure

Open-ended questions were used to gain in-depth insights about the implications of religion, culture and legislations on women's employment. The following questions were asked from

the participants to understand how religion, culture and legislation affect the situation of female workers:

1. *How would you describe the impact of religion or its interpretation on women's employment and leadership in organisations in Jordan?*
2. *How would you explain the influence of the local culture and tribal traditions on women's employment and leadership in organisations in Jordan?*
3. *How would you explain the influence of the local laws on women's employment and leadership in organisations in Jordan?*

Open-ended questionnaires were distributed for employees working in 4-star and 5-star hotels operating in different geographic locations in Jordan (Amman, Aqaba, Dead Sea and Petra) during the months from June to August 2016. In total, 178 questionnaire were received.

The questionnaire was distributed by the author through initial contact with Human Resource Managers who work in these hotels by means of telephone and personal visit. Also Follow-up phone calls were made with those mangers to communicate about distribution of the questionnaire. Later on, these questionnaires were manually collected.

Data Analysis

The analysis strategy used in this paper is content analysis. Content analysis is used “for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). In specific, the analysis starts from broad notions to specific observations, the conclusions/themes were emanated from the data instead of general theory/literature, and the inductive-content analysis was utilized (Blumer, 2015).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify three different content analysis approaches: conventional, directed and summative. According to the first approach, conventional strategy is usually conducted when limited literature is available about a certain topic (i.e. inductive). By contrast, the directed approach is widely used when existing theory is available about a phenomenon in which this approach aims to support this theory (i.e. deductive). The last approach summative design starts with counting and quantifying the texts. For the current study, since existing theory and literature are not available to constitute the qualitative research objectives prior to the data collection, and the need for counting the frequencies for some key words within texts, both conventional and summative approaches were utilized.

Before starting the coding process, all answers to these questions were read more than one time to be more familiar with the overall picture of the answers. Relevant responses were classified into short and long (in-depth) answers. 108 participants gave short answers, while 68 participants gave long answers. All answers were further grouped to be either against or with females to participate in businesses and to be promoted into positions of power. With further concentration on the in-depth answers, the numbers of participants who believe that religion, culture and legislation are either with or against female workers are as follows. 46 participants believe that religion supports and allows females to work, while 11 participants have shown an opposite view. In relation to the cultural dimension, 39 participants argue that cultural practices may prevent females from the economic participations while 15 participants claim that cultural aspects have no impact on female's economic participation. Finally, regarding the implications of the legislative system, 41 participants contend that legislation endorses and promotes gender equality, while 5 participants believe that legislation restricts female economic participation.

This process helped us to yield a more complete picture about the overall orientation for the participants. After re-reading the answers again, each answer was given a code or codes. Also

the frequencies for each code were determined following the summative content analysis design. Next, all codes that show low number of frequencies were excluded (i.e. from 1-3).

Table 4 shows these codes for each category with frequencies.

Table 4 Codes and frequencies

Religion	Freq.	Culture	Freq.	Legislation	Freq.
Religious conditions	6	New values in the 21 st century	4	Application of laws	2
Culture, customs and traditions	3	Cultural ignorance	1	Cronyism	1
Deficient in intelligence	1	Culture	19	Democratic country	1
Disgrace / Shame	1	Customs	9	No discrimination in laws	1
Diversity	1	Women's dependency on men	1	Fairness by laws	15
Efficiency of women	1	Disgrace / Shame	7	Patriarchal system	1
Work environment	5	Educations level in Jordan	1	Laws support women	6
Protecting women's femininity	1	Environment of work	2	Positive action and special treatment	6
Hadith interpretation	3	Protecting women's femininity	3	Women's rights	6
Interpretation of religion	6	Freedom for women	1	Wrong laws	2
Tolerance	4	Gender mixed places	3		
Gender justice	1	Openness culture	1		
Gender mixed places	7	Health and educational sector	2		
Racism against women	2	Traditions	23		
Religious commitment	7	Tribalism	9		

Superiority for women	1	Women' rights	1
Religion supports women	9		
Sympathetic nature of women	2		
Women's rights	4		
Work is a form of worship	1		

THE RESULTS: THEORETICAL CATEGORIES AND KEY THEMES

Findings in this section highlight the implications of religion, culture and legislation on the women's advancement into positions of power in Jordan. As supported earlier in the literature review, the implications were measured and illustrated to understand the overall perceptions of the participants about three dimensions.

According to the schematic illustrations of the emerged codes that are linked with the three dimensions (i.e. religion, culture and legislation), and based on the answers, the key themes emerged in this stage by integrating the first order codes around common meanings and through developing theoretical categories (sub-themes). Also the codes' frequencies were classified against the main categories with a calculation of these frequencies, each code mentioned less than four times were excluded.

Based on the qualitative analysis, three dominant themes were identified to fulfil the aim of this paper which are:

Theme One: Islam supports gender equality

Theme Two: Tribal culture hinders female leaders

Theme Three: Legal initiatives support gender equality

The following sections illustrate the key elements that determine the three main themes.

Theme One: Islam supports gender equality

Figure 1 shows the most repeated codes under the religion question that emerged in the open ended questions.

In addition to the codes emerged in the religion question, a further grouping was done for these codes in order to have more rigour directions for conceptualizing them into sub-themes. For example, we concluded from `interpretation of religion` and `disgrace / shame` codes the following sub-theme: *People's misinterpretation of religion due to local/cultural traditions and customs*. Also, `work environment`, `gender mixed places` and `religious conditions` codes were grouped in a one sub-theme as follow: *The effects of work environment on females*. Finally, `tolerance`, `religious commitment`, `women's rights`, `religion supports women` and `work is a form of worship` codes were grouped in a one sub-theme as follow: *flexibility of religions*.

To show how these sub-themes were concluded, the next paragraphs retrieved some examples from the participants' responses for the first question i.e. how would you describe the impact of religion or its interpretation on women's employment and leadership in organisations in Jordan?

The negative impact comes from the wrong interpretation and old traditions (Female, HR coordinator)

It influences since women respect the values of religion. However, the interpretation of religion has the significant impact (Female, operator)

The religious authority in our society has a significant negative impact on women's jobs. Not because of the religion itself, rather due to the wrong interpretation and understanding of the religion (Male, cost and purchases accountant)

The wrong interpretation of the religion has negative influence on women. For example some people linked the interpretation of religion with traditions and customs (Male, reservation manager)

It is prohibited and considered disgraceful (Male, waiter)

According to these examples, the first sub-theme is: people's misinterpretation of religion due to local/cultural traditions and customs. For the second sub-theme, the following examples are presented to show how this sub-theme has been emerged.

I don't think that the religion has an impact on women if they respect religion and they respect the rules of being in a gender mixed environment. Also when they are committed to the ethical issues and they respect all the religion's responsibilities (Male, general cashier)

The Islamic faith allows women to hold leadership positions and allows them to compete within jobs. However, these jobs should not have any negative physical outcomes or impact on their societal environment in order to protect and respect their nature of sympathy (Male, HR manager)

Usually, female workers in the hotel sector are oppressed, especially when they need to work at night shift. Thus, the society doesn't accept them and forces them to leave the work even before holding leadership positions. Also, in the tourism sector, married women are more impacted than others. We notice that females left their jobs when they get married and when they have kids. In contrast, men are more guaranteed for the employer (Male, cost and purchases accountant)

The religion does not prevent women to work under certain conditions and does not prevent women to hold any position (Female, risk management manager)

The religion is responsible to put some conditions that influence women. Thus, religion may prevent or support women (Male, n/a)

The religion allows women to work within certain conditions.

There is no influence of religion on women's work (Female, n/a)

The religion of Islam gives women the equality to work in all sectors and to hold leadership positions, however, they should follow the rules of “Khalua” (Male, receptionist)

Based on these and similar responses, the second sub-theme is: the effects of work environment on females. For the third sub-theme, the following responses show how such a sub-theme was concluded.

Women should be committed to what religion and Islam requires in the workplace (Male, n/a)

From a religious point of view, the religion supports women's rights and encourages them to be a part of society. However, the culture plays a crucial role in preventing this. Thus, there is no equality between males and females in leadership positions (Female, customer relations manager)

The religion doesn't prevent women from work. However, women should respect themselves. Also it depends on the work (Female, F.O cooperator)

The work is a worship for both male and female (Male, n/a)

The religion has no impact on any job women do. In contrast, the religion strengthens the spirit of leadership and the individual skills in the workplace (Male, chief accountant)

The religion doesn't prevent women and encourages both women and men to work together. One example of this is that when women were participate in invasions during the life of the prophet (Male, food and beverage manager)

The religion states that women constitute the half of society and they have the rights like men (Male, maintenance)

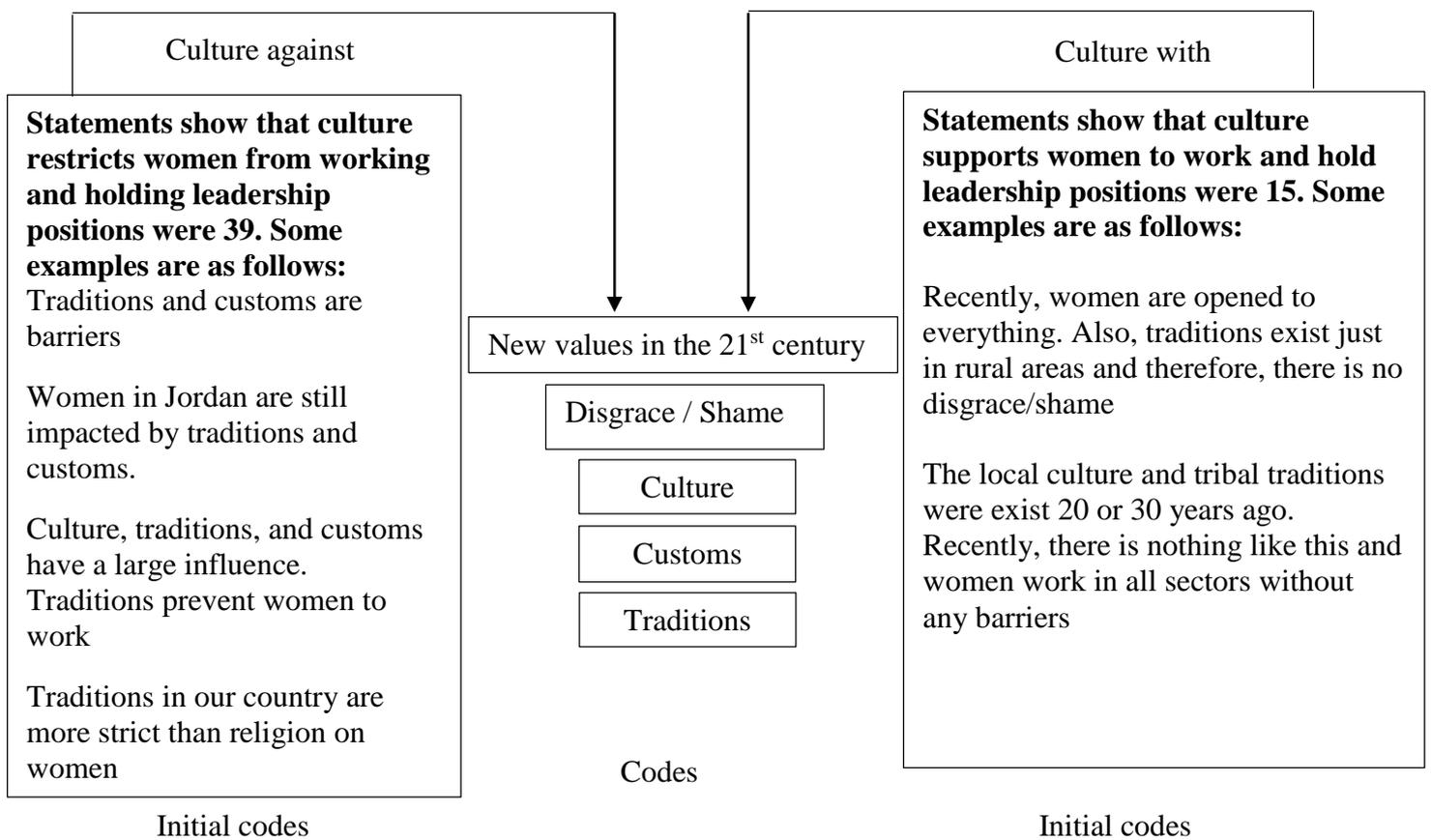
Based on the three subthemes and the quotations, it can be said that respondents' perception about Islam as a religion supports gender equality. The misinterpretation of religion and the

work environment could exclude Islam from being a factor regarding the perception towards female leaders in Jordan. The next section is the second main theme.

Theme Two: Tribal culture hinders female leaders

Figure 2 shows the most frequent codes under the culture question that emerged in the open-ended questions.

Figure 2 Culture’s role



The role of culture on women in the workplace

To better understand how cultural values and practices affect the situation of female workers, the researcher further grouped the emerged codes. For example, `culture`, `customs`, `traditions`, `tribalism` and `disgrace / shame` codes were grouped together to conclude one

sub-theme i.e., *culture, traditions and customs are barriers*. A key code in the answers was identified and used as a sub-theme which is *new values in the 21st century*.

Some examples from the respondents' responses for the second question (i.e. the influence of the local culture and tribal traditions on women's employment and leadership in organisations) show how different sub-themes have been identified in the cultural category.

In urban areas, there are no traditions and customs. Maybe these traditions and customs exist in rural areas. Therefore, these traditions and customs impact on the relationship between workers and not on the work itself (Male, general cashier)

In Jordan, the traditions restrict women to work because the notion of disgrace. And this leads to a negative communication in the society because men believe that they are responsible and as a result, this will prevent collaboration (Male, food and beverage manager)

Women are still restricted by inherited traditions and customs despite that the religion allows them to work in many sectors. However, there are negative perceptions that may come from women themselves. Because women rely on men and because men are capable to hold burden especially in jobs that require efforts and long hours (Male, HR manager)

Culture, traditions and customs have the largest impact on women at work in the society. Traditions reject women to work in low levels, so what do you expect about leadership positions! And traditions are more restricted on women from religion and restrict their abilities in all sectors (Male, cost and purchases accountant)

Jordan is classified into: (1) a society with no culture (the majority) that believes that women should stay at home and (2) a cultural society that believes that if women are

capable to work and hold leadership positions then she can go for this (Male, receptionist)

The local culture or traditions do not influence women when they work within a context that protect their femininity (Male, housekeeping)

Considering these answers to question number two, the first sub-theme was concluded as follows: culture, traditions and customs are barriers. For the second sub-theme, the following examples show how it was emerged.

The Jordanian culture has a high level of education for both men and women. Therefore, women and men are capable to hold leadership positions (Male, n/a)

Recently, women are open to all fields and traditions and customs are restricted just in the rural areas and there is no disgrace on women to work now (Male, chief accountant)

Recently, we are witnessing flexibility trends on this subject. And there is a decrease in the tribal notions. There is absolute freedom in some subjects (Male, accounts payable)

The families recently have more awareness. Also this awareness and local culture support this (Female, risk management manager)

The local culture and tribal traditions existed 20 or 30 years ago. Recently, there is nothing like this and women work in all sectors without any barriers (Male, n/a)

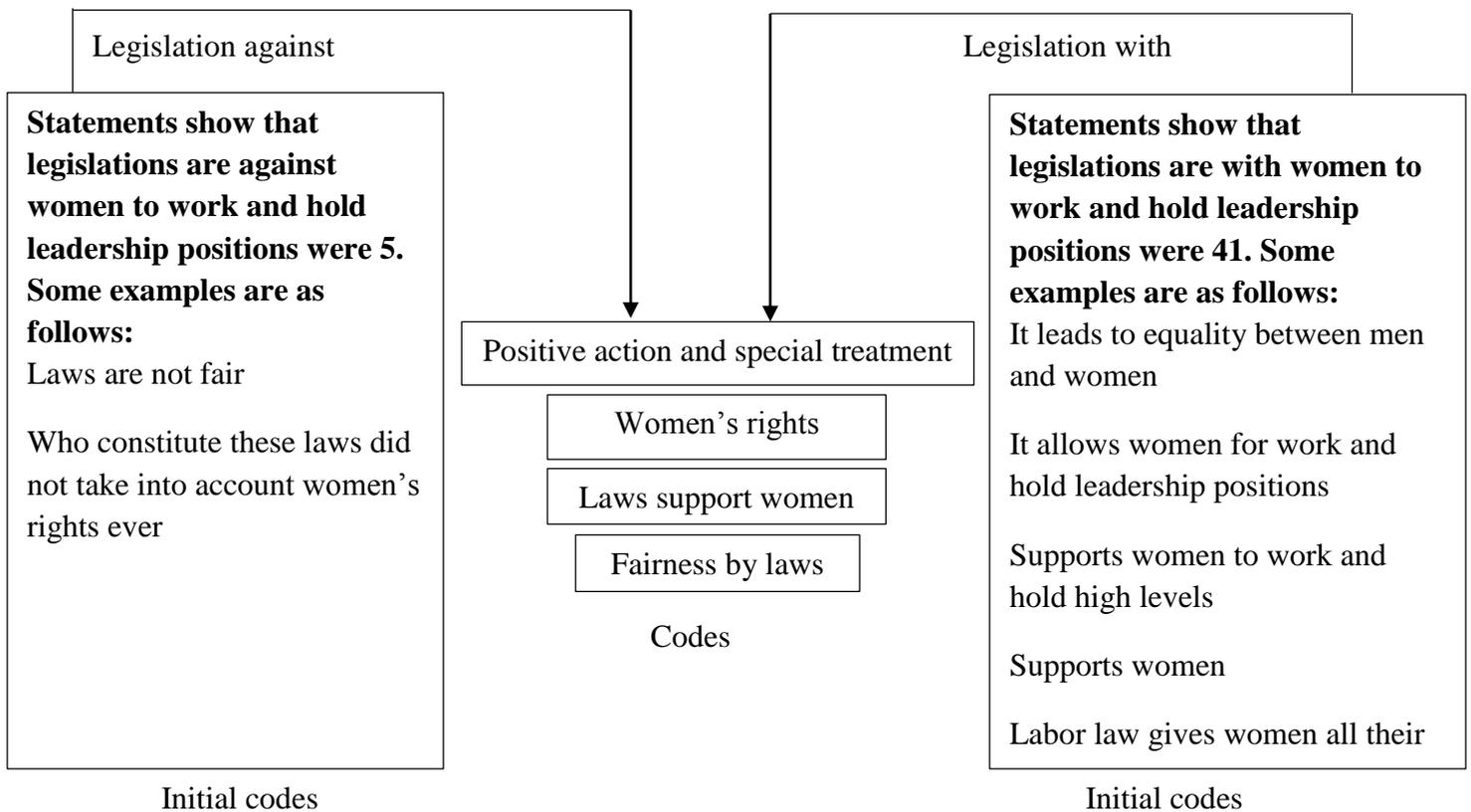
According to these answers, the second sub-theme is: new values in the 21st century. Overall, considering how many answers were against or with females to work, and looking at codes

and sub-themes that were emerged in the cultural category, one dominant theme has been identified i.e., *tribal culture hinders female leaders*.

Theme Three: Legal initiatives support gender equality

Figure 3 shows the most frequent codes under the law/legislation category that emerged in the open-ended questions.

Figure 3 Legislation’s role



The role of legislation on women in the workplace

For the legislation category, we found 4 key codes that have high relatedness. These codes (i.e. positive action and special treatment, women's rights, laws support women and fairness by laws) were grouped into one dominant theme: *legal initiatives support gender equality*.

This theme was concluded by looking at the most frequent codes in the answers. Given that the majority of participants (i.e. 41) perceive legislation to be with and supporter to females, and because of the highly relatedness among the emerged codes, the dominant theme was concluded directly. The following answers are some examples of the participant's responses about the implications of the legislation on female workers.

Laws support equality between males and females, however, recently, in some ministries and organisations, the law has a negative impact on females such as minimizing the maternity and marriage leave (Male, general cashier)

The labour law helps women massively, and respect them in terms of having holidays, leaves and holding leadership positions in the country. And women are capable enough for this and the law is equal (Male, chief accountant)

Make women superior to men sometimes, the Jordanian law is more sympathetic with women. Some laws need to be implemented by the employer, however, some females leave the work before reaching any leadership positions (Male, cost and purchases accountant)

It supports women because Jordan is a democratic country and supports women's rights (Male, bell man)

It allows women to work and hold leadership positions (Female, receptionist)

The labor law has established laws for women's benefits (Male, n/a)

Give complete rights for both genders (Male, HR officer)

DISCUSSION

This study has highlighted the implications of religion, culture and legislation on the women's advancement into positions of power in Jordan. The following sub-sections discuss these themes while linking them with the extant literature.

The First Dominant Theme: Islam Supports Gender Equality

The dominant theme that emerged in the current inductive-content analysis for the religion category is that "*Islam supports gender equality*". This is in line with previous literature that indicates a motivational role by religions. For example, Syed and Van Buren (2014) investigated gender equality within Islam religion in MMCs to develop an ethical framework for management and businesses. Their results indicate that in Islam, there are guidelines and directions that encourage complementarity and respect diversity. In addition, Syed and Ali (2010) note that both the Quranic teachings and the sayings of the Prophet encourage people to avoid discrimination and nepotism. In support of this, one sub-theme emerged in our content analysis was "*flexibility of religions*".

Based on the literature, one important factor that plays a role in the practices of employment relations is the Islamic faith (Syed & Ali, 2010). Metcalfe's (2006) study about the experiences of women professionals in MMCs shows that there is a complex overlapping between gender practices and Islamic values.

Syed and Van Buren (2014: 257) argue that "like other religious traditions, Islam lends itself to multiple interpretations of doctrine that are plausible in different contexts". In relation to female's situation in MMCs, understanding Islam through the patriarchal lens affects women in organisations by imposing them to get "their legitimacy in the society" (Afiouni, 2014:

316). Further, Syed and Ali (2010: 465) conducted a study to explain some trends of employment in Islam by reviewing the main Islamic texts (Quran and Hadith). They conclude that some Islamic values “remain heavily influenced by local cultural traditions”. Hence, it is arguable that there is inconsistency between the Islamic values and the Arab traditions as well as the Bedouin culture in dealing with females in the workplace. In line with this, our content analysis also shows that there is an overlapping between the religious teachings and the local culture and traditions. As shown above, one sub-theme emerged under the religion category is “*people’s misinterpretation of religion due to local/cultural traditions and customs*”.

In addition, Marlow (1997) argues that Islamic scholars after the Prophet Muhammad started to rationalise the tribal system and the pervasive culture that led to a deviation from gender egalitarian directions in Islam (cited in Syed & Van Buren, 2014). Hence, it seems that several historical and political factors are embedded in the way of understanding and interpreting religions.

By contrast, an opposite view emerged from the participants’ responses which shows that religion or its specific male-centred or patriarchal interpretation prevents females from accessing certain jobs. A sub-theme emerged in our inductive analysis as follows: “*the effects of work environment on females*”. Accordingly, based on 57 answers about the impact of religion on female workers, 11 participants argue that there are some religious beliefs that may prevent females to work, specifically, these beliefs are revolved around the gender mixed environments. Hence, based on this sub-theme and by counting the frequencies of codes, an alternative theme was emerged to report the opposite view of 11 participants (out of 57) as follows: “*women are not allowed to work in a mixed gender environment*”.

Overall, despite these directions by the Quran and Hadith, there is overwhelming gap between males and females in the work place in MMCs and thus, it is important to

understand why this gender gap is still massive in the Middle East /Arab countries. Therefore, as discussed above and in line with the literature, another category that may justify this gender gap and needs further exploration is culture. Next section discusses the main theme emerged in the cultural category.

The Second Dominant Theme: Tribal Culture Hinders Female Leaders

Jordan is well known by its Arab and Bedouin culture that is rooted in social/tribal customs. Given that Jordan is a centre of several Arab and Muslim countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia and Iraq) (Abu-Tayeh, 2007), the Arab customs are embedded in Jordan. In addition, Jordan is categorised as a young country given that 55.2% of the population are aged between 25-59 years (Social Security Corporation, 2014).

Jordan is shaped by different cultural backgrounds that combine both modernity lifestyle and Bedouin climate. For example, in comparison to some neighbour countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia), women in Jordan have relatively more freedom such as the right for full education, drive, vote and to participate in different businesses (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010).

Nevertheless, still, some of the high priorities in Jordan are the hospitality values and extended family traditions (Jordan Travel and Tourism, n.d) that revolve around village and rural life.

Despite that females in Jordan enjoy relatively more freedom compared to some other Arab countries, national and international reports indicate that females in Jordan have limited economic contribution and they encounter different forms of discriminations due to gender-related bias (e.g., Social Security Corporation, 2014; World Bank, 2014). In reviewing some international reports, such as the World Bank (2014), one key explanation for the restricted

participation and continued inequality in Jordan is the obstructive social values, and the discriminatory legal context. Therefore, in line with the literature, our content analysis indicates a dominant theme that asserts the embedded role of traditions and customs on forbidding women from accessing the positions of power. The dominant theme is that *“tribal culture hinders female leaders”*.

Culture and its embedded values significantly contribute in either constraining or facilitating businesses in societies (Hofstede, 1984). Therefore, scrutinizing the cultural consequences on businesses and organisations is a recurring theme in organisational studies. For example, one study that has been conducted with the aim of understanding the role of the tribal system on how it influences females in the Jordanian businesses is *“The Arabic culture of Jordan and its impacts on a wider Jordanian adoption of business continuity management”* (Sawalha & Meaton, 2012). Initially, they review the wider context of the Arab culture and they note that the Arab countries are conservative countries that support tribalism. Also they claim that female’s activities are more constrained due to the family honour values. Hence, they conclude that gender separation is one of the apparent Arab societies’ features. In specific, Sawalha and Meaton (2012) shed lights on the Jordanian culture, they note that tribal traditions and customs are stemmed from the Bedouin culture. Therefore, given that the small size of Jordan, these Bedouin and tribal customs have a major impact on businesses and female’s participation in the workplace. Furthermore, Sonbol (2003) confirms this by arguing that it is not tribalism that should give gender relations validity, rather tribalism leads to a continuing patriarchal order. In line with these trends in the literature, our content analysis concluded the following sub-theme *“culture, traditions and customs are barriers”*.

Another view in our analysis indicates that culture recently supports females to work. As shown above, the second sub-theme that emerged in the cultural category is the *“new values in the 21st century”*. Therefore, based on the second sub-theme and taking the frequencies of

codes into account, an alternative theme was emerged to report the opposite view of 15 participants (out of 54) as follows: “*contemporary culture supports female leaders*”

Overall, Jordan seems to be a conservative country consisting of tribal and Bedouin traditions that place values on the family honour toward protecting some norms and morals. Females in Jordan encounter some contextual challenges and constraints that avert them from getting involved in the business life. Hence, it’s arguable that the Jordanian Arab culture with the embedded tribal/local customs may justify the rarity of females in the workplace.

The Third Dominant Theme: Legal Initiatives Support Gender Equality

There are apparent trends toward equality, human rights and justice as well as obligations to enact equal laws. As clearly mentioned in the Jordanian constitution, Article six, “Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion.” (Jordan Const. article VI, S1). In addition, national efforts were taken to impose equality between genders. For example, the Parliament has agreed on a law that allows females to be in advanced positions (Word Bank, n.d.).

Nevertheless, despite these interventions toward gender equality and justice, discrimination and prejudicial evaluations against females remain exist. Hence, the third category that this paper seeks to investigate its implications on female workers/leaders is legislation. According to this content analysis, one major theme emerged in this category is “*legal initiatives support gender equality but they are not sufficient*”. This theme was concluded by noticing that the majority of respondents show that laws in Jordan are fair.

In review of the literature, it is apparent that there are serious steps toward improving women’s situation through legal and international interventions. For instance, as discussed in

the literature chapter, Jordan is a part of the International Bill of Human Rights that consists of six conventions of human rights (JNCW, 2011).

In addition to these steps and initiatives toward human rights by the local government and other international institutions, there are additional plans in the field of economic advancement of women. For example, there are two projects that have been launched by the UN as an executing agency toward empowering women. The first one is Women's Economic Empowerment in the Tourism Sector (Jordan), and the second one is the Regional Technical Resource Network for Women's Small and Micro Enterprises in the Arab Region (Jordan).

Despite the major plans and the regulatory and legislative reforms to address gender equality as serious actions by the government and policy makers, still, females are underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts in the workplace. One reason behind this may be the patriarchy and masculinity systems that involved in the regulatory framework which in turn may restrict female's needs through a patriarchal/male dominant discourse (National Coalition, 2012: 17). Hence, Sonbol (2003) argues that the implementation of some laws may deteriorate women's situation further because their contradictions with some cultural values and beliefs. Overall, it is conspicuous that in Jordan, some of these regulations and legitimations can be a problematic because of their paradoxes with some cultural values and beliefs.

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

Based on this qualitative study, it is apparent that cultural traditions and customs are embedded with religious' interpretations and practices as well as the legal framework. This study shows that Islam, like other religions "lends itself to multiple interpretations of doctrine that are plausible in different contexts" (Syed & Van Buren, 2014: 257). Therefore, women in organisations are impacted through the patriarchal interpretation of Islam that impose them to

get “their legitimacy in the society” (Afiouni, 2014: 316). Hence, in term of the overlapping between the cultural roots and the Islamic teachings, it is arguable that some Islamic values “remain heavily influenced by local cultural traditions” (Syed & Ali, 2010: 465).

In term of the legal framework, it was shown that the cultural traditions also involved in the application of laws and the reforms toward human rights. For example, some of these efforts toward gender equality and enacting laws for justice, as Sonbol (2003) notes, may deteriorate women’s situation further due to their contradictions with the local/tribal culture. Hence, when such regulations and laws contradict the cultural values, these efforts toward women’s rights can be a problematic.

Overall, it can be argued that what constitute the massive gap between males and females in the economic life is the pervasive tribal culture, traditions and customs.

CONCLUSION

This paper offers new insights about the overlapping between culture and religion and their implications on women’s involvement in the business life. As noticed, there are pro-justice trends within Islamic theology, however, such trends toward egalitarianism are largely impacted by the tribal systems that encourage 'Bedou-cracy' and 'Sheikho-cracy' models that manifest in establishing unbalanced image between genders in the economic and social spheres. Hence, businesses and policy makers must consider a pro-justice approach that takes into account and enables full utilisation of women’s skills and capabilities.

A limitation of this paper is the limited sample of 4-star and 5-satar hotels. Future researchers are encouraged to extend this study drawing on a wider/different population in terms of size and industries. Also scholars may explore other contextual and societal factors that may be contributing to the gender gaps in employment and leadership.

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