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## Women's Livelihood and Entitlements in the Middle East: What Difference has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made?

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## 1. Introduction

A large body of scholarship, including much of the feminist literature, has cast a critical eye on globalization's short-term and long-term social effects. It has been argued that the neoliberal philosophy of "free markets", on which the economic (and financial) aspect of globalization is based, is inimical to concepts of full employment, public goods, and social rights. Feminists argue further that many of the trade and financial agreements associated with neoliberal economic policies contravene the spirit and letter of international conventions on human rights, women's rights, and labour rights. In particular, the withering away of the welfarist, developmentalist state is regarded as detrimental to women's interests. Approaches to globalization remain polarized, and it is not my intention in this paper to review them.<sup>1</sup> Yet qualitative regional or country-case studies could elucidate the contradictory nature of the neoliberal policy turn and the complex and differentiated ways that it has affected states, employment patterns, and social policies, especially as far as women's rights are concerned.

In this paper I examine changes in patterns of women's employment and social policies pertaining to women in the Middle East and North Africa, and make comparisons between two periods: the oil-boom era of the 1960s-1980s, and the period of liberalization since the latter part of the 1980s and into the present decade. Like other areas in the world-economy, the region has undergone a shift from state-directed economic development with protected industries to a more open and liberalized economic policy environment. Economies within the region are more or less liberalized in terms of trade and financial markets, and the region as a whole has seen less foreign direct investment than have other regions. Some economists have explained this in terms of the less competitive nature of MENA industries, labour skills, and wages compared with other regions, largely the result of the region's earlier "competitive advantage" in oil (Karshenas, 2001; Hakimian, 2001). This is an argument that I consider in this paper.

Although the region is often studied as an integrated whole<sup>2</sup> and the term "regional oil economy" was coined to describe the extensive labour and capital flows that characterized the region during the oil boom era, there does exist sufficient differentiation across the countries to warrant a typology of economies. In his discussion of industrialization in the Middle East, Robert Mabro (1988) has offered the following classification:

- Oil economies poor in other resources, including population (Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE)
- Mixed oil economies (Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia)
- Non-oil economies (Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Turkey, Yemen)

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1. I discuss this and related issues in chapter 2 of Moghadam (2005a).

<sup>2</sup> "Integrated whole" – like "integrated global economy" – may not be the most precise term, given that intra-regional trade links are weak and there are serious political divisions among the countries, including the Arab countries. Nonetheless, because of certain shared characteristics, including culture, religion, history, and the prevalence of oil economies, the MENA region is considered an appropriate site for regional analysis, not only by international organizations such as the World Bank but also by scholarly organizations such as the Middle East Studies Association.

Alan Richards and John Waterbury (1990) came up with a somewhat different taxonomy in their analysis of the political economy of the Middle East:

- The Coupon Clippers: Libya, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar. These states have much oil and little of anything else, including people. They have been and will continue to be almost entirely dependent upon oil and any money earned from overseas investments.
- The Oil Industrializers: Iraq, Iran, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia. The first three states share the main features of large oil exports, a substantial population, other natural resources, and a chance to create industrial and agricultural sectors that will be sustainable over the long run. Saudi Arabia lacks the non-oil resources of the first three countries.
- The Watchmakers: Israel, Jordan, Tunisia, and Syria. These four small countries have limited natural resources and must therefore concentrate on investing in human capital and exporting skill-intensive manufactures. In the early 1990s, manufactured goods accounted for 84 percent of Israeli, 52 percent of Jordanian, and 42 percent of Tunisian exports.
- The NICs: Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco. These countries have relatively large populations, relatively good agricultural land or potential, and a long experience with industrial production.
- The Agro-Poor: Sudan and Yemen. These are the poorest countries of the region and ones where the agricultural-development-led strategy of industrial growth seems to offer the best hope.

The two classifications differ somewhat, and one can raise questions about the second typology's definition of Egypt and Morocco as NICs. (Richards and Waterbury did not include this classification in the second, 1996, edition of their book.) In this paper, I combine aspects of the two typologies and focus on female labour, social policy, and the changing political economy. I discuss the issues in a regional perspective but with an emphasis on Iran (an example of an oil economy), Jordan (a non-oil economy), and Tunisia (a mixed oil economy). I make the following arguments. First, all three countries were affected by the oil boom in such a way as to keep the supply of and demand for female labour – and a supply of educated and skilled women workers – limited. Second, non-economic factors such as the role and nature of the state and cultural understandings about male-female roles reinforced a “patriarchal gender contract”. This has been especially strong in Jordan, and in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. Third, when countries were compelled to open their markets they found themselves in an uncompetitive position, mainly due to a less educated and skilled labour force, especially among women. In this respect, however, Tunisia has fared better than Iran and Jordan, because the state has welcomed FDI in sectors that draw on female employment; moreover, Tunisia has a longer and more consistent tradition of women's rights and it began liberalization earlier than did either Iran or Jordan. Fourth, the employment effects of the changing political economy and of globalization appear mixed. Women seem to be losing jobs in some areas but gaining them in others. There has been an informalization of work, but in some cases women's access to salaried work may be increasing, and involvement in NGOs is increasing. In addition, social policies pertaining to women seem to be changing to conform to international norms. On the other hand, unemployment rates are high, inequalities have been increasing, and new poverty groups have emerged,

although there is insufficient data to draw conclusions on any feminization of poverty.<sup>3</sup>

The discussion that follows analyses patterns and trends in MENA women's employment, unemployment, and welfare in the two periods, and ends with some recommendations to enhance women's economic participation (public and private sectors) and their social rights. Sources of data are the ILO, ICFTU, World Bank, UNDP, ESCWA, CAWTAR, national statistical yearbooks and other documents, publications by women's organizations, relevant secondary sources, and the author's fieldwork. This paper also addresses some methodological issues and discusses the enumeration problems and data inconsistencies and inadequacies in connection with women's economic activities in the region. Because of the importance of this matter, we begin with a discussion of data and methods.

## **2. Women's Employment in MENA: A Methodological and Conceptual Note**

A number of researchers have discussed the problems entailed in studying women's economic activities in the Middle East (Anker 1995; Assaad 1999; Doctor and Khoury 1991; Moghadam 2002, 2003). First, the region suffers from a paucity of data on women's productive activities and economic contributions. A major problem has involved definitions and understandings of work and employment, especially in the rural and urban informal sectors. As in other parts of the world, much of what women perform in the urban informal sector or household is not recognized as a contribution to the national income or to development but is rather perceived to be a private service to the family. Women's agricultural work also has tended to be underreported in national accounts. This non-recognition lies not only with statisticians and policymakers but also with ordinary men and women, who may be motivated by prevailing attitudes and modesty codes to refrain from providing an accurate description of women's productive activities, or who wish to avoid the notice of the tax authorities. As a result, census data in many countries have frequently reported an extremely small economically active female population.

A second, related problem lies with the informal sector. Small workshops (such as textile enterprises) that rely on female labour may avoid taxation through non-registration. Not only does this result in a further underestimation of women's industrial participation, but it also entails more exploitative work conditions. Most of our understanding of the urban informal sector, and especially of women's roles in it, comes from ethnographic studies (e.g., Lobban and contributors 1998; Poya 1999). There have been few systematic studies of the informal sector in MENA countries. Jacques Charmes has tried to measure its size and growth, and concluded that there has been no significant growth of female informal sector activity in the Arab countries. (See his contribution in the CAWTAR Report 2001.) Egypt's 1989 Labour Force Sample Survey included an expanded definition of economic activity to capture women's participation in agriculture, the urban informal sector (wholesale and retail trade/sales work), and the unemployed population. As a result, there were significant differences between the results of the 1986 census and the 1989 LFSS; the former reported a 10% female share of the labour force, while the latter concluded that

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<sup>3</sup> This does underscore the need to understand better the class dimensions of neoliberalism's impact, and the divergent ways that middle-class and working-class women may experience globalization. This important issue, however, is outside the scope of the present study.

women were 28 percent of the labour force (Moghadam, 1998, ch. 5). In 1998, another LFSS was conducted using the same methodology as the 1989 LFSS to capture changes over the previous ten years; on the basis of the expanded definition of economic activity, it concluded that Egyptian women's labour force participation rate was nearly 42 percent (Assaad 1999). On the other hand, a study of Jordanian women's informal sector activity found no significant increase in female labour force participation (Flynn 1999). To my knowledge, there has been no systematic study of the informal sector in Iran.

Whether counted or not, workers in the informal sector typically have no access to social insurance programs, although they may be beneficiaries of assistance for the poor, whether these take the form of government-sponsored clinics and subsidies on food and fuel, as in Iran and Tunisia in the 1960s and 1970s, or more targeted transfers for poor households or low-income divorced women, as in Tunisia since the 1990s.

A third problem: inconsistency in data collection across time and across government agencies. Some countries (or surveys) count persons over the age of fifteen as part of the labour force, other countries count persons aged ten and above, still others (such as Iranian surveys) have included persons aged six and over. Iran's first two census reports, for example, show high rates of female involvement in manufacturing (see Table 1). The proportion declines somewhat in 1976 and rather drastically after the Islamic revolution. Does this discrepancy suggest differences in enumeration techniques, or real changes in female economic participation? Census data sometimes over-count workers (as with female manufacturing workers in Iran and Tunisia – see Table 1) and sometimes undercount them. In Iran since at least 1976, the census bureau reports a very small female agricultural work force, but the agricultural census will account for women more properly and indicate a much larger female work force. There has been inconsistency in data collection across countries (the result of new methods of enumeration with labour force sample surveys, as in the Egyptian case mentioned above), making comparisons difficult.

A fourth problem is that labour force data in international sources do not always agree – sometimes not with each other and other times not with national-level data. For example, when in the early 1990s Iranian sources were reporting a female labour force share of 11 percent, the UNDP's *Human Development Report* was reporting a larger proportion. In more recent years, this problem of inconsistency across data sets has been resolved to a certain extent, as most sources now rely on the ILO for labour-force data. Still, some data sets still disagree – for example, the World Bank's GenderStats figures on the female labour force may be higher than those of ESCWA or national-level reports (e.g., see figures for Jordan and Iran). Moreover, there remain many gaps in coverage for MENA countries, and Saudi Arabia appears not to provide data to the international agencies (including ESCWA), especially on employment.

Finally, it is difficult to determine women's access to earned income or the gender-based wage gap because of a lack of gender-disaggregated income data. This can be discerned from an examination of country-level annual statistical yearbooks (which are based on census data) and of international data sets, such as those of the UN. This is true of many developing countries and not just MENA, and within

MENA, Turkey stands out for the availability of such data. For example, Turkey's State Institute for Statistics carries out gender-disaggregated surveys, which have been used by researchers in numerous publications (see, e.g., Moghadam 1998, ch. 4). The national Human Development Report 2001 for Turkey includes data on earned income that is differentiated by gender and also by region. Other countries, however, do not report wages. As a result, in order to calculate its measure of "Estimated Earned Income" by sex, the UNDP's annual *Human Development Report* makes estimates of female and male earned income on the basis of GDP per capita (PPP US\$), female and male shares of the economically active population, and the assumption that women earn 75% of male earnings.<sup>4</sup>

Some countries in the region provide fairly comprehensive quantitative information on women's economic activity and employment. In addition to Turkey, which already has been mentioned, Tunisia should be noted. The women's research and documentation center CREDIF was formed in the early 1990s to assist the government in its women and development planning and to provide studies on various aspects of women's lives. CREDIF publications on women's economic activities are a valuable source of information, and are referenced in this study.

Because of gaps in coverage and enumeration inconsistencies – which make time-series and comparative analyses difficult – care must be exercised in reviewing and interpreting available data. However, this paper is concerned principally with examining women's access to the formal sector of the economy and to salaried employment, where the data presented are more reliable. Women's employment data in public services and large-scale industry are virtually free from gaps in coverage. Moreover, the formal sector is covered by social insurance policies and labour law.

A final methodological – and conceptual – note is in order. Because of certain shared characteristics – the Islamic religion and some cultural practices, the colonial encounter, geopolitics, the prevalence of oil and rentier states, the predominance of MENA countries in OPEC – the countries of the Middle East and North Africa conventionally constitute a unit of analysis for international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Labour Office (see, for example, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*) as well as for scholarly associations such as the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and the Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS). And yet the region is also divided into sub-units, which form the basis for many analyses. For example, the publications of UN's regional commission for the region, ESCWA, provide data and analysis only for the Arab countries of West Asia; this excludes North Africa, which are members of the ECA, while Iran is part of ESCAP and Turkey is part of the ECE. When the UNDP's *Human Development Report* provides aggregate data for regions, it groups all the Arab countries; Iran is excluded from this ranking. The UN study, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* has provided data separately for "West Asia" (including Iran and Turkey) and "North Africa". The Tunis-based Center for Arab Women's Training and Research (CAWTAR) produces policy-related studies for all the Arab countries. Within MESA, there are specialists on the Maghrib, and principally Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, due to that sub-region's shared experience with French

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<sup>4</sup> UNIDO provides country-level data on manufacturing wages, but these are not disaggregated by gender. There are, of course, national-level household and labour-force surveys which provide such data, but accessing them was outside the scope of the present study.

colonialism and the French language. Iranian studies, Turkish studies, and Yemeni studies similarly constitute distinct scholarly associations within MESA.

These classifications for scholarship and policy analysis provide for rich regional, sub-regional, and country studies, and feminist scholarship has tended to follow these classifications (along with a relatively new one, the study of Muslim women). There are good arguments for studying Arab countries alone, or Maghrib countries separately, especially for studies that focus on, or are informed by, culture or politics. In a political economy approach, however, the conceptual entry point lies in resource endowments and economic organization, as we saw with the classifications by Mabro and by Richards and Waterbury, along with issues of distribution. In the feminist political economy approach taken here, attention is drawn to the gendered outcomes of the use of natural resources and systems of distribution, the way that female labour is deployed in economic processes, and state policies pertaining to women's participation. The latter is especially important given that a key feature of MENA countries has been strong and centralized state systems – rentier, authoritarian, and, for the most part, culturally conservative – and this has had distinct implications for economic development, political processes, and gender relations. Such an approach helps us to understand similarities and differences across countries in the region and between the MENA region and other regions by utilizing economic and non-economic variables. For example, economic differences among the countries of the region (e.g., oil and non-oil) explain to a large extent different patterns and rates of female economic activity (e.g., higher female employment in Tunisia compared to Iran or Algeria). However, non-economic factors must be mobilized to explain why Tunisian women had lower educational attainment than Vietnamese women as recently as 1990, why Iranian women's economic participation declined and fertility rose in the 1980s, why the region as a whole has lower educational attainment than does Latin America as a whole, or why the region has lower female labour force participation than East and Southeast Asia. Clearly, an explanatory framework must take into account political economy, cultural understandings about male and female roles, and state policies.

### **3. Industrialization, the Oil Boom, and Women's Employment**

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Middle East was part of the global process of the internationalization of productive and financial capital – now better known as (economic) globalization. At this time the large MENA countries, such as Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and Algeria, were pursuing import-substitution industrialization, where machinery was imported to run local industries producing consumer goods. This strategy was associated with an economic system characterized by central planning and a large public sector, and it opened up some employment opportunities for women, mainly in the expanding government sector but also in state-run factories or industrial plants in the private sector receiving state support and foreign investment. The rise of oil prices in the early 1970s led to a proliferation of development projects in the OPEC countries, massive intraregional male labour flows from capital-poor to oil-rich countries, and considerable intraregional investment and development assistance. These changes also affected women, who were increasingly brought into the labour force, although in distinct ways.

Industrialization is an important part of economic development and has implications for female labour incorporation. Concerted industrialization began in Latin America and Southeast Asia earlier than it did in the Middle East, but by the 1960s, MENA countries were seeking to catch up. In Brazil and Mexico, foreign investment played an important role in propelling industrialization, although import-substitution industrialization remained the main development strategy. In the early 1960s, Southeast Asian countries embarked upon a state-directed export industrialization strategy, which, along with the expansion of world trade in the 1970s, contributed to their dramatic economic growth (Jenkins 1991). In the Caribbean, where plantation agriculture and the demands of colonialism had already created a supply of female labour, foreign investment relied on female labour for export manufacturing (Osirim 1997). In the Middle East, the industrialization drive gained momentum when revolutionary regimes took over in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, and the Shah of Iran decided to divert oil revenues to finance industrialization. Between 1955 and 1975 the industrialization of the Middle East followed a classic pattern of import-substitution industrialization.<sup>5</sup>

Those countries rich in oil and poor in other resources (Mabro's first category) chose an industrial strategy based on petroleum products and petrochemicals. Indeed, for the oil-rich Gulf states, foreign exchange from oil revenues constituted the accumulation of capital. The industrialization of other countries (Mabro's second and third groups) followed a typical pattern of ISI, although Algeria, Iran, and Iraq remained dependent on oil revenues for foreign exchange and to finance imports and development projects. In almost all the countries, the state was seen as the creator and guarantor of jobs. In the Middle East, ISI did not evolve into manufacturing for export; because of oil revenues, governments chose to extend the import-substitution process, moving into capital-intensive sectors involving sophisticated technology. Oil revenues certainly were used for domestic investment purposes, and foreign investment was beginning to appear in Iran in the 1970s. For example, in Iran a world market factory, commencing operations in 1974 with US and West German capital

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<sup>5</sup> Israel did not adopt ISI.

investment, produced shoes, leather goods, textiles, and garments (Frobel, Heinrichs, and Kreye, 1980).<sup>6</sup> But in both the oil and mixed oil economies, the contribution of petroleum to the national income was such as to make the apparent share of other sectors appear insignificant.

A consequence of the oil boom was the onset of massive intra-regional labour migration, largely from the non-oil countries to the oil-rich countries, during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Tunisia and Jordan were labour-sending countries (largely to Libya, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia), while Iran was a labour-receiving country (mainly Korean and Afghan workers, and Western engineers and technicians). Remittances by Arab male workers were important to the welfare of households in the sending countries, while the oil and mixed oil economies could afford high wages for workers. For example, worker remittances from Jordanians working in the Gulf countries represented as much as 16% of GDP during the 1980s (see Moghadam 1998, ch.6). Oil revenues and labour migration had a positive impact on growth and wages but a largely negative impact on the deployment of female labour.

An analysis of wage trends by economist Massoud Karshenas (2001) shows that the wages of manufacturing workers were higher – often by a factor of two or three – in most of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa than they were in Asian countries such as Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines. As can be seen in Table 2, even during the years of expanded export, Asian workers were earning far less than MENA workers. While low wages served to increase female economic activity in Asia, the higher wages earned by men in MENA served to limit the supply of job-seeking women (Karshenas 1995, 1997; Karshenas and Moghadam 2001).

Table 2 about here

Massive intraregional migration of men from the labour surplus countries of Jordan, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen to better-paying jobs in the oil-rich states of the region (such as Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE) affected female employment patterns. The migratory trend created shortages in the labour markets of the sending countries, resulting in some cases in the agricultural sector's dependence on female workers (Chamie 1985; Azzam, Abu Nasr, Lorfing 1985; CREDIF 2002). The formal sector remained predominantly male, but women were making some inroads.

Among those developing countries where female employment grew significantly during the 1970s (see ILO/INSTRAW 1985), especially high increases were reported in Tunisia and South Yemen, although both started from a very low base.<sup>7</sup> For both countries, this was a function partly of male out-migration, and partly of the state's gender policy. In a 1982 special economic report on South Yemen (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen [PDRY]), the World Bank estimated women's employment at more than 20 percent. Because of the socialist state policy of encouragement women's social participation, between 1976 and 1984 the number of women working in the public and mixed sectors doubled in South Yemen. In Tunisia,

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<sup>6</sup> See especially Table III–17/18 in the book's Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Female labour force participation in Jordan was 2.6% in 1961, and in Tunisia it was 3.0 percent in 1966. See Moghadam (2003), Table 2.2, p. 50.

since independence and under the leadership of President Bourguiba, Tunisian women had held rights that were far in advance of other MENA countries. By the mid-1970s, Tunisia reported a 12 percent female share of the labour force. Meanwhile, in oil-rich Iran, the female labour force measured 12-14 percent (depending on the source of data). In contrast, Jordanian women's labour force participation remained a very low 3 percent. This was due to the fact that although Jordan was a labour-exporting country, it was also a labour-importing country. The importation of Arab male labour and southeast Asian female labour prevented Jordanian women's labour incorporation. High fertility rates (close to 7 per woman) as well as a conservative culture fostered by tribal authority militated against women's economic participation.

For relatively well-educated women, the expansion of the state sector produced employment opportunities in teaching, health, and welfare, along with limited access to jobs in the manufacturing sector.<sup>8</sup> During this period, governments instituted social security programs for workers in the public sector and for large private sector enterprises. Protective legislation for working mothers – such as paid maternity leave and workplace nurseries – was in place in all MENA countries, including Iran, Jordan, and Tunisia (ILO 1985; Brocas, Cailloux, & Oget 1990; Moghadam 1998; CREDIF 2002). Such policies did not affect the majority of women, because of the small size of the female labour force, but they were enjoyed by professional women and the small number of working-class women in factories.

Generally, in developing countries, the degree of occupational choice that women had within the structure of employment was linked to the type of industrialization the country was undergoing, the nature of the state, the size of the public sector, and the class background of women entering the labour force. In some countries, development and state expansion afforded women a wider range of professional work opportunities than was available in the most industrialized societies of the West. This breadth of options was particularly striking in Turkey, where in the 1970s the female share of teaching, banking, and medical positions reached one-third, and where one in every five practicing lawyers was female (Kazgan 1981). Oncü explained this in terms of elite recruitment patterns; under conditions of rapid expansion, the most prestigious and highly remunerated professions were maintained by the admission of women from the upper reaches of the social hierarchy (Oncü 1981: 189). In Turkey as in other MENA countries, notably Egypt at the time, the majority of the female labour force in the formal sector was found in professional jobs in the government sector.

The concentration of the female labour force in professional jobs was found also in Iran. There, however, labour force statistics based on the various census surveys show a fairly large proportion of female labour in manufacturing, although the nature of that participation was predominantly rural and traditional (e.g., rug-making and handicrafts). In Tunisia, too, as in other MENA countries, the 1960s and 1970s saw the industrial sector expanding as a predominantly male enclave, with high wages and a relatively influential role for the trade unions (CREDIF 2002; Ben Romdhane 2005). But also in the 1970s, Tunisia moved away from its socialistic economic strategy to a more capitalistic one, and in the 1980s opened up its economy.

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<sup>8</sup> Some governments (e.g., Egypt and Morocco) had an explicit policy of guaranteed employment, in the public sector, for graduates.

Women's participation began to increase – and indeed, manufacturing became feminized – after Tunisia adopted a capitalistic and open economy.<sup>9</sup>

The high concentrations of female labour in MNCs characteristic of Southeast Asian and some Latin American countries are rarely found in the Middle East, partly because EOI has not been pursued by all the countries of the region and partly because of reliance on revenue and foreign exchange from oil exports. Mabro (1988: 692) has written that Iran probably would have embarked upon an export-oriented strategy if the 1979 revolution and the war with Iraq had not arrested the process of industrial development. This proposition would help explain the decline in female industrial employment in the years immediately following the 1979 revolution and the stagnation in overall female employment in the Islamic Republic.

Despite some industrialization and growth in manufacturing exports, industry in MENA countries failed to make progress comparable to that achieved in India, Brazil, South Korea, or China. As Mabro (1988: 696) stated: "The Arab countries, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, Turkey have still a long way to go on the road to industrialization." Richards and Waterbury (1996: 65) noted that total manufacturing value-added (MVA) in the region was slightly less than that of South Korea, and that it was instructive "to compare MVA for Turkey and Iran with that of Italy, which has roughly the same number of people: Italy's MVA is ten and one-half times that of Turkey and roughly sixteen times that of Iran." This ratio has implications for patterns of female employment: Lower levels of industrialization or manufacturing for export means less female proletarianization and activity in the productive sectors.

Table 2 provides data on the female share of paid and unpaid employment in all non-agricultural economic activities (that is, manufacturing and services) over time. The table shows the diversity across countries in the region, but it also illustrates the limited nature of women's involvement in the non-agricultural labour force and in paid employment, especially when compared with Asian countries. Because of the methodological problems discussed in Section 2, it is difficult to discern a pattern of women's involvement in manufacturing in MENA; in some countries the female share of manufacturing declined between the 1960s and 1980s (especially Iran) while in others the female share steadily increased (e.g., Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia). It is not clear why women's manufacturing employment declined between 1961 and 1979 in Jordan's case; one can speculate about enumeration issues, rising wages, or the impact of the 1967 war and the influx of Palestinian refugees. In Iran's case, the dramatic decline between 1976 and 1986 is certainly a function of the Revolution and the new regime's emphasis on family roles for women. Women's manufacturing employment increased somewhat in subsequent years, but according to the 1996 census their share of manufacturing was 14 percent – and much of it was carried out in the rural sector (Moghadam 2003, ch. 7). This is not surprising, given Iran's oil economy and lack of investments in light industries. By contrast, Tunisia shows high female shares of manufacturing for the 1970s and 1980s, although the figures on paid employment suggest that the women workers were not necessarily concentrated in modern or urban factories. Indeed, Table 2 shows that in some countries the majority of women in manufacturing are not salaried workers in the formal sector but perhaps home-based or other types of irregular workers, probably in rural areas. This seems

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<sup>9</sup> As in other developing countries, however, women's employment conditions were far from ideal.

especially to be the case with Iran in 1976, Turkey in 1970, and Tunisia in all years. In this respect, the contrast with the East Asian countries is striking.

Table 2 about here

The oil economy and high wages for men, along with the industrialization strategy followed by the large MENA countries, reinforced what I have called the patriarchal gender contract – the implicit and often explicit agreement that men are the breadwinners and are responsible for financially maintaining wives, children, and elderly parents, and that women are wives, homemakers, mothers, and care-givers (Moghadam 1998). The patriarchal gender contract is implicit in cultural understandings about male and female roles across the countries in the region. It is explicit in the region's Islamic-based family laws, which place women and girls under the guardianship of fathers, husbands, or other male kin. Although Iran's family law was reformed and modernized in the early 1970s, it was abrogated by the Islamic state in 1979 and replaced by an extremely patriarchal version of Sharia-based family law. Jordan's family law is similarly very conservative; not only does the family law require that women obtain the husband's permission to stay in or seek a job, but cultural norms allow the father to continue to exert control after the daughter's marriage, such that "it is often the father who refuses to allow the married daughter to take a job, even when her husband agrees and encourages her" (Sonbol 2003: 6). Only Tunisia has had a consistently modern family law (or personal status code) since independence, and further reforms were enacted in the early 1990s. In most interpretations, Muslim family law obligates men to maintain their wives and wives to obey their husbands, and gives male kin a larger share of family wealth. Until relatively recently, almost all MENA countries required that women could seek employment or undertake travel only with the permission of their husbands (Moghadam 1998, 2003). Muslim family law is a type of social policy that also has been a key feature of the MENA state's gender policy. It has had implications not only for women's political and civil rights, but for their social rights and economic participation as well.

By the 1980s, about 40 percent of the population of working-age women were employed in most countries. The highest rates of economic activity for women were to be found in East Asia (59 percent) and the Soviet Union (60 percent). In the MENA region, however, rates were far lower (3-14 percent). The combined effects of the regional oil economy, conservative cultural understandings, and state gender policies led to fewer investments in female education, skill acquisition, and employment. Tables 3 and 4 provide comparative data on mean years of schooling of adults, and patterns of female employment. As can be seen from Table 3 (circa 1990), there have been variations across MENA countries in mean years of schooling, but MENA countries were behind other countries, including much poorer ones. Table 4 shows patterns of women's employment and occupational distribution across regions in the world economy. As can be seen, the vast majority of employed women in MENA in 1990 were professionals (largely in social and public services related to education and healthcare). Compared to other regions, MENA women were under-represented in production jobs, in clerical and sales work, and in administrative and managerial positions.

Tables 3 and 4 about here

## *Export Orientation and Female Labour*

In the 1980s, in line with the changing global economy or as a result of rising indebtedness, the non-oil MENA countries turned to an export-oriented growth strategy in manufacturing and agriculture. The pioneer was Turkey. Following the 1980 military coup, Turkey began to liberalize its economy and shift from ISI to EOI. By 1990 its manufactured exports constituted 68 percent of total exports, and in 2000 that figure grew to 81 percent. Morocco and Jordan similarly expanded their manufacturing sectors (UNDP 2002b, Table 14: 198-201). Egypt under Sadat tried to follow the Turkish model and liberalize its economic system to promote industrial exports, but since then it has been less successful than Turkey.

For countries that previously had relied on worker remittances, the shift in development strategy became even more urgent after intra-regional migration ended with the Gulf war and unemployment began to soar. Tunisia's liberalization started relatively early, and exports of non-oil products began to grow (see Table 5). As a result, the oil sector's share of total exports grew lower than that of the OPEC countries – 42 percent in 1985 compared to Iran's 85 percent (or Saudi Arabia's 97 percent). Jordan accepted a stabilization and adjustment program and implemented trade liberalization in 1990-91. As a non-oil economy, it sought to increase its manufacturing base (e.g., textiles, garments, pharmaceuticals) as well as its services sector (e.g., banking, tourism, and telecommunications). After the end of the destructive war with Iraq, Iran partially liberalized its economy in the early 1990s, during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, and its development plans sought the goal of less oil dependency. However, as seen in Table 5, oil dependency continued.

Table 5 about here

How does our hypothesis regarding the salience of oil in the determination of patterns of female employment fare in light of the available evidence for the mid-1990s? Export-led industrialization does appear to correlate with higher rates of female manufacturing employment. Tunisia, a mixed oil economy, has seen foreign direct investment from France, Italy, and Spain in textiles and garments, telecommunications, metals, and food processing. Data from the ILO show that by the early 1990s, fully 43 percent of manufacturing workers were female, and a high proportion of all working women was involved in manufacturing.<sup>10</sup> This was not the case, however, with Jordan, another non-oil economy. Although Jordan could boast some of the highest rates of female educational attainment in the region, it reported only a 10 percent female share of total employment in 1993, with just 7 percent of the female labour force involved in the industrial sector (see Moghadam 1998, ch. 6). By the late 1990s, a USAID-sponsored female labor force sample survey found that, even with an expanded definition to capture women's non-formal economic activity (that is, the informal sector and the agricultural sector), Jordanian women's labour force participation rate was a mere 12.5 percent (Flynn 1999). Here again, non-economic

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<sup>10</sup> Another non-oil economy, Morocco, similarly emphasized export-orientation, and by the early 1990s, 37 percent of its manufacturing work force was female. According to Laetitia Cairoli (1999, 2006), the garment industry in Fez was/is overwhelmingly female, attracting predominantly young, unmarried women.

factors may help to explain this apparent anomaly. In the early 1990s, the Oslo agreement promised economic benefits, and it could be reasonably expected that Jordanian women's economic activities would increase due to both demand and supply factors. Yet Jordan was an extremely conservative country where honor killings took place, and where fertility rates were close to four per woman (compared to Tunisia's 2.5 and Iran's 2.6). Indeed, as unemployment grew in the 1990s, there was an implicit policy to discourage female employment (Amawi, 2000; CAWTAR 2001; Moghadam 1998, ch. 6). As for Iran, it continued to rely on oil exports, and the state remained staunchly Islamic and culturally conservative. Thus, according to the 1996 census, the female labor force measured 12.7 percent – that is, roughly the same as in 1976 (though proportionately far smaller, given population growth).

Evidence from the MENA region would therefore confirm the view in the WID/GAD literature that export-led industrialization and female employment are positively related. The region also provides evidence that oil-centered industrialization inhibits female employment. The oil economies of Algeria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have relied heavily on oil extraction and revenues, and in all three countries only a small proportion of the female economically active population is gainfully employed. In addition to political economy, cultural understandings of male-female roles, as well as state policies (including gender policies), explain patterns of women's employment, and hence their livelihood and entitlements.

We should discuss the special case of Turkey, because although it is the most industrialized MENA country, it does not have the high levels of female industrial employment or even female share of formal sector employment that one would expect. In fact, Turkish women remain concentrated in agricultural work rather than in the modern industrial sector. Turkey's proximity to Europe and its greater participation in the international division of labour have drawn more women into world market activities, but most of these activities are in the informal sector—unwaged, family-based production of agricultural goods or carpets or textiles, as has been documented by Mine Cinar (1994) and others. Agriculture, light manufacturing industry (tobacco, textiles/apparel, food/beverages, packaging of chemicals), and certain subdivisions of service industries are typically “feminine” occupations, but they constitute a relatively small percentage of Turkey's female labour force. In 1980 fully 88 percent of all economically active Turkish women were in agriculture. During the 1990s this figure declined to 65 percent and more women became involved in manufacturing employment with the shift from import-substitution to export-oriented industrialization; in fact, one survey showed that women's share of manufacturing reached a high of 25 percent in the mid-1990s.<sup>11</sup> Turkish feminist economists have conducted studies that confirm a positive relationship between export orientation and share of female employment (Ozler 2000). But they also have found that marital status is an important determinant of women's participation in manufacturing; “wives and mothers” are less likely to be found in formal manufacturing firms and more likely to be found working in subcontracting arrangements at home, where they are not always captured in official statistics (Ozar

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<sup>11</sup> Data from World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2000*, Table 2.4, p. 52; and from the ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1997*, Table 2B.

and Gunluk-Senesen 1998).<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the patriarchal gender contract continues to hold sway in Turkey, and that non-economic factors remain salient in understanding why employment in the formal sector of the economy remains a predominantly male phenomenon in Turkey.

Thus, Joeekes's argument that industrialization in parts of the Third World "has been as much female-led as export led" (Joeekes 1989: 81) must be qualified for the Middle East. And Standing's contention that "women are being substituted for men in various occupational categories, including manufacturing and production work" (Standing 1989: 25) also does not quite apply in the Middle East, where men predominate in the industrial sector, except for Morocco and Tunisia. To be sure, in nearly all the large countries women are engaged in light manufacturing—textiles, clothing, pharmaceuticals, food processing – but not in the large percentages seen in Southeast Asia or along the Mexico-U.S. border. There may be a perception that factory work is not suitable for women, although this belief may be tied to the limited demand for female labour given the type of industrialization path the MENA countries chose in the past. From a world-systems perspective, because the region functioned as a source of oil and petrodollars, international capital and Middle East states alike did not aggressively pursue foreign investment in the kinds of industries likely to bring about female labour incorporation. However, this may be changing due to both the rigors of neoliberalism and the influence of global feminism.

#### **4. Neoliberalism and Women's Livelihood**

In the 1980s all Middle Eastern countries were beset by economic and political difficulties, which also affected women's economic status and employment possibilities. The economic crisis in the Middle East occurred in the context of a worldwide crisis resulting in part from the drop in real prices of primary commodities, including oil. The global oil market became very unstable, leading to fluctuating and declining prices. The near-collapse of prices in 1986 (from \$28 per barrel to \$7 per barrel) had repercussions throughout the Middle East: austerity measures were introduced, availability of development aid decreased, and major development projects were reevaluated or suspended. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 raised the price of oil again, but the damage already had been done. In the 1980s countries of the Middle East, and especially North Africa, experienced low or negative economic growth rates, declining state revenues, and high levels of indebtedness to foreign creditors. In some cases (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria), debts became truly enormous in relation to the country's economic capacities; Turkey was placed on the World Bank's list of "severely indebted middle-income countries." According to the UN, debt as a percentage of GNP for the Middle East and North Africa in 1989 rose to 70 percent; during the 1980s the region's debt increased from \$4.4 billion to \$118.8 billion (UNDPI 1989).

The most active Arab borrowers from the World Bank—Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia—had to impose austerity measures on their populations as a result of World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)

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<sup>12</sup> Their field survey also concluded that the high number of first-generation migrants in the big cities, who tend to be undereducated, affects labour force participation in the formal sector.

structural adjustment policy packages, and several experienced “IMF riots” (Niblock and Murphy 1993; Harik and Sullivan 1992; Walton and Seddon 1994). High population growth rates coupled with heavy rural-urban migration concentrated larger numbers of the unemployed in major cities. The livelihood of lower-middle-class and working-class women (and men) was adversely affected by the debt and the inflationary-recessionary cycles plaguing the region, especially in Morocco, Algeria, Iran, and Egypt (Moghadam 1998). In Israel the serious economic plight was alleviated by massive American aid. But elsewhere, tough economic reforms, along with poverty, unemployment, and debt servicing—as well as political repression—served to delegitimize “Western-style” systems and revive questions of cultural identity, including renewed calls for greater control over female mobility. It was in this context of economic failures and political delegitimation that Islamist movements began to present themselves as alternatives (Moghadam 2003).

The prescribed solution to the economic downturn was the shift from a state-directed development strategy with large public sectors to a neoliberal growth strategy favoring the expansion of the private sector. Export industrialization also was encouraged, and UNCTAD data show that most MENA countries sought to re-orient their economies in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, it seemed plausible to propose that the changing political economy might affect women’s employment positively, in that a more outward orientation could increase the demand for female labour, while the new austerities might result in households releasing their female labour supply. Thus I suggested the following “positive scenario” (Moghadam 1998):

- Structural reforms often call for fiscal changes and the mobilization of domestic resources, through such measures as expanding the tax base and making taxation more efficient. Governments may reason that in order to increase the income-tax-paying population, policies would be needed to increase the size of the female labour force.
- Countries focus on making their labour forces more qualified, partly by raising education and skill levels. There is thus increased attention to improving education, vocational training, and skills-upgrading for women.
- There is a rising demand for women in the labour-intensive textiles and garments branches that are geared for export.
- Women's numbers rise in such expanding occupations as banking, insurance, accounting, computing, and business services.
- The expansion of tourism breaks down cultural proscriptions against women's employment in sales and private services, and in hotels, restaurants, and trade.
- As governments relinquish control over economic enterprises to focus on expanding and upgrading health, education, and social services, this enhances the participation of women in the social sectors.
- The emphasis on private sector development and entrepreneurship leads to support for women-owned or managed businesses.

A more negative scenario, however, was equally plausible. Here, stagnation continues, investments do not increase, inequalities widen and poverty grows, women face exclusion from paid work, and informal sector work grows. In addition, women continue to face constraints in access to a livelihood and entitlements, due to:

- High population growth and fertility, as well as illiteracy among rural women and older age groups,
- Inferior or incomplete schooling and inadequate training, which fail to prepare women for modern sector jobs,
- High male unemployment (especially of young men), which acts as a disincentive to hire women,
- The widespread perception of women as less reliable workers, coupled with the persistence of the male breadwinner/female homemaker ideas (the patriarchal gender contract),
- Provisions in labour legislation that prohibit night work for women (interpreted in some places as the inability of women to apply for second-shift jobs in the industrial sector) or that require maternity leaves whose costs must be borne entirely by the employer,
- Employment costs to women, including infrastructural deficiencies (such as poor roads and public transportation, which result in lengthy travel time), and inadequate social policies to help women balance wage work and family responsibilities,
- Lack of gender sensitivity and gender awareness on the part of government officials and planners, and absence of integration of a gender dimension in economic policy-making,
- The absence of influential women's organizations, including those that may focus on the problems of women in the labour force.

As we shall see, elements of both scenarios have been realized in the MENA region thus far, though with variations that will be evident in the three-country focus later in the paper.

An observed effect of the changing political economy was an increase in the supply of job-seeking women – along with the emergence of very high rates of unemployment for women. Ethnographic studies and anecdotal evidence pointed to higher levels of female economic activity, though this was not necessarily captured in labour-force statistics. According to one UN database, the female share of the total labour force in 1995 in various regions was as follows: 37 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 24 percent in South Asia, 25 percent in South Asia, 43 percent in East Asia, 37 percent in Southeast Asia, 27 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean – and 17 percent in the Arab region (which would exclude Iran and Turkey). The average for all developing countries was 35 percent (UNDP 1995: Table 39, p. 216). A different UN database shows that whereas in 1980 women comprised about 20 percent of the total labour force in Western Asia (which would include Iran and Turkey), that figure increased to 26 percent in 1997; with the addition of North Africa, it increased to 31 percent. The figure had increased relative to the 1970s and 1980s, but it was low compared to South America (38 percent), the Caribbean, East Asia and Southeast Asia (43 percent), and Central Asia (46 percent) (UN 2000: Chart 5.1, p. 110).<sup>13</sup>

As was seen in Table 4, a distinctive feature of MENA women's employment is its concentration in public-sector professional jobs, a function of the correlation

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<sup>13</sup> There is some inconsistency in the figures given; others cited are female activity rates of between 45% and 62% in the developing world (UN 2000: Chart 5.2, p. 110; CAWTAR 2001, Table A/27).

between educational attainment and female labour-force participation (see also Anker 1998: 164). This remains largely the case for women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where their share of civil service employment grew from 30% in 1986 to 38% in 1996. Indeed, throughout the region, there appears to be a feminization of government employment. I have hypothesized that the gradual feminization of civil service employment may be linked to two factors: the rising educational attainment of women and the gravitation of men into the growing and more lucrative private sector as a result of the imperatives of neoliberalism. However, the jobs obtained by women in public service are not necessarily at high levels. In examining occupational distribution, one finds that MENA countries have minimal female presence in administrative and managerial occupations. In the late 1990s, the percentages ranged from a low of under six percent in Algeria, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, and Syria, to 10-13 percent in Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey (Moghadam 2003: 53).

Another distinctive feature, long noted by researchers of MENA women's employment, is an apparent disinclination by MENA women to enter sales work and service occupations in the private sector. Certainly the data confirm that in general, MENA women have been under-represented in private sales and services and in the sector of hotels, restaurants, and wholesale and retail trade (at least according to official statistics for wage employment). Ghazy Mujahid (1985: 115) explained women's avoidance of such jobs in terms of cultural norms, as these are occupations with the highest likelihood of indiscriminate contact with outsiders. Another likely explanation is that the merchant class has been typically male, and the traditional urban markets—bazaars and souks—have been the province of men. As seen in Table 6, the situation has been particularly dramatic in Iran, especially after the Islamic Revolution. The table also shows that Tunisia had higher rates of female employment in the sales and services sectors than did either Iran or Jordan. Note also the relatively large proportion of women obtaining professional jobs in finance, insurance, real estate, and business services in Tunisia compared with Iran and Jordan. It is perhaps for this reason, as well as the fact that Tunisian women have higher levels of employment than do women in Iran and Jordan, that their estimated earned income is higher, as seen in Table 7. The table also shows that the gender gap is narrower in Tunisia than in Iran or Jordan.

Tables 6 and 7 about here

Women's share of earned income appears to be quite small in MENA, as reported by various issues of the *Human Development Report* (see, e.g., UNDP 2002b, Table 22). The data on earned income suggests that in most countries women earn one-third to one-half of men's earnings. In MENA, however, some countries – notably Iran (as seen in Table 7), as well as the oil economies of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Algeria – show very wide gaps. Although poor enumeration and gaps in coverage could play a part in these figures, they are likely to be the result of low female labour force participation, limited involvement in paid employment, and high female unemployment.

Indeed, what Iran, Jordan and Tunisia have in common with each other, and with all MENA countries, are the high rates of unemployment, especially among women, that began to appear in the 1990s. (See Table 8.) In all three countries, as well as in Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco, women's unemployment rates ranged from 20 –

25 percent; even in the ostensibly rich oil-producing sheikhdoms of Bahrain and Oman, job-seeking young women experienced rates of unemployment as high as 30 percent (CAWTAR 2001; Moghadam 2002). Given the low rates of female labour force participation and of the female labour force shares in many of the MENA countries, it is clear that women's unemployment rates have been disproportionately high. The feminization of unemployment became a feature of the MENA labour markets in the 1990s, as discussed in the next section.

Table 8 about here

Another feature of the MENA region has been the relatively low levels of foreign direct investment compared to other regions in the world-economy. Considering just the Arab region, the share of total FDI barely came to just one percent over the period 1976-1998, with a steady downward trend (UNDP 2002b; World Bank 2000).<sup>14</sup> Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia receive the largest amounts, but even so, these are comparatively small FDI flows.<sup>15</sup> Along with the factors mentioned above (the oil economy and high wages), this has served to limit female proletarianization and overall participation in paid employment. The situation is especially pronounced in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (See discussion of Iran, below.)

## 5. Unemployment in MENA

The unemployment rates in the MENA region are the highest of any region in the global economy; they increased in the 1990s and mostly in the double digits. According to ESCWA (1999a: 34), average unemployment among Arab countries was estimated at 14 per cent in 1994, with some 10 million unemployed and several million underemployed. The Gulf sheikhdoms managed to limit their unemployment rates through control of labour inflows, but one estimate of unemployment in Bahrain puts it as high as 15 percent. In Egypt the official unemployment rate in the mid-1990s was about 10 percent. However, adjusted for underemployment the unemployment rate was nearly 21 per cent in 1994, with 85 per cent of the underemployment being of persons aged 19-29 (mostly recent graduates). According to a recent report by the World Bank (2004), the labour pressures are greatest in the period 1990-2010, and some 100 million jobs will need to be created in the region by 2020 in order to alleviate unemployment.

Before proceedings, a methodological and conceptual note on unemployment, underemployment, and youth unemployment is in order.

Unemployment is difficult to measure precisely, especially in developing countries, but the ILO encourages statisticians to apply standard definitions and measures. Unemployed" comprises all persons above the age specified for measuring the economically active population who during a specified reference period "did not have any work/ job", that is, were not employed; were "currently available for work",

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<sup>14</sup> In addition, despite the role played by petrodollars in global finance, the Arab world and Iran remain comparatively cut off from financial globalization, for better or for worse. See discussion in Henry and Springborg (2001) and in IMF (2003).

<sup>15</sup> In 2001, the proportions were: Turkey 35%; Morocco 28%; Algeria 13%; Egypt and Tunisia 5%; Lebanon 3%.

that is, were available for paid employment or self-employment during the reference period; or were "seeking work", that is, had taken specific steps in a specified recent period to seek paid employment or self-employment. The unemployment rate is the percentage of people in the labour force who are unemployed. (It should be noted that the quality of the data on unemployment varies widely; cross-country comparisons are especially problematic. Surveys are episodic and use different methods.) In contrast to the unemployed are "persons not in the labour force " (or "population not currently active"). This category comprises all persons not classified as employed or unemployed during the reference period, as well as those below the age specified for measuring the economically active population (such as children and young people). Persons may be inactive because they are attending an educational institution, are engaged in household duties, are retired or have reached old age, or other reasons, such as infirmity or disability (UN 2000: 111). The inactivity rate is largely a female phenomenon. Female economic inactivity is especially pervasive in the MENA countries, although over time women's inactivity has been declining.

In order to put MENA women's unemployment in a broader perspective, it should be noted that in many countries around the world, unemployment rates are generally high among women and young people. In fact, the unemployment rate was higher for women than men in 1997 in all regions for which data are available. Long-term unemployment is a serious phenomenon, especially in the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Russia. Such unemployment could have a discouraging effect, as workers drop out of the labour market. And unemployment rates may be higher than those reported (UN 2000: 118). In general, unemployment rates are lower for women and men with higher levels of education.<sup>16</sup> Generally, among workers with only a primary education, the unemployment rate is higher for men. In contrast, among workers with a secondary or higher education more women than men are unemployed. This suggests the universality of gender bias. In MENA countries, too, women with secondary schooling or higher education are more likely to be unemployed than are men with comparable levels of educational attainment. Most of the unemployed are young, or new job seekers.

The main factors behind the high unemployment rates in the MENA region are:

- The post-oil boom era of slow economic growth and decreasing productivity. During 1990-1995, productivity declined in Kuwait, Algeria and Jordan, remained the same in Bahrain and Oman and increased in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Alongside the productivity decline, real wages also witnessed substantial declines over the decade.
- Intense demographic pressure on the labour market. This results from the very high fertility rates of the 1970s and 1980s. The rapid growth of the labour force has not been matched by domestic job opportunities.
- Return migration. The return of labour emigrants following the second Gulf War had serious implications for the labour markets of Yemen, Jordan and Palestine, and to a lesser extent Egypt and Syria.

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<sup>16</sup> A notable exception is Eastern Europe, where during the 1990s, rates were highest for women and men with secondary education.

- Contraction of government employment. Public sector employment rates were high in the MENA region; for example, more than one in three Egyptians were employed by the public sector, including the armed forces (ESCWA 1999a). When employment in state-owned enterprises fell, this contributed to unemployment, especially among the young.
- Privatization. Tunisia has been the regional pioneer and in the 1990s Algeria sold or liquidated almost one-third of its public enterprises. Significant changes also came about in Morocco, Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon. Job loss occurred with privatization and enterprise restructuring in a number of countries.

What these factors led to is a situation in which educated new entrants to the labour force were unable to obtain the increasingly scarce public sector jobs that had been the main source of employment for that group in the past. And this was occurring in a situation where the private sector was unable to create adequate employment opportunities – despite the official policy of promoting privatization. Some have argued that the contraction of government employment has led to “voluntary unemployment” (the “unemployment-as-luxury” hypothesis), especially among the middle-class, and that the situation is exacerbated by education-employment mismatches (UNDP 2002). In Iran, 25% and perhaps up to 40% of young graduates are unemployed, mainly due the education-employment mismatch.<sup>17</sup>

In Egypt and Syria, about 80 percent of the unemployed are first time job seekers, and unemployment is similarly concentrated among the youth in Lebanon and in Yemen. The situation is somewhat different in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, where half of the unemployed have previous work experience, indicating that significant job loss may have occurred in these countries as a result of privatization or enterprise restructuring. The concentration of unemployment among educated new entrants in many of the MENA countries is especially pronounced for women who have been disproportionately affected by the slowdown in the public sector hiring (ERF 1996: 89-91), given women’s own preference for public sector employment.

In the mid-1990s, a view prevailed to the effect that there was “no common trend in the pattern of unemployment by gender” (ERF 1996: 90). However, since then it has become clear that unemployment rates are far higher for women than for men in most of the MENA region (Moghadam 1995b, 1998; ERF 1999). For example, in Morocco, the female unemployment rate in 1990/91 was 31.8 percent, compared with 16.7 percent for men. Roughly 40 percent of the urban unemployed were women. Moreover, women’s unemployment was high at all educational levels – primary, secondary, and higher – and over twice as high as men’s at the secondary level (Richards and Waterbury 1996: 137). In Egypt, youth unemployment is a serious problem among women; 83 per cent of unemployed women in the mid-1990s were first-time job seekers, while the corresponding rate for males was 55 per cent (ESCWA 1999a: 34). Ragui Assaad, who has compared labour force data for 1988 and 1998, concludes that “young urban women, who experience extremely high unemployment rates (in the vicinity of 50%) are actually worse off than in 1988” (Assaad 1999: 14). The figures clearly suggest that more young women are seeking jobs, and that they are encountering gender bias.

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<sup>17</sup> Personal communication, Hassan Hakimian, 4 April 2004.

In a few countries (e.g., Algeria, Lebanon, Yemen) the unemployment rate of women has been lower than that of men.<sup>18</sup> And yet, women's unemployment is disproportionately high, given their far smaller share of the labour force and their high inactivity rates. For example, in Algeria, where only about 10% of the labour force was female, the female unemployment rate was 29.7%, just slightly less than that of men (29.8%). True, the great majority of the nearly 500,000 people who lost their jobs by 1999 as a result of privatization of public enterprises were men (Layachi 2003). However, women's unemployment rate is nearly three times the rate of their labour force participation whereas men's unemployment rate is far lower than their rate of labour force participation. This also shows that more Algerian women are seeking jobs in an overall untoward economic situation, but are not attaining them. If in the past, married women were less likely to seek jobs, this is no longer the case. In 1989, only 33% of Algerian working women were married, while in 1996 the figure had risen to 52 percent.

The main factors affecting female unemployment and underemployment may be identified as follows:

- Growth of the population of job-seeking women, propelled by economic need and declining household budgets, as well as educational attainment and personal aspirations;
- Rapid growth of the labour force due to relatively high fertility;
- Lack of job growth as a result of slow growth and lack of investments;
- Loss of jobs through privatization of state-owned enterprises;
- Fewer jobs available in the government sector due to contraction of the public-sector wage bill;
- Limited job opportunities in the private sector that are also "women-friendly";
- Gender bias and discrimination, and the prevailing gender ideology that privileges men in recruitment and hiring.

These labour supply and demand factors are arguably more pertinent to explanations of women's unemployment than are factors related to technological change, skills, or other aspects of "human capital". Anecdotal evidence suggests that men tend to be offered more training and skills-upgrading opportunities, and more possibilities for promotion. When women lose jobs as a result of enterprise restructuring, they may find it more difficult than men to find new jobs, in part because of the prevailing gender ideology that favors jobs for men (as household heads). Moreover, the private sector is often less friendly to women than is the public sector, which offers social insurance and other benefits to working women. There is also a tendency on the part of employers to regard women as "expensive labour" due to labour law provisions for paid maternity leaves, workplace nurseries, and nursing breaks for new mothers.<sup>19</sup> Thus despite growing economic need and increasing numbers of young women with the motivation, education, and experience to be successful in the labour market, MENA women's economic participation is hindered

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<sup>18</sup> The higher male unemployment in Yemen is partly due to the inability of those labour migrants who were expelled from Saudi Arabia after the 1991 Gulf War to find jobs in Yemen.

<sup>19</sup> See Moghadam (1998) for a discussion, especially in connection with Egypt and Jordan.

by a combination of structural difficulties and gender bias, as well as inadequate or problematical social policies.<sup>20</sup>

### **5.1 Women's Unemployment: Some Cases**

In Egypt, most (70 per cent) of the unemployed are 19 years old or younger, indicating real economic need on the part of Egyptian households. Although in absolute figures more men than women are unemployed, the rates of unemployment among women are exceedingly high and disproportionately high, given their very low economic activity rates. This is confirmed by research by Jolliffe (1997: 22): "Unemployment rates are strikingly higher for females than for males in both the urban and rural sectors." Assaad's research finds that unemployment continues to be concentrated among educated youths under the age of 30, with the highest unemployment rates being experienced at the intermediate levels of education. In fact, the ESCWA Labour Force Statistics Database 1999 shows a high concentration of female unemployment among those with intermediate education, while male unemployment is distributed more evenly across levels of educational attainment. Assaad also finds that "unemployment [is] significantly higher for educated females than educated males" (Assaad 1999: 3).

In Syria, men's unemployment rates have changed very little over the decades, remaining at between 5.4.1% in 1970 and 7.3% in 2000. (According to ESCWA, the relatively low recorded rates of unemployment may be due to deficiencies in the statistical tools used.) But the unemployment rate among women increased from 4.4% in 1970 to 18.5% in 2000. "The gender gap was more elevated among the urban population, whereby women were four times more likely to be unemployed in comparison to men" (ESCWA 2000b: 71). Indeed, 21.4% of urban Syrian women, compared with 5.4% of urban Syrian men, were unemployed in 1995. Even so, the rural unemployment rate of Syrian women was, at 13.4%, nearly twice as high as that of men in 2000 (UNIFEM 2003: 54). The ESCWA Labour Force Statistics Database 1999 shows according to Syria's 1994 census, female unemployment was concentrated among those with primary schooling and secondary schooling, and that women comprised 35% of the unemployed with university education.

In Lebanon, unemployment and underemployment in 1996 and 1997 was estimated at 22 per cent for new entrants to the labour market, compared with an overall unemployment rate of 7 per cent. The abundance of foreign labour was said to further aggravate the unemployment situation in the country. Although intensive efforts to rebuild the infrastructure and restructure the economy were expected to help to decrease underemployment and raise the productivity of the labour force as a whole, the economic slowdown experienced in 1999 created additional pressures on the unemployment situation.

Lebanese unemployment is concentrated in the younger age groups of the labour force. For young people aged 15-19 years with less education, unemployment was nearly 29 percent in 1997 (UNDP 1998b: 77). The gender breakdown among the young was 29.7% male unemployment and 21.6% female unemployment. Although

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<sup>20</sup> One such problematical social policy is the Muslim family law, which under current interpretations gives women a lesser share of family wealth. Since many small businesses use family wealth as start-up capital, this serves as a disincentive and a barrier to female entrepreneurship.

the female rate is lower, it is disproportionately high, given women's lower activity rates; the figures also suggest that young women from working-class or lower-income families are seeking jobs out of economic need. For the age group 20-24 in 1997, unemployment was lower among women (11.5%) than among men (20.1%). This may be because young women entering the labour force are better educated than their male counterparts and can find employment more quickly and easily. Indeed, the 1998 National Human Development Report for Lebanon shows that net enrollment rates across educational levels are higher for females than males (UNDP 1998b: 82). Or it may be due to the greater demand for typically female occupations (e.g., secretary) than typically male occupations. Lebanon's economy is among the most open in the Arab region, with a strong emphasis on tourism and other services. These sectors tend to be more receptive to female employment. For both unemployed women and men, the duration of unemployment is long (14-16 months), and their search is made difficult by the absence of effective employment agencies, public or private, to put them in contact with the appropriate job (UNDP 1998b: 77-78).

In Algeria, the economic reforms of the early 1980s did little to improve conditions. Instead, industrial investment fell, imports decreased, and several industrial projects and international contracts were cancelled. About 125,000 public sector workers were laid off in 1991 (Layachi 2004). In 1994, Algeria became unable to service its \$26 billion foreign debt, which was consuming 93.4 percent of export earnings, and had to resort to an IMF and World Bank SAP in exchange for debt relief. The SAP led to a 40 percent devaluation of the dinar, the lifting of subsidies on basic food, and the liberalization of foreign trade. Between 1994 and 1998, some 815 public enterprises were dissolved, and Public Economic Enterprises laid off 60 percent of their workers (Layachi 2001, 2004). Although the retrenchments affected mainly men, women's livelihood was adversely affected. More women sought jobs to augment deteriorating household budgets, but gender biases as well as structural economic problems foreclosed employment opportunities.

In Morocco in the late 1990s, unemployment hovered at around 20 percent, though again much higher for women than for men. According to a recent national human development report for Morocco, urban women's unemployment rate in 1999 was 28.2 percent (PNUD 1999: 81). Not only is the unemployment rate for women very high, but women are a very large proportion (35 percent) of the total unemployed.

In addition to high unemployment, the quality of the educational system has fallen markedly, and Morocco continues to be characterized by high rates of illiteracy and of poverty. According to Moha Ennaji (2005), the government of Abdelrahman Youssefi sought to implement a program to curb unemployment through job creation, improve poor women's access to basic services, and reform the system of social protection. However, international factors such as structural adjustment policies as well as the "demographic explosion" have placed obstacles to the social and economic reform program. Or as a Moroccan women's rights activist (Al-Feddy 2000) has said, "How can the state improve the status of women, children, and the poor when international financial institutions are in control?"

It is possible that the relatively low unemployment figures in the Gulf Cooperation Countries reflect the higher wealth of these countries plus the strong

social convention that women should remain in the home. Given the rising education of women in the Gulf, however, the relatively low female unemployment rate may be a statistical artifact; women without jobs may be simply defined out of the labour force. Also, and in theory, the unemployment rate for nationals in the GCC countries should be low given the small share of nationals within the total labour force.

However, unemployment does exist in the Gulf countries, in some countries more than others, though available data are inadequate. Governments have put a great deal of emphasis on the importance of hiring nationals, but this practice has not been widely applied in the private sector. The labour market of nationals suffers from many types of structural unemployment including disguised unemployment in the public sector, the unemployment of females, the voluntary withdrawal from work owing to the unavailability of preferred types of jobs with the Government, and "luxury" withdrawal from work owing to early retirement (ESCWA 1999a).

Available data show that women's unemployment rates are almost always higher than men's in the Gulf countries. For example, while Bahrain's total unemployment rate in 1991 was 6.8 percent, it was fully 13.4 percent for women.<sup>21</sup> Oman's unemployment rates soared in the early 1990s, especially for young women. ESCWA data shows an unemployment rate of fully 25.8% unemployment for females aged 15-24 in 1993. Bahrain and Oman have higher recorded unemployment rates for women than do the other GCC countries, which indicates that more women are seeking jobs in the two countries, probably due to both educational attainment and declining household budgets. In both Bahrain and Oman, moreover, youth unemployment is quite high, especially among young women (ESCWA, 2000a: Annex 14).

And who are the unemployed women? In Oman, according to the 1993 census and indicated in the ESCWA Labour Force Statistics Database 1999, most of the unemployed women had completed high school. In Bahrain, the majority are those who have completed secondary schooling or more, according to the Human Development Report for Bahrain. The ESCWA labour force database shows that women comprise fully 46.5 percent of the unemployed with secondary schooling, despite women's overall low labour force participation. It should be noted that the unemployment of nationals in Bahrain coexists with the employment of foreign workers. Can this be explained by the "education-employment mismatch" hypothesis? Or by the "unemployment as luxury" hypothesis? Perhaps. But it can also be explained by the openness of Bahrain's economy, which "encourages businessmen to employ foreign workers, particularly when they consider the costs, profit margins, and increase of competitive efficiency of their enterprises" (UNDP 1998a: 74).

Women in the GCC countries constitute an underutilized group of human resources that could be drawn upon in the present decade to help in the development process. The fact that many young women are being educated today will increase pressures for greater female labour participation, especially in teaching, nursing and

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<sup>21</sup> There is a discrepancy between the ESCWA figures on Bahrain and those provided by another publication. According to Bahrain's *Human Development Report 1998*, in 1991 total unemployment was 14.7 percent: female 24.8 percent and male 12.3 percent.

other public service occupations. A larger female labour force would reduce dependence on expatriate labour.

## **6. The Informal Sector, Poverty and Inequality**

How do the unemployed — those who expect jobs in the formal sector but do not find them — fare in countries where unemployment insurance is not in place or is not available to new entrants? It appears that some of the job seekers — and especially the men — have gravitated to the urban informal sector, which by all accounts has grown tremendously in the region. Informal-sector workers may include taxi drivers, construction workers, domestic workers, people who work in souks and bazaars (the traditional markets in the Middle East), hairdressers, barbers, seamstresses, tailors, workers in or owners of small industrial or artisan workshops, hawkers of sundry goods, repairmen, and so on. It also includes home-based female pieceworkers, such as women in Turkey, Syria, and Jordan who are engaged in sewing and embroidery for a contractor or subcontractor. There is, of course, high-end informal sector work as well; for women this includes computing, tutoring, catering, beauty services, and making jewellery, handicrafts, exotic jams, and so on. In Iran, anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the young unemployed may “help out” at a relative’s enterprise, receiving a kind of stipend that goes unreported in the national accounts.

Little systematic work has been done on women's roles in the informal sector in the MENA region, or on the relation between the formal and informal sectors, but good ethnographic studies offer valuable insights. Lobban (1998: 9) notes that women are involved in: small-scale retailing of food and clothing; weekly markets and street sales; household and domestic sales and services; informal or illegal sexual services; loan pools and cooperatives; and "the survival economy." Early (1998: 133) found that women in Cairo were engaged as vendors, merchants, midwives, seamstresses, tattooers, bread bakers, henna-appliers, and bath attendants.

In Tunisia, surveys conducted in 1989 and 1991 found that the informal sector employed nearly 35% of total urban wage earners. About half of the informal sector workers (mainly apprentices and *aides familiaux*) had a salary significantly lower than the minimum wage (World Bank 1995: 26). The types of informal sector work encountered by Berry-Chikhaoui (1998: 218) in Tunisia seemed to represent three forms of responses: to poverty, to traditions and food needs, and to modern aspirations. In each category women were a minority, but they were most represented in the second category. Berry-Chikhaoui found women working as seamstresses, public bath attendants, hairdressers; potters, and scribes; and she found them engaged in small-scale food production, small-scale metal work, textiles, leather; artisanal crafts, and street food sales. These sectors "rely heavily on young women and low wages to sustain them" (Lobban 1998: 31).

In Algeria, massive exclusion from the formal job market has meant a tremendous growth of the informal sector. In 1998, the informal economy employed more than 19% of non-agricultural labour. Azzedine Layachi reports that some 250,000 new job seekers join the informal sector every year. “Those who find a job in this sector usually receive less than the minimum wage and have no social protection” (Layachi 2005).

The nature and function of the informal sector has been much debated; although it is agreed that it serves to absorb the labour force and to provide goods and services at relatively low cost, it is also unregulated and untaxed, leading to poor labour standards and income that is not distributed (such as the wealth of many merchants). The informal sector both contributes to, and is a reflection of, income inequality in the society, although it continues to have its enthusiasts in international development and policy circles.

Even though poverty is not as severe in the Middle East as in some other regions (UNDP, 2002a), it has been increasing, and according to some observers, income inequalities have been widening (El-Ghonemy, 1998; Richards and Waterbury, 1996). This is said to be the result of the new policies of neoliberalism, as well as the old policies of high military spending and inadequate taxation. High population growth plays a part in the creation of new poverty groups in urban areas, but the more significant causes are economic recession, rising prices, deteriorating wages, and unemployment.

Poverty and inequality are measured by household income and consumption and by quality-of-life indicators. Conventional studies distinguish between “absolute poverty” and “relative poverty”, and they establish an income-based “poverty line” against which households are measured. In an alternative conceptualization, the definition of poverty is broadened to include measures of “capabilities” or “human development” such as literacy, life expectancy, access to clean water, and so on (UNDP 1997). This better captures gender differences while also recognizing the multidimensionality of poverty. Studies show that there has been considerable improvement over time in standards of living in the Middle East and North Africa, as measured by such social indicators as life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal mortality, access to safe water, adequate sanitation facilities, rising age of first marriage, fertility rates, literacy, and school enrolments, as well as by wage rates and household incomes. However, gender gaps exist, and given the income levels of many countries in the region, the social indicators should be better. Moreover, it appears that although levels of absolute poverty have been decreasing in some parts of the region, poverty has been increasing in other parts.

According to the World Bank and ESCWA, the number of poor people in the Middle East and North Africa increased from an estimated 60 million in 1985 to 73 million in 1990 or from 30.6 percent to 33.1 percent of the total population (World Bank, 1993:5; ESCWA, 1993:121; see also ESCWA 1995a, 1995b). Poverty assessments prepared by the World Bank, which were derived from living standards surveys undertaken within various countries, revealed growing poverty in Egypt and Jordan and the emergence of urban “working poor” in Tunisia and Morocco. According to official statistics, 23 percent of the population in Egypt in 1991 and 18 percent of the population in Jordan in 1993 were considered to be living under the poverty line (Moghadam 1998). In 2002, the figure had not changed for Egypt, though in Jordan 12% of the population now lived below the poverty line; the figure for Morocco was 19 percent (UNDP 2002b, Table 3, p. 158). In Egypt and Jordan, poverty was largely rural, and the rural poor were small landholders and tenants, landless agricultural workers, and pastoralists (ESCWA, 1993:6). In Egypt and Morocco, the urban poor include the unemployed and female-headed households. One revealing measure of women’s income and human poverty is the maternal mortality

rate (per 100,000 live births). In 2000, the rate for Egypt was 120 and for Morocco 230. This may be compared to the low rate – just 33 – for Cuba (UNDP 2002b, Table 8). In all MENA countries, because of gender differences in literacy, educational attainment, employment, and income, women are especially vulnerable to poverty during periods of economic difficulty or in the event of divorce, abandonment, or widowhood.

Layachi (2005) reports that in Algeria in 2001, about 22% of the population were considered poor, and among them, 25% lived in absolute poverty; most were living in rural areas and were illiterate. What is interesting to note is that some 43% of those considered poor were regular wage earners and 12% were retired. The evidence on poverty in Algeria, Layachi stresses, shows the disconnect between income and cost of living, and the high dependency rate in many families where a single wage earner – more often than not the male household head – supports a family of six persons or more (Layachi 2005).

In Lebanon, the main factors behind the alarming increase in the incidence of poverty have been the civil war and misguided economic policies, including tax write-offs for large firms engaged in the country's reconstruction and the absence of any property taxes. According to ESCWA, in 1996 about 1 million Lebanese (28 percent of the population) were living below the poverty line, and some 75 percent of the poor were urban dwellers. The ESCWA report singled out the absence of government social spending and “unjust wealth distribution” as the factors behind the rise in nutritional deficiencies, lack of hygiene in poor areas, and the lowering of teaching and health standards (*Middle East Times*, 1996:19).

For some countries, poverty and lack of progress in human development has resulted from very high military expenditures. In Iraq, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen, military expenditures in 1990 far exceeded expenditures on education and health. As recently as 2000, military expenditures in Saudi Arabia amounted to 11.6 percent of GDP; in Jordan, the figure was 9.5 percent. Even Turkey committed nearly 5 percent of GDP toward military expenditure, compared with 2.2 percent of GDP for health and 3.3 percent for health (UNDP, 2002b: Table 17).

The available evidence suggests that in the large and diversified economies – such as Turkey, Lebanon, and the Islamic Republic of Iran – inequalities or relative poverty are quite pronounced and have been growing. The persistence of destitution or absolute poverty, mainly in rural areas, is a problem in such low-income countries as Egypt, Yemen, and Morocco, and perhaps also in the Gaza Strip. Social indicators on health, safe water, and sanitation reflect the quality of life of citizens as well as urban-rural disparities. Although urbanization has brought about access to health, safe water, and sanitation for residents in most of the countries, some countries — including Algeria, Syria, and Yemen — continue to have difficulties in the provision of such urban services. In other countries there are distinct rural-urban disparities. In terms of access to services, urban living is certainly superior to rural living, but population growth and reductions in government social spending are straining the quality and quantity of urban services. These pressures are not conveyed by the statistics but are best discerned by visits to and stays in the non-elite sections of MENA cities, where overcrowding, rundown and inadequate public transportation,

streets in disrepair, polluted air, high noise levels, and lack of building codes are only some of the many problems that low-income urban dwellers endure.

There are, of course, poverty-alleviation programs in most of the MENA countries, such as targeted transfers to poor households, public works programs, microcredit/microfinance programs, and social development funds. Some of these programs are meant to alleviate unemployment as well. According to one study (Brandsma and Hart 2002), MENA countries vary in terms of women's access to microcredit. In many countries, women need permission from their husbands to take out a loan or go to a meeting. Thus although Egypt has the largest numbers of microfinance and unemployment lending programs, the vast majority of the clients are men; in Yemen, too, these programs largely benefit men. In contrast, the majority of clients in Morocco and Palestine are women; in Jordan and Tunisia, too, women constitute a high proportion of targets and clients. Some summary statistics for Jordan and Tunisia, circa 2001, follow:

	Jordan	Tunisia
Number of microfinance institutions	8	6
Number of unemployment lending programs	3	5
Number of active microfinance clients	17,777	3,251
Female percent	47%	64%
Number of unemployment finance clients	5,320	22,575
Percent female	25%	20%

Most of the programs are administered by NGOs, but banks and government agencies may also take part. For example, in Jordan, microfinance and unemployment programs are administered primarily by government agencies, followed by private companies, banks, and finally local NGOs. The Microfund for Women began as an offshoot of Save the Children, and is now a locally managed and governed NGO. In Tunisia, the principal microcredit institution is Enda Inter-Arabe, an international and national NGO. Since 1997, it has received funding from the Banque Tunisienne de Solidarité, which also provides funds for the unemployment program. Almost half of its loans go to borrowers between the ages of 18 and 29 (Brandsma and Hart 2002).

## **7. Iran, Jordan, and Tunisia in the Neoliberal Era**

How have MENA oil economies, non-oil economies, and mixed oil economies “adjusted” in the neoliberal era? As noted previously, many have sought to re-orient their economies and better integrate themselves in the global economy, albeit with varying levels of “success”. Liberalization and privatization have not been the panacea that the international financial institutions once promised they would be. For example, although Egypt was once considered a kind of NIC, its economy has not performed well and it suffers from serious social tensions. As we saw earlier, the region receives relatively little FDI, and of the amount that flows to the region, Turkey secures the lion's share. The other promising country in the region, Tunisia, is a mixed-oil economy whose development strategy emphasizes tourism and the export of manufactured goods. This has yielded respectable FDI flows as well as greater access by women to jobs in the manufacturing sector and in the expanding tourism-

related services sector. At the same time, the Tunisian state, which alone among the countries of the region may be deemed a welfarist state that also promotes women's rights, has implemented policies to encourage women's employment and to provide working women with an array of entitlements. By contrast, Jordan, a non-oil economy that has similarly emphasized its manufacturing sector, has not seen higher levels of female employment; FLFP remains low and fertility high, despite the relatively high educational attainment of women. One reason may be the structure of its exports (as seen in Table 5); another may be the conservative nature of its state and society, including resistance to the reform of Jordan's patriarchal family law; yet another may be its proximity to the persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Finally, the Islamic Republic of Iran, an oil economy, has failed to diversify its economy and continues to rely on oil exports; concomitantly, women's access to paid employment remains limited, especially in a situation of high unemployment. And in an "Islamic" environment, women's entitlements are highly contested.

At the same time, the era of neoliberalism has coincided with the rise of global feminism, which has encompassed nearly all the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and certainly Iran, Jordan, and Tunisia. In one respect – a pronounced role for independent NGOs – neoliberalism and global feminism agree, but on other issues, such as socio-economic or human rights, the two diverge. Thus while on the one hand, numerous NGOs have formed in connection with privatization or to compensate for the contraction of public-sector employment, other NGOs have formed to criticize these trends or to advocate for enhanced civil, political, and social rights for women. The civil society NGOs typically endure difficulties in their interface with the state, but their existence confirms the growth and vitality of a women's movement in the region.

### *The Islamic Republic of Iran*

According to Karshenas and Hakimian (2005), Iran's FDI flows are "abysmal" both in absolute size and by any comparative measure, and its continued oil dependency is a structural weakness. In 2001, total FDI amounted to \$32.7 million, or a mere 0.34% of all FDI inflows into MENA. (By contrast, Jordan received \$100 million. Tunisia received \$457 million, or 5% of all FDI flows into MENA – and with a far smaller population than Iran's.)<sup>22</sup> Since the MENA region is severely underrepresented in its share of global FDI flows (accounting for only 1.3% of the total), it is not surprising that Iran's share of global FDI inflows is also a paltry 0.003 percent.

Despite Iran's relatively long history of industrial development and capital accumulation, its economic structure is still very much dominated by oil, as seen in the dominance of oil exports in both the balance of payments and the government's fiscal revenues. Karshenas and Hakimian (2005) maintain that there are "few signs as yet of a major breakthrough in diversification of the economy." Iran's non-oil exports comprise nine percent of total exports. By contrast, Tunisia has raised the share of manufactured exports to about three-quarters of its total exports.<sup>23</sup> The Third Plan of

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<sup>22</sup> Statistics from the World Bank's country profiles, [www.worldbank.org.mena](http://www.worldbank.org.mena), and its GenderStats database.

<sup>23</sup> Tunisia's proportion of manufactured exports is even higher than that of Morocco and Egypt, with one-third. Two-thirds of Turkey's exports are of manufactured goods (Karshenas and Hakimian, 2005).

2000 is intended to increase the role and diversity of the private sector, removing obstacles to foreign and domestic investment, initiating privatisation, supporting export-led growth, and developing the non-oil sectors. But it has thus far failed to create enough jobs for the 16% of the labour force that is unemployed. Rural unemployment is also high: it shot up from 9.2% in 1988 to 16.5% in 1999. The high unemployment rate of 25% among the youth is seen as the Achilles heel of the economy and a potential source of social and political instability. In 1996, most of Iran's female unemployed were women with only primary schooling, indicating that economic need is propelling more working-class and poor women into the work force, but 34% were secondary-school graduates. Meanwhile, although female labour force participation is just under 15% (or 27%, according to the World Bank), it is expected to rise, adding to the economic and labour market difficulties.

In an interesting development, a high proportion of rural women have registered themselves as unemployed and looking for work – a function, no doubt, of both rising educational attainment and household financial needs. Employment opportunities are limited in rural areas. Although a UNDP study in Tehran (UNDP 2000) reported that there were 100 rural women's cooperatives and 2,000 women development workers, it should be noted that the rural female population is over 11 million. With limited employment opportunities – still largely in public services such as teaching, healthcare, and welfare services – women in both the urban and rural areas turn to the informal market for their livelihood, as suggested by anecdotal evidence and research by Poya (1999). There seems to have been a growth of home-based personal/beauty services, in part a response to the closing down of many beauty salons (not barber shops) after the revolution. High-end informal sector work includes desktop publishing, tutoring, catering, beauty services, and making jewellery, handicrafts, and exotic jams. More disconcertingly, there has been a growth in prostitution.

Enhanced NGO activity by Iranian women has been noted by a number of scholars. Women's NGOs include women's rights groups, publication collectives, service-delivery organizations, welfare organizations, professional associations, and associations dealing with the environment or rural women's issues. They provide employment opportunities for women who would otherwise be unemployed or find it difficult to abide by the strictures of government agencies; they represent a form of social participation for women; and they may be regarded as the organizational expression of the women's movement. For professional women in the work force, NGOs enable them to enhance their visibility in and contribution to the public sphere while also protecting their professional (*senfi*) interests. Since the late 1990s, trade and professional associations have been formed by women journalists, publishers, teachers, nurses, and lawyers.

In some cases, the women's NGOs are oppositional, as with the Women's Cultural Centre, which produces feminist books, journals, and calendars and, most recently, an electronic feminist news service (*ifribune*). In other cases, they may be regarded as an arm of the state. In yet other cases, they serve to raise poor women's consciousness and give them access to income-generating activities. Poya (2004) describes the activities of the Women's Society Against Environmental Pollution, which teaches poor women in south Tehran the environmental and economic advantages of replacing plastics with cotton materials. By providing the women with

sewing machines and other materials to produce pencil cases, school bags, and shopping bags, the NGO helps to raise environmental awareness while also enabling poor women to sell their products and earn a living. In rural areas, the Institute for Research, Consultation and Marketing of Women's Products works with the women's clubs set up by the Ministries of Agriculture and Reconstruction Crusade to help women earn a living from growing fresh flowers, vegetables and herbs.

Although the growth of women's NGOs in Iran is salutary in many ways, it should not be regarded as a panacea for unemployment or for women's limited access to formal sector employment. Many of the women's NGOs are very small operations.

### *Jordan*

In the early 1990s, Jordan experienced a reduction in demand for its exports, a drop in aid receipts from the Gulf countries, a decline in the number of jobs available to its workers in the Gulf and consequently in remittances, and a sudden devaluation leading to severe inflation pressures. This was also a period when structural adjustment was underway. As a result of economic need, more Jordanian women began to look for jobs. But squeezed by a large external debt and high male unemployment, the Jordanian government has had an implicit policy of discouraging female employment (Moghadam 1998; Amawi 2000; CAWTAR 2001). This despite its continuing policy of emphasizing exports of goods and services, which in 2000 amounted to 45% of GNP.<sup>24</sup>

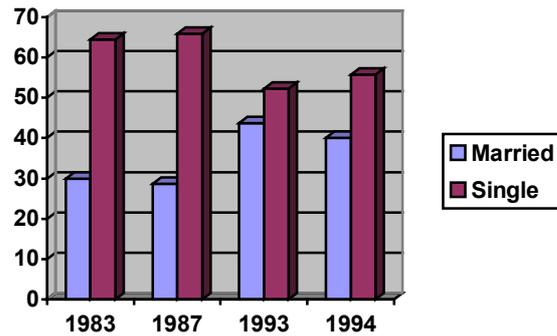
Unemployment among women is very high in Jordan – about 20% in 2000, though down from the extreme highs of the early 1990s. In the mid-1990s, the unemployment rate among women was more than double that among men and was highest in the youngest age groups. With respect to level of education, 70-75% of unemployed women had post-secondary qualifications, compared with 25% of unemployed men (ESCWA 1999a: 36; Ministry of Planning 2000: 68). Educated women were more likely to be unemployed than were educated men or less-educated women. Indeed, fully 72% of unemployed Jordanian women had a tertiary degree. It has been suggested that one reason behind educated women's high unemployment was the growth of jobs that did not require higher education (e.g., jobs in manufacturing and tourism-related occupations). While this may be true, it also suggests gender bias, given that educated men's unemployment rates were not as high.

The Jordanian female labour force is generally young, especially in the formal sector, although in the agricultural sector, women tend to be married, with children, and older. Khuri-Tubbeh (1994, 1995) found this to be the case also among the low-income women in Amman that she studied in 1992. A USAID-sponsored study similarly found that the mean age and marital status of women in micro-enterprises and in agriculture differed somewhat from those of women in the formal sector (Flynn (1999). It also found that married women are increasingly staying in salaried employment – a significant development since, as seen in the figure below on economically active women by marital status in Jordan, married women's labour-force participation was less than half that of single women in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> From the World Bank's country profile of Jordan, on-line.

<sup>25</sup> The data are from ESCWA Statistics Division, LFSD 1999.



The labour market in Jordan is stratified along various lines – primarily national origin, social class, gender – and the female labour force similarly is stratified. The vast majority (70%) of the salaried female labour force in Jordan is highly educated – that is, professional or elite women (Flynn 1999). Working-class, urban poor, and rural women are also part of the labour force, and those with incomplete education face problems of low wages, job insecurity, and difficult working conditions. Other ethnographic studies and small-scale surveys on women in the informal sector, such as research on Jordanian women by Taghrid Khuri-Tubbeh (1994, 1996), suggest that increasing income inequalities, growing unemployment among men, rising prices, and household survival strategies may be propelling more women into informal sector work and self-employment.

But the female LFP rate in Jordan is very low – not only by international standards but also by regional standards (Mujahid, 1985; Moghadam 1993, 1998). In the late 1990s, it measured about 12 percent (ESCWA 2002).<sup>26</sup> Even with a broad definition of work, however, the USAID study found a mere 12.5 percent rate of female labour force participation in Jordan. The study also reported that the FLFP rate in agriculture was only 18 percent. This is perplexing, since usually, when one accounts for the informal sector and agriculture, female activity rates increase substantially (as we saw earlier in connection with Egypt). In addition to structural problems of the economy, it is likely that cultural factors as well as the state’s gender policies serve to limit women’s access to a livelihood. Jordan’s family law is among the most conservative in the Middle East, stipulating male guardianship and female subservience. Social policies and labour law all working women to exit the labour market easily. As Sonbol (2003: 88) states:

“Various legal codes (labour, personal status, citizenship, retirement, and criminal) peripheralize women by making them into male dependents and de facto deny women full competence even after they have reached the legal age of majority. The result is that, even though Jordan exerts efforts to allow women greater participation in public and business life, the laws act as a push factor forcing or encouraging women to leave the workplace.”

What is more, there is significant gender inequality in wages. Comparing the average wage for males and females who have the same educational level reveals that a woman receives about one-third of a man’s wage among those who are illiterate; one-half for those with primary schooling; two-thirds for those with basic education;

<sup>26</sup> But according to the World Bank, it was 25% in 2000.

82% for those with secondary schooling, and about the same for intermediate diploma; and 71% for those at the university level (Amawi 2000, citing Department of Statistics 1997). In the manufacturing sector, women's wages are only 57% of men's wages.<sup>27</sup> Such a gender gap in wages could serve as a disincentive for women.

### *Tunisia*

Between 1975 and 1984, female employment was "polarized" (CREDIF 2002a: 41). The textile industry was quite feminized, and due to male out-migration, agriculture also became female-intensive. Other women in the labour force were in the professions, and very few women were found in private sales and services. In the latter part of the 1980s, changes occurred and women's employment became more diversified, especially in the expanding services sector and in manufacturing other than textiles, such as chemicals, electronics, and food processing. According to CREDIF (2002a, 2002b), between 1994 and 1997, women benefited from 38.4% of the new employment opportunities. This was due to improved educational attainment of the female labour force, growing foreign and domestic investments,<sup>28</sup> and a favourable juridical framework and political environment for women.

The Tunisian research institute CREDIF argues that globalization is on the whole favourable to women's employment, and more jobs for Tunisian women have been created, especially in export manufacturing and the expanding services sectors. However, between 1984 and 1994, there was also an expansion of precarious forms of employment – self-employment or family-based employment. Since 1994, and mainly due to their educational attainment, women have more access to salaried jobs, notably in the administrative services (CREDIF 2002a: 295-96, 300, 3002). Problems remain, however: women are still largely unpaid family labour; enterprises are still reluctant to hire women; and women lack the necessary financial resources to start their own businesses (CREDIF 2002a: 303). Moreover, the special trade agreement with the European Union could jeopardize Tunisian enterprises and lead to job losses (CREDIF 2002b: 99).

Women's labour force participation is higher in Tunisia than it is in Iran or Jordan, but for some time, the female labour force share has remained constant at about 21-24 percent. The most recent data show that women constitute 24.5% of the labour force, and this figure increases to 37% with an expanded definition of the labour force. The labour force attachment of married women still weak but has increased – from a 16.7% activity rate in 1994 to 18% in 1997. It is strongest among those under the age of 30, where, at 33%, it has nearly doubled since 1975. For those aged 30-59, the participation rate has increased since the mid-1990s, from 25% to 33%. Most women (53%) in the work force are single, widowed, or divorced (CREDIF 2002b: 40).

In 1999, just 5.7% of the female economically active population was aged 15-17, with an activity rate of 18% (down from nearly 30% in 1975). This is the result of higher female enrolments in and completion of secondary school. Indeed, in 1997, 25% of the female labour force had completed secondary school, and 30% higher education, compared with 23% who had at least a primary school education. There are

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<sup>27</sup> See World Bank, GenderStats data base.

<sup>28</sup> FDI flows to Tunisia are certainly higher than Iran or Jordan but appear to be volatile over the years; see CREDIF 2002a: 294.

slightly more educated women than men in the labour force. As noted by Ben Romdhane (2005), the number of women university students has risen three-fold since the mid-1990s. Whereas women represented 42.2% of the student population in 1993-94, they became a majority in 1999-2000. In 2000-2001, they represented 53.9%, and in 2002-2003, 55.1%.

No doubt because of women's rising educational attainment, as well as the high age at first marriage (24 in the 1990s, now close to 27) and lowered fertility, there has been a narrowing of the gap in access to paid employment between women and men. Between 1984 and 1994, 43% of new salaried jobs went to women – although precarious and irregular forms of employment also increased, as noted above. In 1997, most of the female salariat (54%) was under 30 years of age, whereas for men the proportion was 34%. The reason for the difference is that “the access of women to salaried employment is a relatively recent phenomenon that largely affects the youth” (CREDIF 2002a: 42). In 1999, fully 66.6% of Tunisia's working women were salaried (the figure for men was 68.8%); just 18% were *aides familiaux* (contributing family workers), and about 15% were employers or self-employed. This is definitely an improvement over the 1980s and early 1990s, when a larger proportion of the female labour force was irregular or non-waged.

In terms of occupational concentrations, women predominate in the sectors of textiles, garments, and handicrafts; in primary school teaching; as housekeepers; and as secretaries. In 1997, the feminized occupations with female shares of 50% or higher were handicrafts, office work, teaching, and life sciences and health. Women constituted 30.5% of machine operators and assembly workers 30.5% female (CREDIF 2002a: 242). Women were under-represented in the following occupations: cashiers, etc. (20.7%); physical and technical sciences (19.7%), intellectual and scientific specialists (19.3%); agriculture and fishing (19%); sales (14.6%); directors (11.4%), and public administration officials (10%).

The female unemployment rate has increased from nearly 21% in 1989 to 16.3% in 1999, but it is still higher than men's. One reason is that the female labour force is largely young, and unemployment hits them the hardest. Those most vulnerable to unemployment are the illiterates or those with just primary schooling, but increasingly, the highest educated are also experiencing unemployment (CREDIF 2002a: 45, 269). In 1989, unemployment among women with higher education was 7.5% but in 1997 it had increased to 10%. By contrast, unemployment for educated men increased from 4.6% to 7.4%. This could be a function of gender bias, or it could be the result of less work experience among women.

During the initial period of liberalization there was a steady increase in the rate of women's unemployment – from 11% in 1984 to 20.9 in 1989 to 17% in 1994; after that it declined to 16.7% in 1997 and 16.3 in 1999 (Republique Tunisienne 1999: 97; CREDIF 2002a: 269). A higher proportion (nearly 28%) of unemployed women are between the ages 18 and 24 than was the case in 1984 (CREDIF 2002b: 85, 87); of the unemployed female labour force, 28% have secondary schooling. But the unemployed population in Tunisia includes a sizable number of previously employed women workers. For example, out of a total of 108,781 unemployed women in 1997, some 45,000 were former salaried workers while 57,000 were new entrants (Republique Tunisienne, 1999). Nearly 24,000 had been previously employed in

textiles, artisanal, clothing and leather industries. It is clear that unemployment primarily affects young and unmarried working-class women, especially those with primary education but also those who have completed secondary education. Between 1994 and 1997 there was a slight increase in unemployment among women (and men) with higher education, from 2,400 to 6,400 unemployed women with higher education. In 1997 this represented an unemployment rate of 5.9 percent among this group of women – and it should be noted that the corresponding rate among men was 3.5 percent. And what kind of work were the unemployed women seeking? According to the 1999 national survey of employment, over 76,000 sought salaried work, compared to 16,500 who preferred self-employment and 15,800 who were indifferent. (The same preferences were expressed by the unemployed men.)

Underemployment may be a problem in Tunisia as well. According to the 1994 census on population and housing, over a quarter of the working population – male and female alike – engaged in part-time work. It is not clear if this part-time work was voluntary or involuntary (Republique Tunisienne 1994: 56). Where was this part-time work located? For men it was largely in agriculture and construction, while for women it was in agriculture and the industrial sectors of textiles, garments, and leather. More recent data on underemployment are not available.

Due in part to unemployment, many women move towards the informal sector and micro-enterprises. It is estimated that about one-fifth of jobs in the informal sector are held by women. Moreover, women who turn to micro-enterprises are better educated than men: 47.3% have secondary education (38.1% for the men) 6.5% higher education (2.4% for men). Overall, 54% of women entrepreneurs have secondary or higher education against 40% of men (CREDIF 2002a).

Indeed, the private sector has become increasingly important to Tunisian development and as a source of employment for women. In 2002 there were 5,000 women heads of business in Tunisia, mainly in the sectors of textiles and garments, services and information technology. The Association of Women Business Presidents promotes women's leadership in business by providing scholarships for women students at the Advanced Institute of Management (ISG) and the Institute of Advanced Business Studies (IHEC). A recent study sponsored by CREDIF and the UNDP on women's entrepreneurship (Deneuil 2001) showed that in Tunisia, as in many other countries, women have difficulty obtaining financing for new enterprises. Women also appear less likely than men to request bank financing and are less willing to carry debt. Seventy percent of the women questioned in the study said they drew on personal savings to begin their business, although those at the level of micro-enterprise had frequently received credit from an NGO. Since the survival rate, after five years, for businesses begun by women was almost twice as high as for those begun by men, it is clear that women's businesses are viable and a potential source of growth.

As in Iran, state agencies and women's NGOs alike see to the needs of low-income and poor women, but the Tunisian state's gender policies are more proactive and more consistent with feminist demands. For example, the government has established a fund to provide financial support to divorced custodial mothers who are not receiving child support from the fathers of their children. Other policies support women in the work force. Indeed, the formation of CREDIF itself is indicative of the

Tunisian government's interest in women and development issues. It was created in 1991 and institutionalised in 1994 as a research centre that would provide the government with data and analyses on women and gender issues, such that they could be integrated in the national development plans.<sup>29</sup>

Since independence, Tunisia has had a liberal family law, one that did not impede women's economic participation. First President Bourguiba, and since 1989, President Ben Ali, have presented themselves as champions of women's rights. Women workers also have had rights under the country's labour law. In 1993, the labour law was amended to refer explicitly to the principle of non-discrimination. In addition, article 66 of the Labour Law conforms to ILO conventions regarding night work, underground work, and other hazardous work to women, especially to pregnant or lactating women. There is thus "positive discrimination" toward women due to their role as mothers. But the maternity leaves are not very generous. In the public sector, the maternity leave is two months at full pay, which may be extended by annual leave. In the private sector, it is 30 days at two-thirds pay, with a medical extension for an additional 15 days but no longer than 12 weeks (the ILO recommended minimum). New mothers may have time off to nurse their babies for up to six months, and enterprises with at least 50 women workers must provide a special nursing room.

Since 1983, state employees could request a leave of four months at half-pay to raise their small children, with no loss of seniority; since 1988 this has been limited to the first three children only. Mothers may also take up to two years' leave to raise children younger than six years or a disabled child. According to CREDIF (2002a: 214): "The objective is to protect women's right to work in the face of any obstacles related to maternity and responsibility for minor children. The objective is also [to do so] without placing in danger their social functions related to reproduction and without disrupting the stability of the family. At the same time, it favours the sexual division of labour in the household, and risks compromising the equal opportunities of men and women in the labour market" [my translation].

Tunisian women's participation in the country's main syndicate is not in accord with their labour force participation. Women workers make up just 12% of the membership of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT). CREDIF points out that the UGTT is a largely masculine organization, especially in its management – only 1.1% female (CREDIF 2002a: 194-5). In 1982 the Commission Nationale de la Femme Travailleuse was formed by teachers, textiles managers and workers, and its purpose was to conduct or commission studies on women worker problems for the UGTT. Though it became attached to the UGTT executive bureau in 1991, "This evolution has not, in any case, facilitated women's access to decision-making structures in the syndicate" (CREDIF 2002a: 195). Women have made some inroads, though still limited, in l'Union Tunisienne pour l'Industrie, le Commerce or l'Artisanat (l'UTICA); and l'Union Tunisienne pour l'Agriculture et la Peche (UTAP). In the former, women are three out of 22 of the Executive Board; in UTAP, about 20% of the members are female, and 9% of the directors are women. 1990 saw

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<sup>29</sup> As explained by an official of the Ministère des Affaires de la Femme et de la Famille, at a meeting at CAWTAR, Tunis, 7 February 2004.

the formation of la Chambre Nationale des Femmes Chefs d'Entreprise, which in 2001 had about 1,200 members (CREDIF 2002a: 196).

In the 1990s, feminist organizations and women's NGOs increased their numbers and activities (there were 21 women's NGOs in 2001), and many have worked with state agencies to research or advocate for women's socio-economic participation and rights. The l'Union Nationale des Femmes de Tunisie (UNFT) continues to play an important role, but CREDIF (created in 1990, set up in 1994), and La Commission Nationale "Femme et Développement" are also influential; their studies have been commissioned for the national development plans.

The case of Tunisia shows the extent to which the state and its gender policies play an important role in shaping women's livelihood and entitlements. Studies on Tunisia (CREDIF 2002a, 2002b; Ben Romdhane 2005) show that there has been a noticeable reduction in poverty and discrimination against women, as well as a general increase in well-being. However, continued neoliberalism and new trade agreements could pose risks. Some feel that Tunisia's trade with Europe and Tunisian small businesses could be hurt when the Free Trade Agreement that it signed with the EU comes into effect in 2007. Layachi (2001:25; 2005) believes that the association agreement, which calls for abolishing tariff barriers in Tunisia, may increase imports and trade deficits, and could diminish state revenue from tariffs. This is likely to adversely affect the social welfare programs administered by the state, as well as retrench thousands of women workers. It is estimated that between 1,500 and 3,000 firms – many of them textiles and garments firms that employ women – could go out of business. If so, this could undo the progress made in more recent years in women's livelihood and entitlements, and compel the government to expand the scope of existing social policies to protect working-class women in particular.

## **8. Conclusions**

This paper has provided a perspective on women's livelihood, entitlements, and social policies in the Middle East and North Africa, with a focus on Iran, Jordan, and Tunisia. By discussing patterns of women's employment and gender policies before and after liberalization, and by drawing attention to the consequences of the regional oil economy, it shows that the MENA region is not amenable to simplistic conclusions concerning globalization. Both the oil boom era and the neoliberal era have had positive and negative effects on women's livelihood and entitlements. Oil is obviously hugely beneficial to aid in recovery during bust years and to provide capital reserves. But the record shows that in the MENA region, it impeded economic diversification, the formation of a skilled and educated work force, and growth of the female labour force. It also contributed to over-centralization, allowing authoritarian states to dominate the economy and society through access to the substantial oil rents. As we saw with the Islamic Republic of Iran, it has enabled the state to continue its rentier behaviour and avoid diversification of the economy. By giving high wages to male workers, the oil economy during the oil boom era reinforced the patriarchal gender contract, leading to low rates of female economic activity and high rates of fertility and population growth. In most of the MENA region, women were locked into a patriarchal family structure based on the traditional division of labour. A prime example is Jordan, a non-oil, labour-exporting economy that nonetheless imported labour (and continues to do so). By around 1990, most of the MENA women who

worked outside the agricultural sector were college-educated professionals employed mainly in the public sector. A smaller share of women worked in factories or private services, but many lacked the educational qualifications of working-class women in other more-competitive economies such as China, Vietnam, and Central and Eastern Europe.

The end of the oil boom and the adoption of liberalization and privatisation policies have resulted in some changes to the structure, well-being, and gender composition of the labour force. The supply of job-seeking women has increased, and civil service employment is becoming increasingly feminized (as men gravitate to and dominate the more lucrative private sector), but unemployment has become feminized as well. Unemployment among educated women is higher than it is among educated men. There is more of a demand for female labour in manufacturing in some countries (as we saw with Tunisia), but not necessarily in formal sector employment. In an untoward economic and labour market situation, anecdotal accounts and ethnographic studies suggest that self-employment and informal sector activities – both high-end and low-end – have been increasing, although more qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to determine the extent and types of informal sector work among women. There is some indication that women are moving into sales, services, and banking (as with Tunisia), but the trends remain unclear and the data incomplete. In an era of global feminism more women's NGOs have been formed, and these are a source of both women's employment and feminist activism.

For middle-class and upper middle-class women, education, connections and family wealth provide the means for a livelihood and entitlements; but the situation for working-class and lower-income women remains dire. Deprived of literacy or locked into patriarchal family structures, they have no little or no access to income, not to mention social benefits. Others look for jobs but cannot find them, joining the ranks of the unemployed. Yet other women struggle in various types of service jobs, with low wages and no benefits. It is encouraging that in Tunisia, the welfare state has sought to mitigate the negative effects of the new labour markets – with their emphasis on “flexibility”, short-term contracts, and low wages – through social policies and targeted assistance.<sup>30</sup> To a certain extent, this also may be occurring in Iran, although unlike Tunisia, the Islamic state in Iran does not encourage women's employment and the economy has not, in any event, undergone structural change. In Jordan, it appears that the labour markets continue to favour men, and keep women locked out.

Thus some aspects of the positive scenario that was proposed earlier in this paper have been realized, but so have aspects of the negative scenario. Among other things, this suggests that cultural understandings and the state's gender policies are as influential as is economic policy itself in shaping women's livelihood and entitlements.

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<sup>30</sup> This is explained in more detail in Moghadam (2005b).

**Table 1. Manufacturing Wages, Selected MENA, Latin American, and East Asian Countries, 1963-1995 (U.S. \$)**

	<b>1963-70</b>	<b>1975-85</b>	<b>1985-95</b>
Iran	568	6986	4805
Jordan	532	3531	3561
Tunisia	940	2808	5126
Brazil	-	2407	6193
Mexico	-	3865	5286
Venezuela	2366	8615	5788
Korea	342	2558	9313
Malaysia	688	2082	3425
Philippines	627	1081	1816

*Note:* Wages refer to total compensation of labour in US\$ terms at market exchange rate, divided by total number of employees in the manufacturing sector.

*Source:* Extracted from Karshenas, 2001, Table 3, p. 67, using data from UNIDO.

**Table 2. Female Share of Employment in Non-Agricultural Activities, MENA and Asian Countries**

All Workers		Paid Employment		All workers		Paid		Employment	
<b>MENA</b>	Manufac- Turing	Non- Agri- culture	Manufac- turing	Non- agri- culture	<b>East Asia</b>	Manufac- turing	Non- agri- culture	Manufac- turing	Non- agri- culture
<b>Egypt</b>					<b>China</b>				
1960	4	11	3	12	1980	39	35	39	35
1966	5	10	4	13	1991	45	39	45	39
1976	7	14	7	12					
1989	-	-	9	18					
<b>Iran</b>					<b>Hong Kong</b>				
1956	34	23	30	24					
1966	40	21	33	22	1961	33	30	35	32
1976	38	22	20	17	1976	46	37	48	39
1986	15	11	7	11	1986	46	40	47	42
<b>Jordan</b>					<b>S. Korea</b>				
1961	16	11	3	10	1960	27	27	26	26
1979	6	10	5	12	1975	38	34	38	33
1984*	11	23	11	23	1980	36	34	38	34
<b>Morocco</b>					<b>Indonesia</b>				
1960	30	16	22	22	1961	38	30	-	-
1982	36	26	-	-	1971	43	35	35	25
					1980	45	35	36	24
<b>Syria</b>					<b>Malaysia</b>				
1960	7	10	7	12	1957	17	14	14	14
1981	11	12	9	13	1980	41	31	42	32
<b>Tunisia</b>					<b>Thailand</b>				
1956	22	17	8	12	1960	38	39	27	23
1975	52	29	29	21	1980	47	44	43	37
1984	56	30	34	24					
<b>Turkey</b>					<b>Sri Lanka*</b>				
1965	8	8	-	-	1975	32	18	32	18
1970	23	13	14	12	1975	39	25	39	25
1980	15	13	14	15	1985	47	35	47	35
1985	15	13	15	16	1988	58	39	58	39
					1991				

Sources: ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics* 1990, 1995; \*Guy Standing, "Global Feminization Through Flexible Labour: A Theme Revisited", *World Development*, 27(3) (1999): 583-602.

Note: Some of the data are based on enterprise surveys; others on census data.

**Table 3. Mean Years of Schooling, 25+, early 1990s, by Country and Sex**

MENA country			Other developing countries				
	males	females	males	females	males	females	
<b>Algeria</b>		<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.8</b>		<b>Argentina</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>8.9</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>1.9</b>			<b>Chile</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Iran</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>			<b>China</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>3.9</b>			<b>Colombia</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>7.3</b>
<b>Jordan</b>		<b>6.0</b>	<b>4.0</b>		<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>		<b>6.0</b>	<b>4.7</b>		<b>Mongolia</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>6.8</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>3.5</b>			<b>Philippines</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>7.0</b>
<b>Libya</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>1.3</b>			<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>6.1</b>
<b>Morocco</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>1.5</b>			<b>Thailand</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>1.5</b>			<b>Viet Nam</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>
<b>Tunisia</b>		<b>3.0</b>	<b>1.2</b>		<b>Uruguay</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>8.2</b>

Source: UNESCO, *Education for all: Status and Trends 1994*. Paris, UNESCO, 1994.

**Table 4. Women's Share in Major Occupational Groups, 1990, by Region**

	<b>Prof./Tech. &amp; related</b>	<b>Admin./ manag.</b>	<b>Clerical &amp; service</b>	<b>Sales service</b>	<b>Production workers</b>
<b>workers</b>					
<b>Developed countries</b>					
<b>Western Europe</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Developing countries</b>					
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Oceania</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Caribbean</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Eastern Asia</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Southern Asia</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Western Asia*</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>North Africa</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

Note: Western Asia refers to the Middle East.

Source: UN, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics*, Chart 5.16.

**Table 5. LEADING EXPORTS OF IRAN, JORDAN, TUNISIA, 1989-1990**

<b>Country and product</b>	<b>% of total country</b>	
<b>Iran, Islamic Republic of</b>		
<b>Crude Petroleum</b>	<b>88.93</b>	
<b>Floor coverings, etc.</b>	<b>4.49</b>	
<b>Hides, skins, excl. furs</b>	<b>1.85</b>	
<b>Sulphur</b>	<b>0.34</b>	
<b>Jordan</b>		
<b>Fertilizers, crude</b>	<b>38.91</b>	
<b>Fertilizers, manufactured</b>	<b>12.94</b>	
<b>Medicinal, pharmaceutical products</b>		<b>6.11</b>
<b>Tunisia</b>		
<b>Crude Petroleum</b>	<b>16.40</b>	
<b>Men's outerwear not knit</b>	<b>13.57</b>	
<b>Fertilizers, manufactured</b>	<b>8.56</b>	
<b>Women's outerwear non-knit</b>	<b>6.70</b>	
<b>Inorganic elements, oxides etc.</b>	<b>4.81</b>	
<b>Outer-wear, knit non-elastic</b>	<b>3.68</b>	
<b>Lime, cement, building products</b>	<b>2.17</b>	

Source: UNCTAD, *Handbook of International Trade and Development Statistics 1992*,  
Table 4.3 (NY: UN, 1993).

**Table 6. Female share of service employment by subsectors, Iran, Jordan, Tunisia**

COUNTRY	Trade, restaurants, and hotels		Transport, storage, and communications		Finance, insurance, real estate, business services		Community, social and personal services	
	1980	1990-94	1980	1990-94	1980	1990-94	1980	1990-94
Iran, Islamic Rep.	2.0	1.7	2.2	1.4	9.4	9.2	18.9	13.6
Jordan	2.1	2.1	0.6	0.6	15.9	15.9	13.8	13.8
Tunisia	6.0	8.1	5.3	21.9	24.6	24.6	21.0	21.0

*Source:* United Nations, Women's Indicator and Statistics Database (WISTAT), 1994

**Table 7. Estimated Earned Income (PPP US\$), 2000**

Country	HDI Rank	Female	Male
Tunisia	97	3,347	9,320
Islamic Republic of Iran	98	2,524	9,088
Jordan	99	1,749	6,014

Note: The countries are listed in the order of their ranking on the UNDP's human development index scale.

Source : UNDP, Human Development Report 2002, Table 22.

**Table 8. Unemployment Rates, Selected MENA Countries, 1990s**

Country	Year	Male %	Female %	Total %
Algeria	1992	24.2	20.3	23.8
	1997*	26.9	24.0	26.4
	2001			27.3
Bahrain**	1991	5.5	13.4	6.8
Egypt	1995	7.0	22.1	10.4
Iran (urban)	1991	8.9	21.5	14.5
	1996	8.3	12.5	10.2
Jordan	1991	14.4	34.1	17.1
	1994	12.9	28.3	15.0
	1997	11.7	28.5	14.4
	2000 (Nov.)	12.6	19.8	13.7
Lebanon	1996	8.6	7.2	7.0 (22% for new entrants)
Morocco (urban)	1992	13.0	25.3	16.0
	1998	17.4	22.9	18.7
Oman	1993	4.7	8.7	5.1
Syria	1981	3.2	2.0	3.0
	1991	5.2	14.0	6.8
	1995	5.1	11.6	6.5
Tunisia	1993	14.7	21.9	16.1
Yemen	1991	14.0	6.0	12.3
	1994	10.1	5.4	9.1

Sources: World Bank (1995b), p. 5; ERF (1996), p. 103; ERF (1998), p. 128; ESCWA (2000), p. 37; ILO (1999); Moghadam (1998); Yemen Ministry of Planning & Development (1998); Jordan Department of Statistics, *Employment and Unemployment Survey* (various issues); IRI (1993), Table 8, p. 64; IRI (1997), Table 3-1, p. 70.

\* 1997 data on Algeria from Republique Algerienne (2000) and from World Bank *Genderstats*

\*\*24.8% female unemployment in 1991 compared to 12.3% for men. (*Human Development Report, State of Bahrain* (UNDP, 1998), p. 92.

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