



1 Introduction

On my journeys between countries, I have often asked myself why women are able to exercise more rights in some countries than in others. In those countries women are to some extent unbound, such as in the way they express their behaviours, and in the scope of their actions. Thus, it seems the social practices are different between countries. But who is then behind strengthening more liberal social practices? It looks like particular principles and civil rights are obtained by being citizens. My curiosity has then led me to investigate about what it means to be a citizen in a state, and more precisely, in a liberal one. At first I assumed that the difference lies in the respective, presumably different constitutions! However, I later discovered that the Jordanian and Bahraini constitutions both claim to be liberal and pluralistic and to conform with principle women's rights. That led to the question why women in both countries cannot effectively enjoy their constitutional rights, that is, to emphasise the point, the very political rights in the public sphere, which are granted in the countries' constitutions. It makes one wonder, how to reform what is discriminating their rights. What are the obstacles hindering the achievement of all that, of true citizen's equality? This opens up the debate about the rights and duties in the two countries and about what meaning citizenship holds there.

Indeed, the concept of citizenship is central and obligatory for the modern nation and is thus employed in any discussion of governance and gender. It describes a direct and legal relationship between the individual and the state, a relationship that carries with it obligations and enforceable rights as defined by the juridical process, which has gained importance in recent years. It is about how the subjects of a state are defined, with respect to the law and practices such as legal, political, economic, and cultural. The practice of citizenship, while influenced by the law, differs from the written laws (Hijab, 2002: 2). According to the Arab Human Development Report 2002 the lack of women's empowerment is one of the deficits in the Arab world. To address this deficit a gender and citizenship initiative has been launched in the Arab countries by the United Nations Development Program. This initiative is based on the premise that a citizenship framework is a particularly powerful one, both conceptually and in regard to more practical results, for empowering women and addressing their unequal access to the public sphere in the Arab world (UNDP-POGAR, 2006). Despite of that, women in the Arab countries continue facing discrimination and inequality in rights, despite the legal guarantees of the women's right to political participation. This situation limits women's de-



cision-making opportunities which remain the lowest in the world. Despite substantial efforts by civil society organisations advocating women's political rights, women still lag behind in terms of representation (Rubin, 2007: 16).

Normatively, it is essential for the any country's democratic structure that in the public sphere political participation is granted to all citizens, men and women on equal basis; that, in other words, the principle of human rights is applied by granting effective political rights to both men and women. According to Rose & Hatfield (2007: 7) feminist scholars have long noticed that women have been deprived their political citizenship. In addition, experience has shown that the larger representation of women at the highest levels of government makes a difference in raising awareness, in changing agendas and in providing a national gender sensitive legal framework. In promising democracies where societies are working to remove discrimination between men and women and to empower women at the political participation level by measures such as reserving seats in the parliament (quota system) it has now been accepted that special conditions should be provided in order to enable the contribution of women, while many countries are still lagging behind (Ballington, 2005: 24).

The idea of democracy rests on the legitimacy of power to carry out decisions concerning the citizens' lives, their society and their country. Such decisions should arise from a choice by those who will be influenced. However, this legitimacy has been limited and many have been excluded from choosing between options, and among others these have been women (Amawi, 2009). Indeed, some Arab leaders have recognised the importance of women rights and have reclaimed control over these areas. Their efforts have been boosted by international development agencies, which have in part attributed the Arab world's political and economic stagnation to gender inequality (Coleman, 2004).

Concerning the status of women's rights in the two countries, it is worth mentioning that the project of women's rights with respect to the legal reform of women's status in Bahrain is different from Jordan, in that it initiated only recently. For instance, in the mid-1980s Jordan's political liberalisation had increased mobilisation by both conservatives and women's rights groups. The Jordanian monarch is being pulled in conflicting directions by two forces on these issues: the conservatives and the women groups. In the mid-1980s the nation's political liberalisation had increased mobilisation by both conservatives and women's rights groups. In recent years, the Jordanian government has undergone some gradual reform despite the opposition with respect to women's rights related bills. Furthermore, King Abdulla retains much of the political power in Jordan, and he has



encouraged the return to democratic elections in the late 1980s which politically galvanised women. Women consistently exhibit higher voter turnout than men (UNDP-POGAR, 2006). As a matter of fact, however, women in Jordan remain excluded from the government itself. The Global Gender Gap even indicates that women in the parliament represent 0.07 %, women in ministerial positions 0.17 % (Hausmann et al., 2009: 120). Moreover, no women were elected between 1993 and 2003; and the legislative elections that took place on June 17, 2003, were disappointing for women, when an electoral law reserved only six seats for the top female candidates (Rubin, 2007: 17).

On the other hand, in Bahrain, women's rights in the public sphere have in theory made an important step forward when in 2002 women were granted universal suffrage in national elections for the first time. Yet not a single woman was elected. In response, the king appointed six women in the Shura Council (Upper House) in the next round of parliamentary elections in 2006, the only female candidate, Latifa al Quúd, was among 221 candidates competing for 40 seats. Yet she was the only one running in her district in Bahrain, which ensured her victory (Rubin 2007: 17). In general, Bahraini women in the public sphere continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions. A recent study co-sponsored by the Global Gender Gap Report put it like this: Women in the parliament scored 0.03 %) and in the ministerial positions represent 0.05 %, which shows the gender gap in political empowerment (Hausmann et al., 2009: 46).

On the international level, the two countries have achieved significant progress to some extent in regard to the women's rights project. Jordan has ratified the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995; the principal themes were among others the advancement and empowerment of women's rights in relation to women's human rights, and women and decision-making. Another positive development occurred with regards to the limited rights of women. The final ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW made the government publish the convention in the official Gazette No. 4839, dated August 1, 2007. Whereas Bahrain ratified the international agreements such as CEDAW and became a member in 2002, but made several reservations with regard to conflicts with Shari'a law and has made but a small effort to review and amend the existing national laws and policies to bring them to CEDAW standards (Freedom House, 2005: 54).

Thus, even though women's rights are guaranteed to some degree women in both countries experience legal discrimination in matters such as civil, economic, and social rights. In this light, the private sphere governed by the social rights, namely the family law, might affect other women's rights. Liberal feminist theorists argue that this is due



to discrimination in the private sphere which is among other governed by the family law. Family law is entrenched in the cultural, political, and economic structure of the society. In Islamic countries family law is either governed by or otherwise kept in consistency with Shari'a and restrained by exclusive jurisdiction of particular family courts (Malhas, 2009: 16). According to Charrad, family law has historically been the heart of matter when it comes to women's rights in the Arab countries (2009). Indeed, the family law is a key issue for women stereotypes and gender equality.

Lastly, the importance of the research stems from the objective of establishing gender justice and equality, from which the country would gain plenty of benefits. There is also a desire of the civil society to reform women's rights by lawyers, NGOs, women activists, etc. Furthermore, Bahrain is a new case study and a constitutional reform just recently took place in 2002. In Jordan and Bahrain, even in the Arab World at large, the topic of women's rights and the need for a consistent body of laws and policies is currently subject of discussion. In addition to that, interest in comparing the cases of Bahrain and Jordan has been motivated by the premise that both are monarchies. There exist similarities and differences with respect to each country's women's rights projects. On the basis of their constitution, these two countries may seemingly project a rather liberal-democratic type of monarchism. That is to say, the primary law of the land guarantees, among others, political pluralism and freedom of belief, whereby all citizens are supposed to enjoy full equal citizenship regardless of religion, belief, gender, race or language. It is my hope that the choice of countries and their comparison while departing from a merely legislative comparative perspective will help to generate suggestions for research and action.

In this research, however, the situation in Bahrain and Jordan after 2000 has been the main focus of discussion. In the early 2000s, one could notice new turning points in those countries' political history. Both countries adapted legislative reforms concerning women's rights and women's opportunity to exercise their rights as citizens on equal footing with men. Whether these reforms have enabled the Bahraini and the Jordanian women to advance their cause is the subject of analysis here.

1.1 The Research Objective

In order to understand women's inclusion and exclusion as a citizen in Jordan and in Bahrain, I will advocate a departure from the view that if women in principle obtain their constitutional rights, women's rights are already served. If that was the case, then why is it,



that they still cannot exercise their rights in the public sphere? More precisely, their political participation rights, as I will use a narrow definition of political participation. Then, in order to respond to the question, I will identify an adequate concept of citizenship which needs to be equalising in terms of rights and duties. Secondly, I will find out what the legal reforms concerning women's rights in the two countries are with respect to the civil and political, economic, and the social rights. It thirdly requires investigating whether these reforms grant women more rights as promised in the countries' general policies to promote equality. Lastly, I will shed light on the obstacles against the realisation of women's rights.

1.2 Argument

According to liberal feminist theorists such as Eisenstein et. al. (cf. El Solh & Hijab, Amawi, Moghadam, Joseph), women will not be able to lobby their rights in the public sphere as long as they do not exert their rights in the private sphere. Both spheres are interrelated. El Solh & Hijab (2009: 2) argue that the main cause of discrimination against women is not mainly found in the political and economic laws but fundamentally in the family law which defines the role of men as the legal and only heads of the households. Consequently, political participation of women is limited under such circumstances.

Let me begin with the premise that the key to the advancement of women's role in the public sphere in Jordan and in Bahrain is through active political participation of women in the three branches of the government namely, in the legislative, executive, and judiciary. Their representation in each of these government branches would allow them to advance their cause, provided certain discriminatory clauses in the family law (private sphere) would be amended, so as not to prohibit active women's participation in the public sphere and in the long run. My current observation suggests that policy intervention lobbied by, among others, NGOs and other liberal-oriented institutions and political personalities, has already, though slowly, gained momentum to pump prime political consciousness and encourage participation, most especially, of women. But, obviously, there remains a lot of work to do.

Amawi during a symposium 2009 argues that legitimacy of power makes decisions about the lives of citizens; and therefore power should derive from those who were affected. Women are limited and excluded from making choices. Patriarchy and the subordination of women continue to influence women's lives and participation in the public sphere. This means, power such as political participation is required in order to participate in decisions and take action as citizens. Therefore, if eligible women have political



power they will be able to change that what discriminates against them. The political rights of women must be a main concern in the region, and women must be at the table as these reforms are announced (Maltbie, 2011).

Moreover, in the private sphere on the family life level, there is a need for a greater amount of freedom to manage one's life affairs, the frequent necessity of decreasing familial constraints. There is a patriarchal notion that the dominant authority lies with men and within their families women's lives are mostly shaped by male standards that are set by their fathers, husbands, brothers, or uncles. They depend on their approval in the pursuit of many important endeavours and find their personal freedom limited which also affects the public sphere such as in terms of political participation. Moghadam elaborates on the situation of women as minors and dependents of fathers, husbands, or other male guardians. Religiously-based family laws emphasise the distinction between the public sphere of governance which is classified as the realm of men, and the private sphere of the family, which is associated with women (Moghadam, 2004: 39).

At the general social level, the society's view towards women, and the impact of the social heritage on limiting women's chances of involvement in political matters and the patriarchy are obstacles, because they see women as homemakers and define their supposedly natural role as raising children but do not see them to be involved in political decisions. Moghadam argues that men were seen as the breadwinners and women as wives and mothers, a view supported by Muslim family laws (Moghadam, 2004: 31).

Furthermore, women come into conflict with a power imbalance imbedded in their situation. The stereotypic expectations surrounding them since childhood limit their sense of personal control. They confront a social environment within the family and in the society, linking femininity with dependence, while linking power and efficacy with masculinity. As a result, such stereotyped expectations limit the influence which women are allowed to exercise, which in turn affects the use of power and since decision-making is most relevant to practices of authority and power, women experience special problems in this regard.

Along the same line of argumentation, laws offer men higher rank, the right to limit a women's freedom and to dominate her life. Indeed, both laws and social practices are interrelated. Enslin (2003: 83) argues, traditional and social practices of gender inequality take place in the legal framework of the religious laws. Consequently, such laws (e.g. family law) might limit women's chances in the public arena such as in the legal and political fields and maintain the difference in power between the two genders. It is indeed laws that provide the climate for injustice and form the basis for unjust prac-



tices. For instance, Moghadam assesses that in Jordan, Muslim family laws, conservative governments, and the power of Islamist movements have formed an unwelcoming political-legal atmosphere for women (Moghadam, 2003b: 38).

From what has been stated above, it boils down to the insight that the required change in women's life needs reforms of laws and legislation that limit women's personal freedom and their role in the political and public domains. Normatively, Women's struggle for true equality and full citizenship must be founded on a respect for women's rights in both the public and private spheres. Women's legal inferiority in the family is, in effect, at the root of discrimination against women in the public sphere. In turn, discrimination in the fields of social, economical, political rights hinders any important progress in women's legal status as codified in family law.

To conclude, in this research, I want to develop two main lines of argument. The first, having gender rights in the constitution does not guarantee women exercising their rights in the practice in Jordan and Bahrain. Yet, in both countries rights in the constitution are being regulated by the legislation (laws) to deal with the rights of citizens because changing legislation or law procedures mean less effort and complication than changes in the constitution. Here we find a gap in the rights, even though these legislation and laws stem from the constitutions of the respective country. The main obstacles for women to exercise their rights in the public sphere can be found, this is my second line of argument, in the lack of rights in the private sphere. We may use the term social rights (family law) in the private sphere and the term political participation in the public sphere. Indeed, a study done by Moghadam about gender equality in the Arab countries concludes that, by codifying the patriarchal system within the family, the state and law limit women's political participation and grant them only second-class citizenship (Moghadam, 2003b: 40, f).

1.3 The Problem Statement

The Arab Human Development Report in 2005 highlighted Arab women discrimination. The report outlines the need for gender equality, promoting full citizenship rights for women. The Arab region or the Middle East countries have as countries mostly been formed in the late twentieth century out of ashes of empires that had incorporated a variety of parts of the region, mainly the Ottoman, French, and British Empires (Joseph, 2000: 5). A region long connected with war, patriarchy, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism, and currently in a process of various transitions: economic, political, and cultural. Gender has taken part in these transformations, which implies a growth of



feminist politics (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999: 273, f). Furthermore, countries have altered boundaries and continuously exchanged people over time. There are smaller religions such as Christianity and Judaism, but Islam is the predominant religion; Islam has different divisions that have transformed and continue to transform the laws and practices in response to internal and external influences (Joseph, 2000: 5). The countries of the region have similar issues in that they share a connection to the nationalist movements and the practice of modernisation and development, and experience conflict between secular and religious tendencies. The combination of predominantly Muslim societies and the imperialist West, the blemished nature of agendas for national development and the preoccupation with Islam as a pointer of cultural identity are generally apparent to have constrained and restricted feminist debate throughout the region (Al-Ali, 2010: 217). This culture protects male privilege and an extended family system that grants power to kin over individuals and especially over women. It grants power over women not only to husbands, but also to male members of the kin group (Charrad, 2008: 115). Therefore, feminist critics focus on the continuing role of a kin-structure society and their integration in different levels of governance and the political system that might at the same time act to empower or disempower women (Jad, 2010: 151).

Given that, the context of the region has an impact on women's rights and gender transition and on the quality of the rights' outcome. Women's expansion of their citizenship rights is influenced by the views of the general social, economic and political constructions affecting these rights (Jad, 2010: 152). For instance, in Egypt and Jordan, Muslim family laws, conservative governments, and the power of Islamist movements have formed an unwelcoming political-legal atmosphere for women (Moghadam, 2003b: 38). Defining the social rights of women through religious theologians has restricted women's political and civic rights which contradict with the liberal notion of individuals as outlined by Joseph in 2002 and Marshall in 2000.

Concept of citizenship has disempowered and empowered women and men in different ways and similarly in other regions of the world (Joseph, 2000: 4). To put the point strongly, in the Arab region male citizens get few political rights, and women even fewer. In several Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, women need yet to obtain basic political rights. Women in Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait gained universal suffrage in 2002 and 2003. Arab women have always been engaged in the political movement of national liberation, and in feminist movements, but their representation in formal political structures such as political parties, parliaments, and governments has been more recent and remains limited



(Moghadam, 2003b: 34). Hatem explains that the liberal practice and the constitution commonly outline the rights of citizens in universal stipulations such as institutional bases of representation (Hatem, 2000: 35). This means, the constitution in a liberal state¹ reflects the idea of equal opportunity and then representation for all citizens on an institutional basis. Thus, the constitution and what is written inside is an indicator to what extent a state is liberal in reality.

Women have been bestowed voting rights in the 1950s (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia), the 1960s (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen). In Saudi Arabia, women up to today do not vote or participate in the political process in any significant way. Arab women's limited political participation, therefore, has partly to do with the elections and partly to do with the patriarchal gender structure. Even though women get in the rank-and-file and sometimes leadership of political parties in some countries (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), nowhere have they gained a vital mass; and their appointment to party or government positions has been largely by way of symbolic policy (Moghadam, 2003b: 34). Beginning in September 2011, most countries in the region will have elections, including Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Morocco, and Egypt (Maltbie, 2011).

According to Joseph, women's political participation in the Arab world has become an issue since the women's movement activated women into political participation. Women do not decide the moment for political involvement; their political participation is brought about by the state, rulers, politicians, or others in authority. Women turn into a target of political action programmes, and their public identity is a part of the private identities in family and society. They are thought about in categories of gender (Joseph, 2001: 34).

However, in some cases women are mightily mobilising for their rights even though the outcome is slow; and sometimes this mobilisation is supported by the state and international actors, but not the party system. Moghadam argues that women's collective action extends from consensus creation (e.g., Jordan, Egypt), with a number of states now actively encouraging women's rights and applying legal reforms (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia) (Moghadam, 2003b: 5, f). Furthermore, Al-Ali argues that women's rights issues such as political participation have conventionally both acknowledged the demand of

¹ Liberal is political orientation which favours the social progress by implementing law and reform, and the belief in the significance of equal rights and liberty. It states the primacy of the individual or the nation, ideas of self determination, different to the state, family, economy and politics. A government form which the best eligible rule. Liberal Basic ideas are the following: Liberal democracy, human rights, constitutionalism, just and free elections, freedom of religion and free trade. <http://www.whatisliberalism.com/>.



women activists as well as become part of the debate of male modernisers and reform (Al-Ali, 2003: 216). According to Waylen, civil society plays a part in the transformation of state institutions assisting the redefinition of what is considered political and plays a role in retaining democracy (Waylen, 2007: 50, f). In her view, many feminist organisations consider engagement with the state useful and legitimate and find it possible to construct a state that can react to women's needs (Waylen, 2007: 88).

Furthermore, international actors such as the United Nations also play a role with respect to women's rights and in particular their political participation. Indeed, Jordan has introduced the quota system based on the CEDAW recommendations as a temporary measurement. Many Arab countries have endorsed international conventions regarding women's rights such as CEDAW to incorporate women in development and to boost women's economic and political participation. Countries such as Algeria and Tunisia have confirmed real progress in amending laws such as the family law; many other countries lag behind. Their reservations mainly concern provisions that disagree with Shari'a (UNDP, 2009: 84). According to Jad, women are considered a source of legitimacy, with their gender entity, asked for and encouraged by foreign funding, serving as a secular, liberal image for the new authority (Jad, 2010: 159).

In short, the literature appears to point towards consolidation of some Arab and classical Western thinkers with respect to the definition of citizenship and to women's limitation to enter the political arena because they are considered inferior based on their sex. Both agree that citizenship is highly gendered. There is emphasis on the need for women to exercise their constitutional political rights. Furthermore, for the authors the concept of citizenship in a liberal modern state means a legal process that defines the criteria of an individual, of rights and obligations with respect to the state, but also emphasises the need to practice citizenship, politically, economically, and socially. Therefore, participation by women is important because of the consequence of assembling their perspective when public decisions are being made. However, the Middle East has failed to meet the modern concept of citizenship.

1.3.1 Women's Rights and Family Law

Why do we need to talk about family law? Mukhopadhyay explains that many of the issues that concern gender equality arise in the private sphere of family and society relations. Also, the connection between gender justice and citizenship rests in the way citizenship delineates the boundaries of the sphere of rights. This means citizenship classi-



fies what women's identity, role and entitlements in relation to men are and how these are legalised (Mukhopadhyay, 2007: 269).

This means, tradition and women's role in the society will affect women's rights. When explaining traditional considerations, during a symposium 2009, Charrad stated that family law has traditionally been the heart of the matter when one moves towards women's rights in the Arab Muslim countries. By its very character, family law raise problematic relationships, the place of individuals in the society at large, state, and the direct social environment and the family. Any legislation to alter family relations holds a concept, an image, and a normative model of the individual, the family, the citizens, and the relationships between them. Family law by definition represents an ideal of the family and social relationships. Whether the legislation of a country protects the unlimited male-centred patrilineal or on the opposite the nuclear family defines the key involvement for the rights and obligations of women as described in the law. A similar issue was raised by the United Nations Development Programme when they reported that discriminations against women are evident in the family law, and it is only when this code is reformed that the attempt to eradicate discrimination against women would be successful (UNDP, 2009: 83).

Women's activist, lawyer and human rights activist Asma Khader, when referring to the Islamic countries in general, confirms: "Family law is the key to the gate of freedom and human rights for women" (as relayed by Charrad during a symposium 2009). It involves matters of legal personhood; the main matters affect procedures for custody of children, inheritance, marriage, polygamy, and conditions for divorce. Also, family law is at the centre of attention in regard to the question whether conservative interpretations of family law based on Shari'a remain accepted or whether legal reforms amend the balance of power that the law grants to men and women in their responsibilities, not only as wives and husbands but also as members of larger families. Malhas believes that at the heart of the issue is the organisation of society and the extent to which patriarchal actions are protected or, in contrast, opposed by the law. It is a central theme in the Arab world, for the reason that family law is entrenched in the cultural, political, and economic structure of every society. Malhas says that family law in the Arabian Gulf states, similar to other Islamic countries, is ruled by or otherwise performed in conformity with Shari'a and safeguarded by the special jurisdiction of particular family courts, that is to say, the Shari'a courts (Malhas, 2009: 16).

However, in the liberal model equality aims at equality before the law; which leaves social (and not legal) adjustments to be framed in the wake or even as a result of legal re-



form. Liberal equality aims at democratic representation in a state, and feminists present a convincing case that liberalism entails extending civil rights and representation to all. It is argued that equality before the law in the written legislation and in the practices that liberal feminism calls for could bring about wide social change. However, in most Middle Eastern and North African communities the characteristics in the legal system are ambivalent, creating a dual legal system; one reflecting customs that are internationally equal, the other representing diverse degrees of codification of Shari'a that identify women's rights in matters of marriage, divorce, children, inheritance and custody. Rights written and protected by the constitution in these countries are generally denied or subverted in various family codes (Lazerg, 2009). In the eyes of liberal feminists such state of affairs reveals a state's real democratic situation (Musgrave, 2003: 214). Not surprisingly feminists enquire into how legal policies legitimise certain definitions of oppression or equality, or certain form of politics. Law is but one socio-political tool and some say it is the main tool; hence, it safeguards equality, democracy, and justice. Moreover, feminist lawyers and legal theorists have already achieved progress in changing patriarchal legal systems, particularly by liberal feminist methods that have been effective in the legal domain with respect to women repression and equality (Musgrave, 2003: 216, f).

From what has been stated above, in the Arab world we can see a legalisation of injustice codified in law that favours male dominance, and has an effect on defining individual citizenship. Therefore, for women's citizenship equality more rights need to be obtained by removing discriminatory laws; a state legal and political intervention is also imperative. Similarly, Enslin believes that the state needs to alter men's perceptions of their role in the private sphere, a measure which would be beneficial, as far as it encourages confidence and empowerment for women (Enslin, 2003: 82).

1.3.2 State Policies and Liberal Feminism Premises

Nowadays, much attention is concentrated on the promotion of autonomy in discussions about political versus comprehensive liberalism. Should the focus on political liberalism overrule cultural (e.g., religious) freedom? Or should liberalism employ a comprehensive perspective that tries to integrate the two? On the one hand the nature of politics and state policy has an essential bearing on women's rights and participation and should be changed regardless of customs and traditions. On the other hand political liberalism restricts the debate to the political institutions and thus is limited in what it can say about gender inequalities in states and communities other than the Western community. Some



theorists believe that this leaves little for public deliberation about culture and its effects on women (Enslin, 2003: 79, f). According to Musgrave, twentieth century social movement's feminism has formed its agenda in terms of classic political liberalism. Given the context of Western liberal democracies, feminists discovered that by arguing that patriarchal practices actually conflicted with basic promises of liberalism, they could achieve wider motivation for social change of those practices (Musgrave, 2003: 214).

From the perspective of liberal feminism, an international feminism to support an ethical method of development and policy is a comprehensive perspective. Women in developing countries are subject to a failure of human capabilities, which is effected by a combination of poverty and gender inequality.

There is a major gap in the literature and in the research done so far about these issues: firstly a lack of comparative studies among Arab countries. Then, very few studies have met Bahrain as a case study concerning citizenship. Lastly, as Joseph states, there is a need of comparative analysis of rules and practices of citizenship all over the Arab countries:

“A generation of feminist theorists have investigated Arab states structures (Joseph 1991, 1993a, 1997, 1999a, b, 2000; Hatem 1986, 1994c, 1995; Charrad 1990, 2001; Molyneux 1991; Lazerg 1994; Badran 1995; Brand 1998; Botman 1999). Few studies, however, have established a systematic basis for a comparative analysis of the rules and practices of citizenship throughout the Arab world (Brand 1998, Joseph 2000, Charrad 2001)” (Joseph, 2002: 30).

My research attempts to fill this gap by presenting an analytical, empirical and comparative discussion about legal reforms in women's rights focusing on citizenship and political participation. The comparison will be done between the two countries Jordan and Bahrain. In addition, Charrad (2007: 258) who also outlines the absence of comparative research on Arab countries says:

“More comparative research within the region is needed on policies and behaviours. Research on gender issues in the Middle East has been dominated by case studies on a single country or single community. There is a serious gap to be filled, and should be encouraged either by single researchers or teams, who work on different countries” (Charrad, 2007: 258).

One of few examples of a cross-national comparison is a recent case study co-sponsored by the United Nations that describes the role of NGOs in the Gulf countries, particularly Bahrain; it illustrates to what extent the Bahraini women are aware of their rights in relation to other Gulf countries. It was carried out mostly with a general gender perspective focusing on the role of NGOs (Al Najjar, 2003: 1). Few studies have focused on Bahrain as a case study, particularly on citizenship with respect to rights and duties.

Based on this comparative study, this research will aim at revealing previous and current reforms undertaken by the Bahrain and Jordan governments in advancing



women's rights, and their effects. Subsequently, there is a need to arrive at suggestions as to what can be done with the family law to foster women's right within the context of conservative beliefs and local traditions and culture. If legal reform is important, why not reform discriminatory laws that are used to transfer women to a non-legal status in the legislation? If country policies are important, why not use them to accelerate the reform process? If political participation is important, why not include women as citizens in the decision making positions? If the public sphere is important, why let the private sphere and the patriarchal privilege continue to influence the public domain?

1.4 The Research Contribution

A significant contribution of this research lies in its research on Bahrain, for there is a Sunni-Shi'ite division which Jordan does not have. This is relevant to citizenship and to the research objectives for how they debate family law as regards to women's rights in the legislative authority in Bahrain is different from Jordan. Having different groups in Bahrain has made the legal reform process regarding a codified family law in Bahrain difficult. Shi'ite groups have even disputed a codified family law in order to enhance their own position. Further, Bahrain has but a short history with respect to the women's rights project. This provides further and added value of the comparison. The similarities and differences between the two cases allow for interesting points of comparison. Furthermore, in both Jordan and in Bahrain significant legal issues of concern such as laws with respect to women's rights lack a supplementary body of documentation. Thus, through the use of the elite interview technique, I was able to gain exclusive insights.