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Uncertainty and Resistance in Jordanian Women's Perceptions of their Positionings in Society

By Oraib Mango¹

Abstract

In many parts of the world, women continue to face issues of inequality and discrimination. While the plight of Arab women for gender equality has gained media attention, fewer studies have investigated the perceptions of Arab women themselves on this issue. In this study, through discourse and content analysis of face to face interviews, I investigated the meanings that Jordanian women made of how the society viewed and positioned them. While the participants were aware of the dominant Discourse that limited women and positioned them as inferior to men, their talk also expressed their resistance to this discourse. A post-structuralist feminist discourse analysis lens allowed for the investigation of competing discourses within the women's talk. Between the relayed Discourse on women and the participants' discourse of resistance, a discourse of uncertainty evolved as they struggled to position themselves amidst competing discourses.

Keywords: Jordanian women, Feminist Post-structural Discourse Analysis, Women's perceptions, Discourses, Dominant discourse

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has the lowest overall gender equality in the world (Ministry of Planning, 2011). Within the region, Jordan has been regulating laws that protect women's rights and promote equality between genders (Abueita, 2005). Even though Jordanian women have access to a wide variety of professions in Jordan, their participation in the work force is among the lowest in the world (15% in 2012) (World Bank, 2014) and only a few have been able to reach high-rank positions in judicial, parliamentary and ministerial positions. In that regard, they are not faring better than their sisters in other countries in the Arab world who also face many obstacles that hinder not only their participation in the work force but also their attainment of positions of power within their places of work and beyond. Researchers have found societal obstacles including Jordanian customs and traditions to be a large factor in limiting women's success in the work force and in attaining high positions of decision making in the work place (Abueita, 2005; Al-Barak, 2005; Esim 2011/2012; Ketiti, 2014; Wiggins and Al-Obaidi, 2013). Among these obstacles is an overwhelming lack of trust in women's abilities (Al Maaitah et al., 2012) in addition to social perceptions of women's primary roles in the society as caretakers of their homes and families (Al Barak, 2005). Women in leadership positions face challenges that include negative stereotypes of women, lack of self-confidence, lack of ambition, and the negative

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influence of tribal laws (Al Hussein, 2004; Al Maaitah et al., 2012) in addition to competition from men who, when in positions of power, limit women's movement to higher positions.

Theoretical Framework

Post-structuralist feminism draws from different theoretical positions and places language "as the common factor in any analysis of power, social meanings and the construction of identities" (Baxter, 2006, p.6). It concentrates on everyday actions and everyday speech to analyze wider discourses and to find connections between micro interactions and macro dominating structures that enter into everyday life and affect people's thinking and assumptions. Discourses, as such, are "systematic ways of making sense of the world by determining *power relations* within all texts, including spoken interaction" (Baxter, 2003, p.46).

In this study, I used a post-structuralist feminist discourse analysis (FPDA) positing that in a text, including spoken discourse, there is a plurality of discourses—including competing ones which may exist simultaneously (Baxter, 2003). In accordance with a post-structuralist perspective, discourse and power are interrelated. Power, as Foucault viewed it, is not an overt suppressive force but is rather interwoven within discourses at the different levels including every day talk through which popular discourses are reproduced. Thus, power "is practiced, and this is what puts it within the reach of all strata of society" (Ketiti, p. 13).

This research also draws from Gee's theory of a "capital D" Discourse which includes not just our talk but also our ways of being in the world which in turn help to identify us as belonging to certain identity groups; it includes "ways with words, actions, beliefs, emotions, values, interactions, people, objects, tools and technologies that come to constitute" being and doing a certain type of person (Gee, 2003, p. 20). This Discourse does not only define types but also allows for "meaningful recognition" as "Discourses also exist as the work we do to get people and things recognized in certain ways and not others, and they exist as maps that constitute our understandings. They are, then, social practices and mental entities, as well as material realities" (Gee, 2003, p. 23).

Like all groups, Jordanian women position themselves and are positioned within the society. Members of the society carry certain perspectives regarding what a Jordanian woman is like, how she acts, talks, thinks, what positions she takes in life. In this study, I investigated the women's understandings of this discourse. I used Discourse with a capital D to refer to the dominant discourse on Jordanian women in the society as relayed by the participants while I used discourse(s) (lower case) to refer to other non-dominant but competing discourses.

Methodology

The study aimed at answering the following research question:

How do professional Jordanian women understand and make meaning of how the society views them as women (what is their understanding of the capital D discourse concerning Jordanian women)?

Participants

The participants in this study were 10 professional Jordanian women. The term “professional” is used in this study to refer to women who had completed their post-secondary studies and were working full time at the time of the interviews in the summer of 2012. Seven of these women were in the education field. Six of them were professors (two at the rank of assistant professor, two at the rank of associate professor and two at the rank of professor) at a main public university in Jordan. I was introduced to three of the professors through mutual acquaintances and one of them gave me names and contact information of several other professors. In total, I contacted fourteen professors but received responses from a total of six who participated in the study. The other participant, in the education field, was pursuing her doctorate studies while working full time as the principal of an all-girl private school in Jordan. The three other participants worked in or with governmental agencies or ministries. One of them held an Associate Degree from a prestigious community college in Jordan and the other two held university degrees. The women ranged in age from 30 to 55. All the names used in the study are Pseudonyms.

Data

The data for this study were collected through individual interviews with ten Jordanian women. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each was 30-45 minutes in length. While Arabic was the main language used in the interviews, at times, some of the participants chose to use English during their talk. All interviews took place at the women’s offices in their places of work except two that took place in public spaces (recreation center and coffee shop).

Analysis

To analyze the data, I used Erickson’s (1986) method of analytic induction and also drew from Baxter’s FPDA methodology (2003). After I listened to and reviewed all the interview transcripts, I wrote down a number of assertions. In order to establish “evidentiary warrant” for the assertions, I returned to the data, reviewing and looking for confirming evidence as well as disconfirming evidence or discrepancy for each assertion. After that, I investigated more closely the instances of confirming and disconfirming evidence and used discourse analysis to pay close attention to women’s ways of using language, what Tannen called ‘linguistic strategies’ (1994). In line with the PFDA approach, I looked for a plurality of discourses and especially a discourse of resistance within the women’s talk.

Findings

While all participants mentioned that there were efforts initiated by the Jordanian government through different programs to empower women, nine out of the ten participants were aware of a dominant Discourse that privileged men and discriminated against women both implicitly and explicitly. The results indicated the participants’ awareness that women rarely, if ever, were able to completely cross the boundaries of that Discourse. Most of the women in this study, caught between resistance and compliance, cautiously pushed back and tried to carve new discourses. A PFDA lens allowed for the analysis of competing discourses within the women’s talk. While the participants relayed the dominant Discourse that limited women and positioned them as inferior to men, their talk also expressed their resistance to this discourse. Between the relayed Discourse on women and the discourse of resistance, there was also a discourse of

uncertainty that I argue resulted from women's positionings as subjects of the same discourse that they were resisting.

Women's Understanding of the Discourse on Jordanian Women

According to the content analysis of the data, women's meaning making of the Discourse regarding Jordanian women in the society could be summarized under the following themes:

1. Women were viewed as inferior to men
2. Women were expected to conform to the roles and limitations prescribed to them
3. Women were seen as unfit for leadership and decision making.

These categories were not isolated from each other but rather overlapped within women's talk.

Plurality of Discourses

A FPDA approach to analysis highlights the existence of competing discourses in talk. In addition to relaying the Discourse on Jordanian women, a competing discourse of resistance was expressed through use of the following strategies a) comparing and contrasting; b) posing rhetorical questions; and c) using quotes from the popular dominant Discourse (I use the word 'strategies' in the same way that Tannen (1994) used it to mean the way language is used and not to mean intentional tactics). This resistance was mostly implied and less frequently also explicitly expressed.

As a result of being positioned within the Discourse while also resisting it, a discourse of uncertainty evolved. This was evident through the women's shifts in positioning themselves between two competing discourses. The uncertainty is also evident in the way that most of the participants *implicitly* criticized and resisted the dominant discourse without taking explicit positions.

Below is a discussion of each of the themes that the women relayed from the Discourse on Jordanian women. For each theme, I included sample excerpts from the women's talk and discussed the competing discourses of resistance and uncertainty.

Women as Inferior

Women were aware that the society not only privileged men over women but also viewed women as inferior. They expressed that men were favored in employment even when they were unqualified for a position. The following excerpts are examples of how women used language to express their understanding and resistance of the inferior positioning of women both overtly and implicitly (See Appendix 1 for Transcription notation).

(1)

...كل التوجه المجتمعي توجه نحو الرجل لانه الرجل هو المسؤول ، الرجل هو الـ يعني هو المحاسب وبالتالي هو الذي يعني يقع على عاتقه مسؤولية الإدارة ولهادا السبب يعني ما في توجه من المجتمع من الأسرة والعشيرة بالتالي إنه يعني ندعم المرأة حتى تصل الى موقع اتخاذ القرارايه المجتمع العربي إحنا مجتمع ذكوري لا نستطيع أن ننكر هادا
...إحنا بننشئ في أسرنا أطفالنا وبيننشئونا على إنه، يعني الرجل هو الأقدر، هو السوبر والمرأة هي العادي هي لازم دائما تخضع للسيطرة ، بحاجة الى من يديرها والرجل عنده القدره

All the attention in the society is directed toward the man, because the man is the one responsible, the man is the I mean is the one accountable and therefore he is the one responsible for management and for that reason, there are no efforts from the society, from the family and the tribe as a result to I mean support the woman to reach a decision-making position eh the Arab society, we are a male-privileged society, we cannot deny this...

...We in our families we raise our kids and we are raised that I mean, the man is more powerful, he is super and the woman is regular and should always submit to control, she needs someone to direct her, and the man has the power to direct

Zaina responded to the question regarding women's views in the society by comparing and contrasting between the way the society viewed and positioned men vs. women. She used superlatives and adjectives that invoked power and superiority to indicate the perceptions of men as "more powerful", "super", and the ones "responsible" for "management". In contrast, she used words that evoked obligation and submission when talking of the popular and dominant Discourse on women in the society; the woman "should" submit to control, she is "in need" to be managed and directed; she is "regular" in contrast with the man who is "super".

Within these powerful and sweeping expressions describing the status quo, there is a simultaneous discourse of resistance in Zaina's talk. She implicitly criticized the society for its lack of support for women by holding it responsible for the ways that men and women are positioned; "all the attention in the society is directed toward the man" in contrast with "no efforts from the society" to support the woman. In line with FPDA, there is a plurality of discourses within this excerpt: a discourse relaying the dominant Discourse and the status quo, a discourse of resistance and a discourse of uncertainty of how to position oneself between the dominant discourse and the discourse of resistance.

The uncertainty in her own positioning is indicated through her shift in the use of pronouns between first person and third person pronouns. She included herself in the discourse that privileged men in the beginning as she expressed "we raise our kids" and then quickly shifted to the third person "and they raise us". She started by including herself as a participant in this Discourse when she said "we", expressing awareness of being part of a powerful dominant discourse from which even she could not escape and yet she distanced herself from being responsible for that Discourse as she switched to third person "they raise us". This shift between pronouns in addition to her saying "we cannot deny this" regarding male privilege in the society, indicates a subtle tension in her efforts to position herself within both the dominant Discourse and the discourse of resistance.

In the next excerpt, Asma, a professor at a major university in Jordan explained the same concept of male privilege but in higher education hiring.

(2)

الكل عنده مؤهلات يعني عرفت الكل عنده نفس المؤهلات ، كلياتنا مندخل استاذ مساعد ومنتري منصير استاذ مشارك منتري منصير *professor* يعني وفيه كثير ناس متميزين وفيه كثير رجال يعني قاعدين بمراكزهم يعني بصراحة غير فعالين وغير مناسبين بالامكان اللي قاعدين فيها ، بس قاعدين لإنهم ممكن يمشوا الشغل بطريقة عشائرية بطريقة عرفت كيف ؟

... العشائرية بتخرب كثير عالمرأة ، القوانين، يعني العشائرية لأنه شو يدعوموا الزلمة ولا يدعوموك ؟ بيجوا يقولوا 'مرة حاكمتنا' مثلاً؟ يعني مرات يقولوا بتصير فيه مشاكل على مراكز معينة بيجبوا إنه يكون فيه زلمة ، بيخافوا

إنه يكون فيه مثلاً شغلات بدها تدخل عشائري وما تعرف الست كيف تدبر حالها ، بس إحنا عم نحكي عن مناصب
كثير عليا

Everybody has qualifications, you know everyone has the same qualifications, we all enter at the rank of Assistant Professor and we get promoted to Associate Professor and then get promoted to *Professor* I mean and there is a lot of people who are exceptional and there is a lot of men, I mean, frankly, who are inefficient and unqualified for, for the positions that they are occupying, they are occupying them only because they can run business in a tribally acceptable way you know how?

...Tribal ways are damaging for women, the laws, I mean tribal ways, because what are they to do, support the man or you (as woman)? Will they come and say 'a woman is ruling us' for example? I mean, sometimes, they say that problems may arise over certain positions and they like to have a man there, they are scared that there may be things that need tribal involvement and a woman would not know how to take care of it, but we are talking about very high positions

Asma resisted the Discourse that positioned men as superior to women in the work place by making an implicit comparison between women and men in higher education. She explained how everyone enters the work place with the same qualifications and yet while many are exceptional, there are many "men" who reach high positions when they are neither qualified nor adept at these positions. She also expressed her overt criticism of the system and how "tribal ways are damaging to women". Through rhetorical questions, she expressed her criticism and resistance of the dominant discourse. When she asked, "are they to support the man or you (as a woman)?" and "will they come and say 'a woman is ruling us?'" her questions needed no answer since it is a well-known fact in Jordan that tribes would not accept to have women in positions that are higher than men or even in any position of power.

By comparing, quoting common sayings from the dominant discourse, and posing rhetorical questions, she resisted and distanced herself from the Discourse and placed the responsibility for this gender favoritism on tribal ways, "they". The rhetorical questions served the function of asserting how in the same way that the answers were obvious for all the questions she posed, the restrictions and limitations imposed on women through the Discourse (not through laws) were as obvious. Her second rhetorical question included a quote from the Discourse on women and implied men's resistance to having women in higher positions of power for fear of being 'ruled by women'.

The uncertainty in positioning herself was evident when she shifted from implicit resistance of male favoritism in the work place to overt criticism of the "damaging" effect of the tribal laws. She, then, shifted again to implicit resistance through rhetorical questions, quotes and shift in pronouns. Even though her position as critical of these laws is obvious, other than describing them as "damaging", she did not take an overt position of resistance. Instead, in the last line she seemed to acquiesce as if trying to justify this favoritism because it only occurred in "very high positions".

Fadwa, who at the times of the interview was working with a non-profit American organization on a project for a ministry in Jordan, acknowledged that most people in Jordan viewed women as second class in relation to men.

(3)

والد *majority* ، ما زالت *majority* المجتمع ما زالت تتعامل مع المرأة كفئة ثانية

The *majority* is still, the *majority* in the society is still treating women as second class.

By ascribing the view of women as second class to “the majority in the society”, Fadwa seemed to distance herself from the Discourse implicitly criticizing and resisting that view.

The same was expressed by Hana in the following excerpt:

(4)

دائما بتطلعوا عالست إنها أقل عقليا منهم ، إيه بمستوى أقل منهم ، بتيجي تحكي "ما أنت ست"

They always look at women as intellectually inferior to them, eh at a level inferior to them, (If) you want to speak ‘but you are a woman’ (they would say)

In the above excerpt, Hana expressed how women were perceived as inferior and unfit to participate in discussions with men. She distanced herself from that view by using the third person “they”. She used the comparative form “less” to compare between the perceived inferiority of women in comparison with men in the dominant Discourse. Her use of quotes implied her resistance to that view as she brought forth a popular utterance that other women have quoted repeatedly in this study ‘but you are a woman’. Using this quote, she, like others in the study, resisted and distanced herself from such Discourse by showing its ridiculousness through its mere mention without overtly criticizing or condemning.

Women Must Conform

The participants expressed their understanding that women, themselves included, were expected to conform to the gender roles ascribed to them by the society; a woman’s place is “at home”, as a “wife”, or a “caregiver”. Women are expected to accept these roles and all positionings imposed on them through the Discourse.

(5)

‘لازم تتزوجي’، يعني المرأة اللي ما بتتزوج دورها تكون إمراة متزوجة.
ما تزوجت بتبوري يعني بتصيري *an old maid* بتصيري *a spinster* ،
برت كلمة الدبرت، عنست ، راحت عليك ، حرام ، مسكينة ، هاي الكلمات اللي بيستعملوها...يقول لك يعني حتى
بالأهل هادا بقول لك ‘بيه مسكينة راحت عليها’

‘You should get married’, meaning the woman who does not get married, her role is to be a married woman. ‘If you don’t get married, it means, ‘you will become useless *an old maid*’ meaning ‘you will become *a spinster* you become useless’, the word ‘useless’, became ‘a spinster’, ‘you missed your chances, poor one, poor you’ these are the words they use ...one would say to you, I mean, even in the family, one would say to you ‘Oh, poor one, you missed it’ (Rana)

Rana, a university professor and a dean at the time of the interview as well as a self-prescribed feminist, used quotes of typical sayings that unmarried women would hear in the society; 'you should get married', if not 'you will become an old maid' and 'useless'. The word 'should' indicates obligation, it also indicates how women were expected to receive and conform to directives. The list of words that were used to describe the status of unmarried women all evoke pity and uselessness; 'useless', 'old maid', 'missed your chances', and two synonyms to 'poor one'. Rana pointed to the fact that even family members used these words, thus indicating how this view has become accepted and part of the discourse even at the micro family-level discourse. Her use of quotes as well as her use of third person "they" and "one" indicated her efforts to distance herself and resist this Discourse.

(6)

موبس اللي عندي الشباب ، كل الزلام العرب، منحكي أو الثقافة اللي عنا هون دائماً ، 'الست راس مال شهادتها في المطبخ' مش (؟) دايماً منحكيها ، 'تعبت شقيت عمالك بالأخر شهادتك وين رح تحطوها ؟ بالمطبخ' ، مش هيك بيحكوا؟ فمش قابلين يتطوروا يبعدوا عن هاي المقولة ، 'شو ما تعبت عمالك شهادتك في البيت' .

Not just the young men I have (in the department), all Arab men, we are talking about, or the culture that we always have here "the woman's degree is for the kitchen", isn't that what we always say? "You worked so hard and in the end where will you put your degree? In the kitchen", Isn't this how they speak? They do not accept to develop and move away from this saying, "no matter how much you work on yourself, your degree and diploma is for the house"

Here, Dima, who is the head of a department in a governmental organization, also used quotes from the Discourse on women to indicate that no matter what level of achievement women reach, they would always be looked at in the society as suited for only one prescribed role in the "house" and "kitchen". In the beginning, Dima used the pronoun "we" and included herself within the discourse "isn't that what we always say?" but soon shifted to the pronoun "they" and distanced herself, "isn't that how they speak?" This switch between pronouns indicates a discourse of uncertainty of how to position herself; even though she did not agree with that Discourse, she was still encompassed within it. Like others in this research, her use of quotes, her rhetorical questions and the shift in her use of pronouns implied her resistance and her efforts to distance herself from that Discourse.

Not only were women expected to conform to the roles ascribed to them by the society but they were also shamed if they tried to move beyond these restrictions. Women were held responsible to conform to limitations that they themselves had no choice in setting.

In excerpt (8), Lama talked of limitations that she herself was subject to even as a university professor.

(7)

فأنا أقول المرأة قادرة على أن ترتاد آفاق جديدة في كل مرة، على أن تُمنح الفرص وعلى أن تُهيأ لها الأسباب لكن أنت تكبلها وتطلب إليها أن تنطلق أتّي لها؟ فمثلاً أنا إمراة مثقفة لا أستطيع متابعة الأنشطة عندما تعقد في العاصمة عمان بشكل متأخر، لأ، علي، لأن يصير لزام أ ، علي أن أعود إلى بيتي أو إلى قريتي. أيضاً أشعر أنني ما زلت أحاول لكن غير قادرة على التغيير الذي أريد

I say that women are capable of moving toward new horizons every time, provided they are offered opportunities and provided the right conditions are made available for them. But you (masculine) tie her hands and ask her to move forward. How can she?

For example, I am an educated woman, I cannot keep up with the events that take place in the capital Amman late (at night), no, I have to uh, I am compelled to return home or to my village. I also feel that I am still trying but am unable to make the change that I want.

Lama used words that expressed her understanding of the restrictions and demands that were imposed upon her and that limited her within the confinements of the Discourse. She used words that express obligation “I have to” and “compelled”; she used “to tie her hands” to imply limitations, control and even imprisonment. She was “compelled” to return home before dark and miss any important events that may take place in the evening so she could conform to the Discourse of her village which required her to return home before dark. Here last sentence indicated her awareness of that Discourse and her attempts to carve new discourses and effect change, again indicating uncertainty in the way she tried to position herself.

Her words at the beginning of this excerpt expressed her trust in women’s capacities. Her rhetorical question is an implicit resistance to the Discourse that she ascribed to men. She used the Arabic masculine form of “you” when she asked “but you tie her hands and ask her to move forward. How can she?” This rhetorical question, again, needed no answer as it indicated women’s helplessness in face of such Discourse while also implicitly expressing her resistance to it as she held men responsible for limiting women through her use of the masculine form of the pronoun “you”. Other participants, like Dima in this excerpt, mentioned their families, homes, tribes, villages as places where they faced this Discourse, their uncertainty was exacerbated by their puzzlement over facing the same Discourse outside and at home from people and communities that are supposed to provide them with support and protection.

Women as Unfit for Leadership and Decision-making

This limitation is closely related to the first two regarding women’s prescribed roles and the view of women as inferior to men. Women expressed their understanding of this social view through their reporting of the challenges that they faced at work including men’s resistance to having female supervisors at work and men’s efforts to stop women’s advancement at work. They were aware of the absence of women in positions of power in the Jordanian society.

(8)

كثير أوقات لما صرت رئيسة قسم هون ، إجو حكوا قال كيف بدنا تزوح لنسواننا نقول لهم رئيسة القسم وحده ؟

Many times when I became head of the department here, they (male employees) came to me and said “how are we going to tell our wives that the head of our department is a woman?” (Fadwa)

Fadwa expressed how the society’s views of women restricted their access to positions higher in rank than those of their male counterparts. Men in her department, as relayed in her talk, were vocal about expressing their disagreement with the appointment of women at high positions of power, “how are we going to tell our wives that the head of our department is a woman?” Their

rhetorical question implied belittlement of women and amazement at a situation that did not in their eyes agree with the Discourse which positioned women as inferior not superior to men. Quoting this question is on its own an act of resistance to this discourse as she distanced herself from such a view using the third person pronoun “they” while showcasing the absurdity and outrageousness of such an assumption.

Excerpt (9) indicated how the Discourse positioned women as weak(er) than men and unable to take decisions including political and economic ones.

(9)

فيه عنا شرائح نظرتها نظرة تليق بالمرأة ، لكن كثير من الشرائح لأ ، لا تليق بالمرأة لذلك النظرة في تحسن للأمام لكن ينقصها الكثير ، وما تزال المرأة في نظر الكثيرين، في عقلم الباطن، هي الكائن الأضعف الحلقة الأضعف الـ ، يعني الوجه المنزلي للمجتمع ،الوجه غير المسؤول ، والوجه الذي لا يطلب اليه أن يأخذ قرار في كثير من الأحيان.

We have classes (in society) that have an appropriate view of women but many of the classes no, it is not appropriate for women. That is why the perception (of women) is moving forward but it lacks a lot. And women are still in the eyes of many, deep in their minds, she is the weakest being, the weakest link the, I mean the face of the house in the society, the face that is not responsible, the face that is not asked to take decisions in many cases

Zaina was aware of the perception of women by the society as weak and inconsequential. She contrasted between the social perceptions of men and women as she used comparatives to indicate how the society viewed women as “weaker”, belonging to the house, and incapable of taking decisions. Even though she did not overtly mention men, it was obvious that she was comparing between the positionings of women vs men in the Discourse. This implicit comparison and contrast allowed her to distance herself and resist the Discourse, which also limited women’s participation in economy and in politics as expressed in the next excerpt.

(10)

يعني الدور السياسي في الإنتخابات، إفرضي وحده نزلت ورجال من نفس القبيلة العشيرة ، مين بدهم يختاروا؟ الرجال، "انت ؟ سياسة؟ انضبي في البيت، بتفهمي سياسة إنت تحكي ؟ " يعني كمان المرأة كيف هي كيف بدها تشتغل مع الرجل ؟ الـ النائبات إيه تلاتعشر وحده ok؟ إيه دورهم سياسي ، مطبوط ولا لا؟...
كيف المرأة بتطلبي منها تساوي دور سياسي وهي في مجتمع منغلق؟ مجتمع محافظ؟ وكيف منقول لها "ما تحكي ، صوتك عورة"؟ منقولها "ما تطلعي"

I mean the political role in elections, suppose that one (one woman) ran (for elections) and a man from the same tribe the same clan (also ran), who will they choose? The man. “You? Politics? Go stay at home, do you understand politics to speak up?” I mean and how is the woman to work (side by side) with the man? The female representatives, 13 ok? What is their role? Political? Correct or not? ...How do you ask women to have a political role when she is in a closed society? Conservative society? And how do we tell her “do not speak (in public), your (public) voice is unlawful?” We tell her “do not go out”

Again rhetorical questions were used by the speaker to express the dominant nature of discourses that limited women’s participation in society and intended to keep them in a restricted place. Rana

explained that men were favored over women in powerful political positions. She quoted common sayings and rhetorical questions that ridiculed the idea of women in politics ‘you? Politics? Go stay at home’. Rana used the imperative to indicate how women were expected to receive directives and comply; ‘stay at home’, ‘do not speak up’, and ‘do not leave the house’. Again, Rana’s use of quotes and rhetorical questions implied her rejection of and resistance to such Discourse. Her shift between pronouns “they” and “we” indicates her uncertainty in positioning herself. In the beginning, she used the third person “who will they choose?” and then as if realizing that she herself is part of the Discourse and part of the society that shaped and is shaped by the discourse, she used the pronoun “we” including herself in the quotes; “how do we tell her ‘do not speak (in public), your (public) voice is unlawful?’”

In the following excerpt, Dima expressed her awareness that the society restricted women from reaching higher positions in their employment simply because they were women

(11)

هي التحديات قبل ما توصل أي منصب بتبليش معها ، مجرد إجت ست أثبتت وجودها أو اشتغلت وتعبت على حالها وكذا، بتبليش التحديات إنه اللي حوالها بيحاولوا يدعموا بريكات لإلها إنه ما " أكثر من هيك ما بطلع لك أكثر من هيك ما بطلع لك " لتثبت حالها أكثر وأكثر وغصب عنها لتصير . بتعرفي هلا (؟) كم مديرة فيه تنتين ؟ ثلاثة؟ ثلاثة. هل معناها الموظفات مش قدرات على إنهم يصيروا مديرات؟ بالعكس، أنا باحس الست هي أفدر من الرجل. إحنا عم نشغل وكيف بتلاحظي ؟ الست لما ، بجيها شغل ، بتشتغله أول بأول ، بترتب الأمور منظمة وبدقة. الشباب شو ما كان وبيمشوا ، بس هي الشغلة إنه ثقافتنا العربية والثقافة الأردنية إنه الزلما هو كل شي ، كل شي في الدنيا الزلما والست إلها بيتها ، ما وصلنا لمرحلة إنها الست تاخذ كل شي بدها إياه .

Challenges start before she gets to a (higher) position, as soon as a woman shows up and proves herself and works hard on herself and so on, the challenges start (so) that those around her try to stop her in the sense that “you do not deserve more than this, no more than this” so she proves herself more and more until she gets there. Do you know how many directors we have? Two? Three? Three. Does this mean that female employees are not capable of becoming directors? On the contrary, I feel that women are more capable than men. We work and what do you notice? The woman, when she has work to do, she finishes right away, she organizes her work with precision. The young men, they do whatever and make it work, but the thing is that (in) our Arabic culture and our Jordanian culture man is everything, and everything in the world is the man and the woman belongs to the house. We did not get to the stage where women get what they want

Dima quoted familiar sayings that she heard as head of her department at work; ‘you do not deserve more than this, no more than this’. Her use of these quotes implied her resistance to such Discourse that tried to limit and stop women from reaching high positions. She also explicitly expressed her awareness of such Discourse as she explained how “those around her try to stop her”. Her resistance was explicitly expressed as she overtly made a comparison favoring women over men in terms of their abilities at work. She explained that women were more capable than men to do the work and that the restrictions on women were based on the cultural perception that “man is everything and everything in the world is man”. She used a rhetorical question and answered it to emphasize her view that women were deserving of high positions “does this mean that female employees are not capable of becoming directors? On the contrary, I feel that women are more capable than men”. Dima’s rhetorical question was used not only to emphasize women’s capacity

to outperform men but also served as a counter statement resisting the Discourse that positions women as unfit for high rank positions.

Conclusion and Implications

This research highlighted the understanding of professional Jordanian women of how women were perceived in their society. The discourse of the participants at the micro level gave a clear picture of their understanding of the social world that they lived in. They were aware of the social limitations imposed upon them through social assumptions of who they “were”. They understood that according to the big D discourse they were perceived as inferior to men, unfit for positions of leadership and expected to conform to the positionings and roles that the society prescribed for them.

Wherever there is talk, there is power; groups that have the power are the ones who control the reproduction of discourses. In the context of the present study, it is in the interest of the group in power to maintain the status quo and reproduce the same system of inequality between the sexes and hence reproduce the Discourse on Jordanian women. This does not mean that men overtly decide what is acceptable and not acceptable in the society—although that was expressed by the participants at times—findings indicated that the society itself has been molded to privilege men over women and hence the society as a whole, women included, participated in this male elite discourse as the dominant structures of gender dynamics dominated even everyday interactions at work, in the street and at home.

The FPDA approach allowed for the identification of a plurality of discourses that helped uncover the speakers’ experiences and understandings of power relations (Baxter, 2003). The discourses regarding the sexes that are reproduced at the micro level are interconnected with the dominant Discourse as all contribute to the reproduction of the sociocultural and political powers. However, through a discourse of resistance, the participants challenged the Discourse that positioned them as inferior and powerless. They sought to construct and seek other discourses to belong to but were uncertain how to position themselves since they themselves were also so powerfully positioned by the Discourse. Competing discourses on their own cannot dictate the practices of subjects “without producing counteracts of resistance or supplementary challenges” (Baxter, 2003, p. 122).

In line with the quest of PFDA, this research provided a platform that sought to represent the complexities of female voices that are silenced amidst a dominant masculinized Discourse. It is worth noting that this study was limited to the views of educated professional women most of whom were academics working in the capital of Jordan, Amman. Jordanian women, however, come from different backgrounds and their situations would vary depending on their SES as well as geographic location. Most women in this study were careful about stressing that they did not represent the Jordanian society and that their experiences may vary from those of other Jordanian women.

As I conclude, I am concerned and on guard not to misrepresent Jordanian/Arab women in terms of victims lest I make the unintentional colonial call for western liberation of the East—representation of women as in need of liberation (See Saliba, 2000). All of the women in the study are strong and resistant of the discourses that try to compartmentalize them. They are creating new discourses, changing old ones, contesting and pushing the boundaries of Discourses that limit them (Gee, 2003, 21) but they have chosen not to take an overt deliberate activist stance to implement change. One of the questions that I asked the women as I concluded my interviews with them was

whether or not they would look toward women in the west as a model for liberation. All of the women were quick to reject the idea of liberation of women from the outside and were quick to assure of their acceptance of the current pace of change.

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Appendix 1: Transcription Notation

- () The author's comments for clarification of utterances
- (?) Unclear word or speech
- ? Indicates a rising tone
- , Indicates a comma-like pause
- . Indicates a natural ending
- * Words between stars indicate English words used by participants
- ... Indicates that material has been left out of the text