1 Why Arab and Muslim Women Participate Less in the Labor Market Than Other Women

1.1 Common Explanations for the Low Labor Force Participation of Muslim Women

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, only one out of four Palestinian women in Israel worked outside her home. Among Jewish women in Israel, the rate was about three times as high: three women out of four were gainfully employed. Middle East scholars would not be surprised by this fact. In most Middle Eastern countries and the Arab countries of North Africa (MENA), women's labor force participation (LFP) rates are not much different from those of Palestinian women in Israel, and they are notoriously lower than women's employment rates in other regions of the world (Hijab 1988 and 2001; Khoury and Moghadam 1995; Cinar 2001; Hosni and Chanmala 2001; Karshenas 2001; Moghadam 2003, 2004; Read 2004; Spierings et al. 2009). This is not a problem of the MENA region only. Muslim women of MENA origins living in Western countries, both first- and second-generation, are also less likely to be employed compared to immigrant women from other regions (Algan et al. 2010; Fleischmann and Hohne 2013; Holland and De Valk 2013; Khoudja and Fleischmann 2015, 2017; Koopmans 2016).

Why are Muslim and Arab women less likely to be part of the modern labor force?[1] A popular answer claims that it is the unique cultural and religious heritage of these women that leads them to choose or to follow

[1] We refer somewhat interchangeably to "Arabs" and "Muslims" because of the large overlap of these two big groups. In all Arab countries, with the exception of Lebanon, Muslims constitute the vast majority (90 percent and more), and Islam is a religion that originated in the Arab world, is based on Arabic texts, and was propagated by Arab empires. Thus, the culture of Muslims everywhere carries the insignias of Arab culture. In Europe, similar issues, including women's employment, have arisen in regard to Arab and non-Arab Muslims, and hence it would be too cumbersome to separate the discussion of these two groups, although one should, of course, be aware also of the differences between them, as well as of differences within each group.

options other than participating in the labor force. In many Muslim countries, legislation is explicitly based on the Shari'a (Islamic law), and family laws and practices treat women as inferior to men (Hajjar 2004). Many Muslim countries also deliberately avoid labor laws that ban gender discrimination, do not provide maternity leaves, do not legislate affordable child care, and formally resist the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Sonbol 2010; cf. Afkhami and Friedl 1997; Anwar 2009; Sadiqi and Annaji 2011).

Testing the culturalist perspective requires the comparison of Muslims and non-Muslims under similar political and economic conditions. Such comparison is not feasible in Arab countries, where the populations are (with the exception of Lebanon) Muslim and Arab. Researchers therefore resorted to non-Arab countries with large native populations of Muslims and non-Muslims. Amin and Alam (2008), for instance, compared Muslim women in Malaysia with their Hindu and Buddhist compatriots, and found that the former were much less likely to be employed than the latter two groups. This gap, however, was found mostly in rural areas and not in urban ones, indicating that Islam influences women's economic participation only under certain conditions. Spierings (2014) conducted a multilevel comparison of Muslims and Christians within Muslim-dominated and Christian-dominated districts in Indonesia and Nigeria, and found that the impact of Islam on female labor force participation (FLFP) depended on theological interpretation: the difference between people holding different interpretations of Islam were more important than the difference between Muslims and Christians.

To test the importance of religion and culture in the religiously homogeneous Arab world, Spierings et al. (2010) compared more traditional households and districts to less traditional ones. They identified traditional households in six Arab countries as those where (1) the husbands were much older than wives; (2) members of the extended family lived in the household; (3) a member of the household was involved in a polygynous relationship; and (4) women were young at first birth. Traditional districts were defined as those with higher proportions of traditional households. They found that women from more traditional households and from districts with a relatively higher share of traditional families were less likely to be employed relative to women from less traditional households and from less traditional districts. Yet economic needs and opportunities played a major role as well, leading Spierings and his associates to reject narrow culturalist and modernization theories (ibid., 1405).

Another strategy to study the impact of Islam and Arab culture on women's employment is by comparing FLFP of Muslim and Arab immigrant women in Western countries with that of native women and with non-Muslim and non-Arab immigrant women. The fact that fewer immigrant than native women work outside the home is not very telling, because immigrants suffer from many drawbacks that limit their ability to find suitable jobs: they may not master the local language, may lack understanding of local social norms and expectations, and their educational credentials are frequently not recognized by employers (Koopmans 2016). Second-generation immigrants may overcome some of these obstacles, at least partially, and researchers looking for the effect of culture therefore try to find differences between them and the local natives (Dale et al. 2002; Algan et al. 2010; Hermansen 2013; Holland and de Valk 2014; Connor and Koenig 2015; Koopmans 2016).

The findings of these studies are not consistent, but most conclude that the labor market behavior of second-generation immigrant women is much more similar to that of local native women than is the behavior of their first-generation immigrant mothers (e.g. Algan et al. 2010, F27). Dale et al. (2002), who interviewed first- and second-generation Bangladeshi and Pakistani women in the UK, found that second-generation women were much more determined to combine paid employment with child rearing, and that adherence to Islamic faith was not, in itself, "a deterrent to women's participation in the labour market" (Dale et al. 2002, 23). Holland and de Valk (2014) compared second-generation Turks in four European countries and found large differences in women's employment rates between these immigrants and local native women, but lower educational achievements accounted for a large part of these differences. In France and the Netherlands, second-generation Turkish women were more likely than local native women to withdraw from the labor market when they had two children or more, but in Sweden and Germany no such effect was found, demonstrating that cultural differences do not necessarily hinder Muslim women's entry to the labor force.

Another way to study the impact of Islam on immigrants' integration is to compare them to non-Muslim immigrants rather than to natives. Although immigrants vary in terms of the resources they come with (including education, proficiency in the local language, cultural similarity to the host country, and work skills), at least they share the vulnerabilities associated with arriving at a foreign place. Read's study was among the first to conduct such a comparison, referring merely to women with academic education. She found that, controlling for other potentially relevant variables, academically educated American women of Arab

origin (Christian and Muslim) were less likely to be employed outside their homes than women of other origins. She ascribed this result to a cultural tendency that is shared by Christian and Muslim Arab women alike (Read 2004; Read and Oselin 2008). It should be noted, however, that although exhibiting the lowest employment rate among the groups Read examined, two-thirds of the Arab women in her sample were gainfully employed. Thus even if the gaps in women's employment between Arab women and women from other groups are related to the former's cultural preferences, they seem more like lingering effects of past traditions and not like domineering cultural barriers that keep Arab women away from the labor market.

While Read simply compares the behavior of various groups, Fernández (2007) looks for connections between labor behavior in the US and cultures in the countries of origin as approximated by FLFP and attitudes toward women's work in those countries. She found that "women whose parents were born in countries with lower female LFP in 1990 tended to work less themselves in the US in 1970" (315). Köbrich León (2013) replicated this design in a study of immigrant groups in Germany and also found that the culture in the country of origin affected women of that origin. She compared 20 diverse groups of immigrants in Germany and found that culture in country of origin played a much weaker role in determining FLFP of second-generation women compared to first-generation women. Yet among Muslim immigrants, religious identity did have a negative impact on employment among second-generation women as well.

1.2 Doubts about the Role of Culture and Alternative Explanations

Is culture really the main key for changing women's labor force behavior? The idea that cultural uniqueness accounts for the exceptional labor market situation of Arab and Muslim women may seem most immediately appealing. Many observers seem willing to infer – in our opinion too easily and unreflectively – from the above facts, that the main culprit is something inherent to all these communities, i.e. their shared Arab (or more broadly, Muslim) culture. Such views resonate with the deep-rooted orientalist images of Arab and Muslim women that have been current in the European narrative of the Muslim world for centuries, supposedly indicating "quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam" (Ahmed 1992, 149; cf. Said 1978; Keddie 1991; Abu-Lughod 2002).

It is indeed impossible to deny that deep beliefs and expectations about proper gender roles affect women's decisions about labor market work,

but it should be noted that the evidence cited above is not clear-cut and unequivocal. Amin and Alam's (2008) findings were restricted to rural areas, and Spierings (2014) found that FLFP in Muslim regions depended on the version of Islam practiced. In the uniquely elaborate analysis of Spierings et al. (2010), comparing traditional to non-traditional districts in Arab countries, they demonstrated quite convincingly the importance of both values and economic development for women's employment. Yet there is always a possibility of reverse causation: regions with less-developed economies, and therefore fewer employment opportunities for women, lead to the preservation and even strengthening of traditional patterns. For example, women at a younger age marry older husbands and are more likely to enter a polygynous relationship (all are indicators of traditional households according to Spierings et al.) because the prospects of employment are meager. Their analysis also does not take into consideration differences in the state's treatment of women. Studies on second-generation immigrants found that employment gaps between immigrants and native populations were much narrower than in the first generation and had disappeared in some European countries, perhaps due to broader job opportunities.

Moreover, the relevant question is not whether there are some differences between Muslims and non-Muslims with regard to women's work that stem from cultural differences. The crucial question is whether cultural differences are the *main* force keeping Muslim and Arab women's employment rates below those found in other regions. At the end of her article, Fernández sets the goal for future research to

> . . . understand, for example, how culture propagates and evolves. When and why does culture change abruptly whereas at other times it proceeds glacially? . . . To what extent is cultural transmission purposeful (optimizing on the part of an individual or group in society) and to what extent is it involuntary? (2007, 329).

These questions fit our approach. Culture is a dynamic force that changes continuously together with, and in response to, changing economic practices and social organization. We should remember that the deeply entrenched division of labor between women and men, which is supported by internalized cultural images and beliefs, characterized most societies, non-Muslim and Muslim, in the not-so-far past. As recently as a century ago, very low FLFP rates characterized all Western societies as well (Fernández 2007; Davis and Greenstein 2009; Walby 2010).

Gender relations in Arab and Muslim societies have also changed tremendously along their histories, and have varied from one Arab (or Muslim) society to another. More recently, gender ideologies have stood in the center of social controversy in modern Arab and Muslim societies

for more than a century and have created changes in many of them. Consequently there is wide variance among Arab societies as to the place of women and men, and as to attitudes toward their proper roles (e.g. Mernissi 1985; Sharabi 1988; Kandiyoti 1991b; Ahmed 1992; Hatem 1993; Tucker 1993; Badran 1996; Haddad and Esposito 1998; Sadiqi and Ennaji 2011; Efrati 2012). To understand more comprehensively why Muslim and Arab women are less likely to be part of the modern labor force, one has to study the specific historical processes and the evolving political and economic conditions that have shaped the opportunities and constraints both women and men have faced.

As in Europe and North America (Walby 1986; Goldin 1990; Lewis 1992, 2001; Cooke 2011), the economic structure – level of income, types of industry, ownership patterns, labor supply, and so on – shapes the opportunities available for women in the MENA region (Khoury and Mogadam 1985; Moghadam 1998; Cinar 2001; Hijab 2001). Expansion of state services, education, and health creates a demand for female workers in the Middle East just as it does elsewhere. The impact of economic circumstances is mediated by political forces and state policies (Kandiyoti 1991a, 1991b). Revolutionary regimes, as in Turkey, Algiers, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, have implemented radical social changes that have opened new opportunities to women, although they are a far cry from those promised by the revolutionary rhetoric (e.g. Hatem 1992; Efrati 2012, 160–162). In countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, the traditional social order has not undergone radical transformation; women have entered the labor force, but the change has occurred within traditional structures and institutions (Samergandi 1992; Moghadam 1993, 2000). The three Maghreb countries of North Africa – all having similar experiences in terms of religion, gender relations, traditional kinship structure, French colonialism, and reformist ideology of national movements – have diverged greatly in terms of family law and women's rights. Charrad (2001, 233) explains that these diverging trajectories were "shaped by the process of state formation in each country, especially the degree of autonomy of the state from – versus reliance upon – kin-based solidarities."

Different modes of production are accompanied by different structures of opportunities for women. According to Ross (2008), for example, mineral-rich states discourage FLFP in the market, due to the enlarged weight of manufacturing industries relative to the services where women have more suitable jobs. In his view, this is the key to understanding the persistence of patriarchy in oil-producing countries in the Middle East and in other regions of the world. Without demand for women's work, the political power of women remains marginal, and without their political

participation, "traditional patriarchal institutions will go unchallenged" (ibid., 120). This is true for all kinds of natural resources, but especially relevant for those economies that heavily rely upon oil. "Petroleum perpetuates patriarchy," in Ross's words (120).

The oil industry has hampered women's employment in several ways. First, as a capital intensive industry, it requires a lesser work force and thus discourages the utilization of women's labor (Moghadam 1998). Secondly, revenues from the oil industry enable conservative governments to maintain separated public services for women and men. This may provide employment for women but at the price of strengthening the ideology of sexual segregation (Posusney and Doumato 2003). Thirdly, with high wages in the oil industry, households may not require an additional income beyond the man's (Karshenas and Moghadam 2001; cf. Shami et al. 1990).

Karshenas (2001) develops the last explanation and argues more generally that women's status depends not on economic development per se, but on the specific type of transition from a traditional to a modern market economy. Economies that produce a large income (e.g. the oil economies) enable male workers to provide for their families, decreasing the need for women's paid employment. In contrast, in poorer countries, such as those in South Asia, the need of households for additional income has been strong enough to offset patriarchal norms, and women's employment has become normative.

1.3 Discrimination and Minority Women's Labor Force Opportunities

When we consider minority women's economic activity, their marginality is extremely relevant. When minority members behave differently than the racially and ethnically dominant group, researchers – who often belong to the latter – are often tempted to attribute the dissimilarity to the culture of the minority. This inclination raises the threat that cultural explanations of minority women's lower participation in the labor market are an example of a "blaming the victim" tendency.

Such cultural explanations ignore the fact that those groups suffer from discrimination, prejudice, and negatively skewed allocation of resources and social services, and these obstacles are some of the most harmful factors that block the ability of disadvantaged minorities to find jobs, to advance to higher positions, and to earn higher incomes (e.g. England 1992; Knouse et al. 1992; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Bobo and Suh 1995; Browne 1999). Since women are typically considered to be secondary breadwinners while still having household responsibilities, they must find

jobs that pay enough to cover the household expenses of their joining the labor market and that are not too far from home. Discrimination in hiring, promotion, and remuneration lowers the chances that they can find such suitable jobs and may thus keep many minority women away from employment.

In Europe, discrimination against Arabs and Muslims has become more pervasive and severe in recent years due to the increasingly negative images of Islam in many parts of the Western world (Weller at. el. 2001; Allen and Nielson 2002; Sheridan 2006; Bloul 2008; Mastnak 2010; Connor and Koenig 2015). Such attitudes have a long history (Said 1978). The expansion of Arab communities in Europe, coupled with the strengthening of extreme and violent Islamist movements in the Middle East, has exacerbated negative prejudices against Muslims and Arabs and fostered an Islamophobic atmosphere of religious intolerance. "It is basically a phobia against those who are Muslims, look Middle Eastern, speak Arabic, and wear Middle Eastern dress (e.g. head cover of Muslim women) and have names like Muhammad, Saud, Malik, etc." (Cabili 2011: 12). Islam is perceived as a threat to the West, an inherently violent political ideology rather than a faith and spirituality. It is accused of encouraging its followers to launch a global jihad against all non-Muslims – and particularly against the West (Cabili 2011). Muslims' preservation of their customs and traditions is being perceived as hostile to Western culture. Muslims are "commonly devalued as a group which is unfit or unwilling to integrate; which places religious values such as the honor of the Prophet above core principles of Western liberal democracies such as the freedom of expression" (Fleischmann 2011: 1). As we will see in the next chapter, such devaluation of Muslims and Arabs is also common among segments of Jewish society in Israel.

In sum, although cultural beliefs and values are important in shaping women's economic behavior, culture cannot serve as the main explanation for the low LFP rates of Muslim and Arab women in the MENA region and in Western societies. A suitable explanation must refer also to the economic circumstances available for women of various groups and to the state's differential treatment of those groups. Discriminatory practices toward minority groups must be added to any account that seeks to offer a full explanation of women's labor force patterns.

1.4 Goals and Plan of This Book

In this book, we try to follow the guidelines set at the end of the previous section in explaining the work patterns of a unique group of Arab women: the Palestinian citizens and residents of Israel. We assume that studying

the exceptional circumstances of their lives will yield important insights that have bearing on other groups of Arab and Muslim women. The uniqueness of this group is related to the fact that, unlike other Arabs in the region, Palestinian women in Israel live in a country with a developed economy. Yet they face the economic opportunities of development from the extremely disadvantaged position of a marginalized minority. Other women in the Arab world might have fewer opportunities for women's work, but whatever opportunities emerge, they are first in line to pick them up. Palestinian women in Israel, in contrast, have to compete with Jewish women, who as part of the dominant group have many more resources and more power.

Their status as a minority makes the Palestinians in Israel similar to Arab (and Muslim) immigrants in Europe and elsewhere: The latter also enjoy improved economic opportunities but have to compete for them from enfeebled positions as members of a discriminated and excluded ethnic minority. *Unlike* these immigrants, however, Palestinians in Israel are a native population whose demographic composition is not the outcome of the selective process of migration. Furthermore, the geographical and religious diversity of the Palestinian minority in Israel and the different treatment of subgroups (Muslims, Druze, Christians, Bedouins)[2] by the state enable us to gain even more insights by comparing the subgroups not only to the Jewish majority but among themselves as well. Thus, while there are only about one million and a half of them – a small fraction of the more than 400 million Arabs worldwide – we believe that the story of the women among them carries important lessons for other Arab and Muslim women, as well as for theories about gender and work in general.

In order to examine patterns in the employment of these women, we apply statistical methods used in studies on the labor market and stratification since the 1970s. These studies elucidate the relationship between women's personal characteristics, social structures and conditions, and the economic activity and achievements of women in the labor market. But because of the lack of reliable and detailed statistics in developing nations, most of these studies have been limited to advanced industrial societies. Israel is among those societies, but the numerous labor force studies conducted in and about it have focused on Jews, or have compared Jews to Palestinians (usually referred to as "Israeli Arabs") without distinguishing among various Palestinian subgroups. Very few quantitative studies have been carried out on Arab women, whether they are residing in Middle Eastern and North African countries or in Europe and other destinations of Arab immigrants. This book offers such a study.

[2] This diversity is described in detail in the next chapter.

Our strategy is based on doing an extensive analysis of Arab women's working patterns over a period of 35 years. We use official statistics collected by the Israeli state's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), including labor force surveys (LFSs), income surveys, and the last two population censuses, which were conducted in 1995 and 2008. Together, these sources provide detailed information about women, their households, and their work. We examine and analyze relationships between women's personal characteristics (education, marital status, number of children) and their LFP, including number of hours per week, occupation, place of work, and earnings. As will be described in the book plan below, we study these issues separately for each distinct group of Palestinian women, comparing them with each other and with Jewish women, as well as with men of these groups.

Book Plan. In order to understand the meaning of our findings and their significance for theories of FLFP, Chapter 2 places our study in its social, historical, and economic context and is divided into five sections. The first provides a general description of Israeli society, with emphasis on the composition of the Palestinian minority and its geographical distribution. The second section explains the state's policies toward its Palestinian population, emphasizing the lack of economic development, the unequal provision of social services, and the various means used to control this population. The third section describes the ethnic composition of Israel, the relationships between Palestinians and Jews, and the divisions among both Palestinians and Jews. The fourth section presents the geographical aspects related to Palestinian and Jewish relations, emphasizing the segregation between the two groups and the differential policies regarding their communities. Finally, the fifth section is about the economic infrastructure of Palestinian communities.

Women's opportunities in the labor market depend to a large extent on their education, marital status, and the number and age of their children. Chapter 3 provides elaborate information on these topics by describing trends of educational attainment, marriage, and fertility among the various groups of Palestinian women in Israel. The chapter opens with a description of the separate educational systems that serve Israeli citizens according to their national and religious affiliations. The chapter then describes the changes in educational achievements of the various Palestinian groups in Israel along the 35-year span of our study. The last part of the chapter deals with changes in family composition, again distinguishing among the separate subcategories of Palestinians in Israel.

The largest bulk of Arab Palestinians in Israel, 80.5 percent, are Muslims who reside in the northern part of Israel (the Galilee) and in

the central part of Israel along the border between Israel and the West Bank ("the Triangle"). The size of this group enables us to make more detailed analyses in Chapters 4 and 5 in which we examine the economic behavior of Muslim women from these regions. Chapter 4 looks at Muslim women from the northern and central districts with respect to their participation in the labor market from the mid-1970s to 2009. Chapter 5 deals with various characteristics of employment of those Muslim women who work. There are four main topics that we examine in this chapter. First we look at part-time employment, analyzing the factors involved in part-time work and the reasons given by women for working part time. The second part of the chapter looks into commuting patterns and asks what we may learn from differences in commuting patterns between highly educated and less-educated women. Next, the chapter moves to an investigation of the positions Palestinian women occupy in the Israeli labor market: we describe in what occupations and segments of the Israeli economy they work, and examine whether being a Muslim as compared to a Jew increases women's probability of working in such occupations and segments. In the fourth and last section we examine Muslim women's earnings compared with that of Muslim men on the one hand, and with that of Jewish women on the other, and based on multivariate analysis, we examine the sources that generate these gender and ethnic gaps.

The above two chapters deal only with the majority of the Muslim population, and do not include two distinct Muslim groups, the Bedouins who live mostly in the south of Israel and the Palestinians of Jerusalem. The next two chapters are dedicated to these two groups. Chapter 6 describes the unique case of Bedouin women. The nomadic past of the Bedouins and their separate social organization have kept them as a socially distinctive group. They live all over the country, but in the north and center of Israel, they cannot be distinguished from other Muslims in official statistics, and therefore this chapter deals only with Muslims in the south of Israel, almost all of them Bedouins. Our analysis compares Bedouins who live in the officially recognized towns with those who live in the so-called 'unrecognized villages.' Chapter 7 deals with Muslim women who reside in Jerusalem. East Jerusalem and its vicinity were annexed by Israel in 1967, but their inhabitants have remained part of the social organization of the Palestinian West Bank. This is especially important with regard to their education, which is conducted according to the Palestinian curriculum (or the Jordanian curriculum prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority). Furthermore, almost all Palestinian Jerusalemites refuse to apply for Israeli citizenship (and the few who do often encounter red tape). They are officially considered to be

residents who may work freely in Israel, but they do not take part in its political life. Due to these circumstances, we expect Palestinian women in Jerusalem to have different work patterns than the Palestinian citizens of Israel. We study only the Muslim inhabitants because they constitute 97 percent of Palestinians in the city, while the Christian inhabitants are too few in our data to enable statistical analysis. The chapter compares Jerusalemite Muslim women to those Palestinian Muslim citizens of Israel who live, like the Jerusalemites, in mixed cities.

Chapter 8 brings the story of Druze women. The Druze community in Israel has an exceptional position as an Arab minority allied with the Jewish state. Chapter 9 deals with Christian Palestinian women. Although divided into about a dozen denominations, the Christian Palestinians in Israel constitute a single social group, which is socially separate from their Muslim counterparts. The relationship between these two groups is complex: Christians feel uneasy with the strong Islamist movement among Muslims, and there is a class gap between the (more affluent) Christians and the (less prosperous) Muslims. But the two groups share the same Palestinian national sentiments and aspirations.

In Chapter 10 we summarize our study. We use our results to reconsider the question of how women make decisions about their involvement in the labor market under the specific cultural and economic conditions of their communities, as they are shaped by state policies, legal arrangements, and intergroup relations. We conclude the book with a discussion of how culture is profoundly intertwined with economic structures and political action, affecting people's behavior while at the same time being rearranged and transformed. We end with a discussion of the implications of our findings for other Arab and Muslim women in the MENA region, as well as for Arab women who live in other Western countries. We believe that our study will contribute to a comparative understanding of the processes that generate women's activities in the labor market.