



**Arab Women's Experiences of Careers in
Management**

تجارب المرأة العربية في مهن الإدارة

by

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
at
The British University in Dubai**

March 2018

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences and decisions of young Arab women as they pursue and advance their careers in management or opt out. The main research questions on Arab women's management careers include how they perceive their experiences in organisations, the key elements that contribute to their decision to leave their management career or stay, how they perceive upward mobility in management careers, and the way in which their experiences are qualitatively changed by the overlapping of multiple layers of identity at particular points of intersection. The thesis draws on discourses of gender, intersectionality, and sustainability situated in the paradoxical context of the region in which Arab women, while young and educated many are not working in management or unemployed.

The thesis's aim and research questions were explored through hermeneutic phenomenology via the semi-structured life world interview drawing on a sample of 56 women from 17 Arab countries, between the ages of 24-40, holding degrees in management, who are currently working or worked a minimum of 3 years before quitting. An Arab woman was defined as someone for whom both parents are Arab, has lived in an Arab country for at least ten years, obtained at least one degree in a higher education institution in an Arab country, and has previously or currently works in an Arab country for a minimum of 3 years.

Several themes emerged that described women's management career experiences specifically from the perspective of their social identities the combination of which produce private and public scripts with multiple intersections qualitatively changing their experiences. Shared among their experiences is the way in which these intersections situated them in what they perceived to be places of "empowerment" or "disempowerment" expressed in the ability to make decisions and seek alternatives as they underwent expected role-performance tensions during daily "power" episodes with multiple actors (especially managers, colleagues, spouses and other family members). Thus, the power framework of Arab women's management careers tells of an active participant and a knowledgeable agent aware of the importance of balancing multiple arenas of power. Based on this argument and interpretation the thesis makes recommendations on how to transform various elements such that women experience more equitable and empowering decision-making options that encourage them to remain in their careers as well as move upwards facilitated by cultural and policy changes in universities, organizations, and governments.

تتمحور هذه الأطروحة حول تجارب النساء العربيات الشابات في مهن الإدارة حيث يقررن المضي بها قدما الى أعلى الدرجات المؤسسية أو الانسحاب. سؤال الأطروحة الرئيسي ينظر الى نظرة النساء العربيات أنفسهن الى تجاربهن في المؤسسات، العناصر الرئيسية التي تسهم في قرارهن في الرجوع عن المهن الإدارية أو المتابعة فيها، انطباعهن عن القدرة على الترقى في مهن الإدارة، و تأثير تقاطع جزئيات و طبقات هوياتهن الفردية المتعددة في أماكن و طرق محددة في تحديد معالم قراراتهن و تجاربهن المتعلقة بمهنهن في الإدارة. تعتمد الأطروحة على محاور في الجندرية و الاستدامة لتتنظر الى تجارب المرأة العربية من منظور السعي الى فهم أسباب ابتعاد المرأة العربية عن مهن الإدارة بشكل خاص و سوق العمل بشكل عام بالرغم من امكانياتهن كموارد بشرية شابة و متعلمة.

اعتمدت الأطروحة منهجية الهرمينوتيك فينومينولوجي والتي اعتمدت على المقابلات التي تم اجراؤها مع عينة اقصرت على 56 امرأة استهدفت النساء العربيات من 17 بلد عربي و تتراوح أعمارهن بين ال 24 و 30 عام من حملة الشهادات الجامعية مع تخصص في الإدارة و اللواتي يعملن في وظائف حاليا أو اللواتي عملن لمدة 3 سنوات قبل تركهن للعمل. تم تعريف المرأة العربية بناء على كون والديها من بلاد عربية، و اللواتي عشن في بلاد عربية لمدة 10 سنوات على الأقل و اللواتي حصلن على شهادة جامعية في بلد عربي و عملت في بلد عربي لمدة 3 سنوات.

وبرزت عدة محاور تصف تجربة المرأة العربية في مهن الإدارة و أبرزها تأثير تقاطع جزئيات و طبقات هوياتهن الفردية المتعددة في أماكن و طرق محددة في تحديد ما سمي بالنص الخاص و النص العام اللذين يتقاطعان بطرق عدة تغير من انطباعات المرأة عن تجاربهن المؤسسية و مهن الإدارة وفقا لكيف أثرت تلك التقاطعات في تمكين أو عدم تمكين المرأة من منطلق قدرتهن على اتخاذ القرارات و البحث عن البدائل عند مواجهتهن للتعارض ما بين توقعات النص الخاص و النص العام و الذي يترتب بشكل يومي. و من هنا وضعت الأطروحة ما أسمته بنطاق القوة و الذي يرى المرأة كعنصر واعي تبني قراراتها من منطلق واعي كامل لنطاقات القوة المتعددة و المتعارضة أحياناو التي تبني من التوقعات المترتبة عن أدوار المرأة المتعددة بناء على النص الخاص و العام لجزئيات هويتها الفردية. تقدم الأطروحة توصيات حول كيفية تحويل عناصر مختلفة بحيث تكون المرأة أكثر إنصافاً وتمكين قادرة على اتخاذ القرارات التي تشجعهم على البقاء في مهن الإدارة ، وكذلك التحرك صعوداً بفضل و المثابرة عليها الى اعلى الدرجات المؤسسية من خلال التغييرات الثقافية والسياسية في الجامعات ، المنظمات والحكومات.

DEDICATION

To my mother Flora- My first heroine. I now know. This is for you.

To my father Tarek- My first teacher and the source of all that I am and all that
I will be.

To my husband Miaad- My anchor and the core of all that is good and
beautiful.

To my children Eyan and Elena- My cherished gifts from God and the infinite
rays of light and joy.

To my parents Roohollah and Manizheh- My angels on earth and the mirrors of
selfless love and dedication.

To my sisters Mona and Maha- The missing pieces of my heart.

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude goes to my Professor, Supervisor and Mentor Professor Ashly H. Pinnington without whose guidance, patience, and dedication this thesis would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The intersection of gender and organizations in the Arab context has been a personal and intellectual pursuit for a number of years that began with a simple observation; in my decade as a student in the UAE I had the privilege of being taught by only *two* women neither of whom were Arab. And yet, in every classroom, Arab women by far outnumbered men. Outside the walls of classrooms, whether in the private or public sector, my women colleagues and I were outnumbered by Arab men, who seemed to move up and fast while *our* numbers dwindled. Where did my classmates go? Did they ever make it to the workplace? And if so what was their experience like? Why did they more frequently move out instead of up?

Drawing from my days as an economist, I was acutely aware that, beyond a simple numbers game, there had to be far-reaching consequences to the reality behind these questions. After all, for every decision at the individual level there will eventually be very tangible consequences and costs at the macro level. For every one of my classmates, society bore accumulating costs; first for their education, and after that, for every time one of them stayed out of the workplace or remained a spectator on the side-lines of the corporate ladder. In “searching” for my classmates and colleagues it quickly became clear that there are many stories to be told. This thesis tells some of those stories, which taken together paint a vivid picture of the journey of Arab women today. The “why” and “how” these stories came about are explained in the coming sections.

Research Overview

At the heart of this thesis are Arab women; both the words “Arab” and “Women” in this context bring with them meanings that have emerged from a long and complicated history. The “woman question” has been examined in academic discourse across multiple disciplines and as such the emergent discussion of gender in the context of organizations has paved the way for a rich body of literature that offers numerous ways with which to understand the experiences of women in organizations. To this day, the sociological, psychological, psychosocial, behavioural, feminist and other schools of thought continue to negotiate the terms of exploring the “woman question” with substantial theoretical and practical implications at the level of individuals, organizations, and countries.

Where do Arab women fit into this discourse? Discussions of Arab women are complicated by the addition of “Arabness” to the already complex woman question. The word “Arab” tends to go as unquestioned as the words “American” or “French” would be in a similar context. In discourse, and popular culture, an Arab is one who speaks Arabic, comes from the Arab world, and likely subscribes to Islam or bound in some way to its traditions given the way in which it is heavily intertwined with cultural practices. However, this “umbrella” term is as accurate as suggesting that a “Westerner” is anyone who lives in the “West” and by extension an American, French, and Dutch would all have the *same* experience by virtue of this “Westernness”.

The countries of the Arab world are indeed united by a single language and a shared history. Whether this is enough to assume a common present and singular future is questionable. If the current political turmoil in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt is any indication then each country in the Arab world is, and will be, more powerfully shaped by its different socio-political and economic realities than any common history. In fact, one only must look at the differences between Syria and Lebanon or Jordan and Palestine to appreciate the vast differences even between countries that share borders (that can be crossed in less than an hour by car). The diversity among the countries of the Arab world is so striking that one can not help but wonder how it was reduced to a single narrative that has stubbornly persisted both within and outside common discourse. And while fully delving into this concept necessitates a discussion with particular historical, philosophical, and ideological dimensions it is beyond the scope and context of this thesis.

However, the “Arab” question is an important one if we are to fully understand the dominant theme in management discourse about the Arab context. The persistence of the singular narrative of the Arab world partially explains the disappearance of the nuanced arguments in management discourse when it comes to Arab women, who are often depicted as being oppressed by tradition, patriarchy, and religion and have “not taken the first step in the road to genuine equal rights and opportunities” (Abdalla 1996, p.38). The ideological appeal of this depiction lies in its fit with a stereotype that persists

outside the walls of academia that has made this line of argument almost immune to many questions the most important of which are: What defines this “Arabness” that seems to be at the root of the “Arab” woman’s “struggle”? To what extent does this “Arabness” influence women’s experiences in the world of organizations in general and management careers in particular?

Current research on Arab women is mostly quantitative in nature, where due to a lack of accessible data researchers are forced to make do with what little exists often finding themselves obliged to make assumptions based on data from very different contexts and/or make imprecise comparisons among countries as different as Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. Thus, a more reflective understanding of the similarities across and within the various countries of the Arab world necessitates serious methodological considerations for research. A more holistic depiction of the Arab world in general, and the Arab woman in particular, is a primary motivation for this thesis that shaped its contribution to academic discourse and its practical implications as will be discussed in the coming sections.

It is important at this point to acknowledge that the subject of the current thesis lends itself to exploration with multiple lenses. Given the discussion thus far, it should be noted that while political/ideological considerations under the umbrella of a gender/feminist agenda are important themes they will *not* be the only ones guiding this research. Returning to the observations I made as a student and employee about the absence of women at

various levels, in exploring the experience of Arab women in management careers, my goal is to understand why the Arab world's most educated and skilled human resources are not fully participating in determining the economic (and in turn social and political) realities of their countries today and by extension eliminating their role in shaping the future. This concern is better articulated in the sustainability discourse that has, alongside the gender/ideological perspectives, shaped this thesis.

The idea that society needs to commit to creating the conditions necessary for future generations to thrive by ensuring the efficient and equitable use of society's available resources has been persuasively articulated in the triple bottom line of sustainability that includes environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity (Brauh 2011). Discourse on women and sustainability often places women within the stereotype of the nurturing mother whose role is relegated to environmental conservation efforts. Women also make an appearance in the social pillar of sustainability though this usually revolves around calls for increased education of women without an articulated concern for enabling the investment in education to translate into tangible gains in the "economy" pillar. Thus, while sustainability efforts aim at raising education levels worldwide it is not matched by the efforts for ensuring the full economic return on those investments as is evident in the gap between education levels and labour-market participation.

Sustainability can be viewed as a value judgment on how resources are

best utilized to achieve society's vision of its future. Efforts in this direction are more effective when all society's available resources are utilized efficiently rather than working within the constraints of an imbalanced resource utilization system. Women tend to be an under-utilized economic resource and therefore repositioning them at the core of the economic pillar of sustainability is paramount. This is particularly important in the Arab context that has some of the youngest populations in the world and yet

...the Arab region has the world's lowest ratios of women representation not only in managerial positions but also in employment in general, and in politics... despite the fact that in several Arab countries women's average education is higher than men's... (Abdalla 2015, p.25).

Thus, understanding the experiences of Arab women particularly the factors influencing their positions in the labour market in general and organizations in particular, is a key step towards informing sustainability efforts in the region. And therefore, this thesis is essentially searching for the "lost" Arab investment in women's education and bringing to light the undeniable benefit of their participation in organizations in the hope that understanding its causes will enable the Arab world to fully reap those benefits sooner rather than later.

Research Problem

The position of Arab women in their countries' economies is paradoxical; young and educated they are capable of being powerful human and economic resources on the one hand, yet they remain dormant participants in

the labour market on the other. Nowhere is this paradox more ironic than in the case of Arab women who prepared for careers in management and then never made it to their first job, stayed on the side-lines of their organizations or left before they could advance to the top. This paradox has far-reaching consequences particularly for those economies that want to make sustainability a national priority given that women's absence from the workplace enforces a skewed resource utilization system.

Accompanying this paradox is a vicious cycle; Arab women's increasingly noticeable absence particularly at the middle and top levels of organizations also excludes them from actively participating in the decision-making processes that could ameliorate this paradox. Addressing this issue necessitates an understanding of the critical factors that account for Arab women's absence from organizations at the individual level as they are experienced and articulated by the Arab women themselves.

Aim, Research Questions & Objectives

Drawing from the discussion thus far, the thesis at hand is guided by the desire to understand the experiences of young, educated, Arab women as they make fundamental decisions about pursuing careers in management, advancing that career, or opting out. More specifically, the thesis's central aim is:

To explore the experience of young Arab women as they pursue careers in management.

Drawing from the aim, this thesis' central questions are:

- 1- What are the key themes shaping Arab women's management careers?
- 2- How do Arab women perceive their experiences in organizations as they pursue management careers?
- 3- What are the key elements that cause Arab women to drop out of management careers altogether and those that encourage them to stay?
- 4- What are the most influential elements affecting Arab women's perception of upward mobility in management careers?
- 5- How does the overlapping of multiple layers of identity at particular points of intersection qualitatively change the experiences of Arab women in management careers?

Hence the research objectives are as follows:

- 1- Locate Arab women's experiences in management careers within the broader gender and intersectionality discourses.
- 2- Explore the themes shaping women's management careers from across different contexts and particularly from under-researched Arab countries to contribute a more inclusive view of Arab women in management discourse on the region.
- 3- Explore the potential for the above themes to shape organizational

structure and practice in the region in a way that encourages the increased participation of women in management careers and particularly with the view of aligning with sustainability practice at the institutional level.

Methodology & Significance of the Research

The significance of the research for this thesis stems from its contribution to various areas. However, fully appreciating that contribution necessitates that we briefly describe some elements of the research methodology (a more detailed discussion of methodology is presented in Chapter 3). Using hermeneutic phenomenology this thesis enables "understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and describe[s] the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be"(Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p. 26). As a tool, the semi-structured life world interview enabled an understanding of the themes of the lived everyday world from the women's *own* perspectives as they experienced work in organizations. The choice of methodology is particularly important given that most research on Arab women in management has used quantitative methods with small sample sizes (relative to their ambitions of generalizability across the Arab world).

The sample at the centre of this research is women business management graduates aged 24 to 40 who are currently working or who have worked for more than three years but dropped out. The thesis's sample is drawn

from the following countries: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq, the GCC (UAE, Oman, Bahrain, KSA, Kuwait, Qatar), Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan. A total of 56 interviews took place- a maximum of 4 from each country enabling the research to be as representative of the region as possible.

Thus, the significance of this research is multi-fold. Given the research question and aims, the thesis contributes to understanding the experiences of Arab women as they tell their own stories, which shed light on the critical factors affecting their experiences in organizations and the ways in which these affect the decisions that shape their careers in management. This enables the thesis at hand to contribute to multiple areas of discourse including intersectionality and sustainability as will be explored in later sections. More importantly, the adopted methodology enables this thesis to make the case for a new approach to research on the Arab world; one that not only takes into account the incredible diversity of its countries, but more importantly moves away from an orientalist view of the region- to see it not as a unique novelty but rather a pool of untapped human and economic potential.

Key Terms & Assumptions

The later sections will describe in more detail some of the key assumptions of the research methodology. However, at this point in the thesis, it is important for the reader to be aware of a few key terms and assumptions.

An **organization** is taken to be a “continuing system able to distinguish and integrate human activities [that] utilizes, transforms and joins together a set of human, material and other resources for problem solving [and] a setting in which one level of social relations occurs” (Irefin & Ifah 2012, p. 3).

As for **sustainability**, while the triple bottom-line view is important for the thesis as it enters into the specifics of women and the relationship of their career choices to socioeconomic development, however, I am motivated by Ehrenfeld’s view of sustainability as:

...the possibility that humans and other life forms will flourish on the earth forever. Flourishing means not only survival, but also the realization of whatever we as humans declare makes life good and meaningful, including notions like justice, freedom, and dignity. And as a possibility, sustainability is a guide to actions that will or can achieve its central vision of flourishing for time immemorial. It is a future vision from which we can construct our present way of being... (Ehrenfeld 2000, p.36).

A key **assumption** is in the choice of sample from an age group ranging from 24 to 40 where it is assumed that these women have undergone at least one of two critical points; first when they decided to move from university to the labour market, and second when they decided to pursue movement from the mid-levels of their organizations to the top or outside the labour market altogether. The choice of business management graduates is also based on the assumption that these women must have had, at least at some point, an interest in pursuing management careers after graduation. For the purpose of this thesis, an **Arab woman** is defined as someone:

- Of Arab descent with both parents being from any one of the Arab countries as follows: the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, KSA, Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan.
- Who has lived in an Arab country for at least ten years.
- Has obtained at least one degree in a higher education institution in an Arab country with a concentration in management.
- Has previously worked or currently works in an Arab country for at least three years.

Structure of the Thesis

After this introduction, in Chapter Two the thesis embarks on a thorough literature review that delves into discussions of gender, women in management, and the fundamental tenets of intersectionality and the various schools of thought that have shaped intellectual discourses thus far. This is then followed by an exploration of research on Arab women in management with an emphasis on the contribution and limitation of the research particularly in terms of the narratives on “Arabness” moving onto the question of gender in the Arab world and the way in which its terms have been negotiated and renegotiated in academic discourse.

Chapter Three details the methodology beginning with a discussion of the way in which the thesis’s choice of methodology enhances its contribution to

academic discourse. The discussion begins with an exploration of phenomenology in general and hermeneutic phenomenology in particular with a focus on its appropriateness given the thesis's aims. This is followed by discussion of semi structured life world interviews before it moves onto the choice of language, and a discussion of the use of journaling and critical friends in the methodology ending with an exploration of the data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter Four previews the stories of the women interviewed that are organized in a way that enables the reader to gain a full picture of participant's ideas and experiences with a strong emphasis on excerpts from interview transcripts and critical incidents. This then sets the stage for Chapter Five that will place the interviews within the broader themes of discourse addressed in the literature review before exploring the ways in which the insights generated contribute to the thesis's main questions via a discussion of the conceptual framework that emerged from the research in Chapter Six. The relationship between the results and the themes in the literature is discussed in Chapter Seven, which draws on the results to make recommendations at the level of governments, organizations, and institutions of higher learning thereby paving the way for Chapter 8 that makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Chapter

The research question at the centre of this thesis lends itself to a multidisciplinary exploration of discourse including discussions of sustainability, gender, feminist schools of thought, intersectionality, women in management, and the historical positioning of Arab women within those discussions. The present chapter examines this thesis's position in relation to these different areas of discourse and how they not only shaped its methodology but also its ability to inform future research as well as practice at the organizational and institutional levels.

An Overview of Sustainability

Introduction

While most would attribute discussions of sustainability in its current form to the last four decades, the catalyst for its evolution began two centuries ago when the relationship between “man and nature” was re-examined with concerns for the future of natural resources. This section explores the historical development of sustainability and sustainable development before moving onto exploring more specifically organizational sustainability and the relationship between individuals and organizational sustainability via an understanding of decision-making in the context of organizational scripts.

Sustainability: A Brief History

The idea that nature was created for exploitation has found its most

extensive realization in the industrial revolution, with human knowledge and creativity allowing the kind of advances that enabled “humanity’s triumph over nature” implying that economic gains came above all other considerations- an idea heavily perpetuated by capitalism (Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien 2005, p. 38). However, the finite nature of resources makes it apparent that, apart from environmental concerns, an exploitative view of resources means humanity will, at some point, find itself without resources or alternatives. This problem has encouraged a transition towards views of “managing” resources in ways that enable economic growth over increasingly longer periods of time with the assumption that economic growth inevitably means social progress given dwindling poverty, with concerns for the environment appearing almost like an afterthought (Douthwaite 1992). However, the “growing awareness of the global links between mounting environmental problems, socio-economic issues to do with poverty and inequality and concerns about a healthy future for humanity” gave way to the emergence of sustainable development that made the link between the environment and socio-economic issues (Ibid, p.39). This new conception of the relationship between man and the environment, today and in the future, was clearly expressed in the Brundtland Report published in 1987 that asserted that sustainable development necessitated “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (WCED 1987, p.43).

Hence considerations of future generations as central stakeholders in the

socioeconomic and environmental decisions made in the present raised fundamental questions about the tenets of human well-being and prosperity that necessitated

...changing the quality of growth, meeting essential needs, merging environment and economics in decision making (WCED 1987, p. xii), with an emphasis on human development, participation in decisions and equity in benefits...social justice today and in the future is a crucial component of the concept of sustainable development... (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien 2005, p. 39).

This view of sustainable development was understandably (and deliberately) ambiguous to enable multiple stakeholders to take its principles and make them “their own”. However, this ambiguity gave rise to numerous debates on its definition and interpretation between those who view it as a strong moral imperative and those who view it as meaningless at best or a culprit in the perpetuation of failed capitalist growth models at worst. Attempting to reconcile these opposing views Haughton (1999) proposed that if *equity* is made central then sustainable development could only be achieved if the following interconnected principles are met:

- 1- ***Intergenerational equity (futuraity)***: echoes the Brundtland report in the idea of making the decisions needed to enable future generations to meet their own needs without this compromising the needs of the present.
- 2- ***Intragenerational equity***: this draws heavily on the idea of social justice with a more inclusive approach that sees eradicating the

origins of social injustice rather than “simply dealing with redistributive measures” as being central to ensuring that “the needs of future generations are met” (Haughton 1999, p. 235).

- 3- ***Geographical equity***: this necessitates that decision-makers avoid a “parochial concern for protecting localized corporate or environmental interests while effectively ignoring external impacts of their decisions” (Ibid, p. 235)
- 4- ***Procedural equity***: refers to the idea that all individuals must be treated openly and fairly with regulatory and participatory systems that enable participation for all.
- 5- ***Inter-species equity***: views the survival of species as equally important as the survival of humans; an idea that must be central in decision-making processes.

And yet the link between justice and the environment in sustainable development remains contentious. While some argue that there is not necessarily a link between sustainability and social justice others suggest that linking environmental and social concerns is imperative and must be considered away from moral or sympathetic views as a solid pillar of sustainability efforts (Marcuse 1998; Dobson 2000). To put the discussion thus far into perspective Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien (2005) mapped the different views of sustainability in relation to socioeconomic and environmental considerations thereby classifying various sustainability efforts into three categories based on

their view of the changes necessary in terms of social and political structures, as well as the relationship between humanity and the environment in order to pursue and achieve sustainable development. Exploring these categories is important, as they have shaped the way in which sustainability contributes to this thesis.

The first category, “status quo”, is one that views the potential problems facing the environment and society as achievable through “adjustments [that] can be made without any fundamental changes to society, means of decision making or power relations” (p. 42). This echoes the sentiment that economic growth would inevitably “take care” of all other issues including poverty and the environment. Lomborg (2001) argues that

...to improve the environmental quality of the developing world, securing growth so as to lift these people out of hunger and poverty is of the utmost importance since...only when we are sufficiently rich can we start to ...deal with environmental problems... (in Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien 2005, p. 42).

As such, the status quo view of sustainability argues that no changes in governance are required but rather “green capitalists who practice ‘corporate citizenship’ and ethical business” can achieve sustainability issues (Elkington & Burke 1987).

In a departure from this view, the “reform” perspective of sustainability acknowledges that there are serious environmental and social issues that, if left unresolved, could have serious consequences for humanity. It also contends that

current policies, and practices among governments, businesses, and society in general lend themselves to criticism. This, however, is not sufficient ground for fundamental change. For these reformists the source of the problem is not in

... the nature of present society, but in imbalances and a lack of knowledge and information, and they remain confident that things can and will change to address these challenges. They generally accept that large shifts in policy and lifestyle, many very profound, will be needed at some point. However, it is assumed that these can be achieved overtime within the present social and economic structures.... (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien 2005, p. 43).

Within the reform perspective is a range of ideologies about the intensity and direction of the reforms needed to achieve sustainability goals. One group of reformers argue that technology and the “greening” of markets can address much of the challenges of sustainability. Going a step further are the reformers who believe that while such measures can take care of sustainability concerns, they are only temporary, and eventually more radical reforms must be introduced at multiple levels locally and globally. Another group asserts that the time for these radical changes is *now*; these reformers are on the edge of the most “radical” of sustainability perspectives- the transformationists.

For transformationists the accelerating environmental and social problems require fundamental changes in society and how humanity prioritizes justice given that “reform is not enough as many of the problems are ...located within the very economic and power structures of society because they are not

primarily concerned with human well-being or environmental sustainability” (Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien 2005, p. 45). Within the transformationist perspective are those who focus on the environment alone, and others who focus on social development, while others view them as inseparable. Thus, there are those who believe in transformation independent of sustainable development and those who view transformation as heavily linked with sustainable development.

Thus, for deep ecologists the environment is of fundamental importance with “the intrinsic value and needs of nature and the environment” coming before human needs (p. 45). This perspective has been heavily criticized for its seemingly deep disregard for humanity (Bradford 1989; Bramwell 1989) with some suggesting that “there is an association between some green and fascist thinking”. This is unsurprising given such statements as Foreman who suggested that in addressing the famine in Ethiopia “the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve” (Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien 2005, p. 45). Others are not as extreme arguing that while econcentrism is needed, yet it is best expressed in a subsistence perspective (Bennoldt-Thomsen & Mies 1999).

However, for the transformationists who prioritize sustainable development with the emphasis on both social and environmental concerns “social and environmental systems risk breakdown if radical change does not occur” (George 1999; Rees 1995; in Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien 2005, p. 46).

Consequently, a strong commitment to social equity is necessary to enable individuals to have control over their lives and resources and the means with which to pursue “livelihood, good health, resources and economic and political decision-making” (p. 46). This then invites discussion on the relationship between people and the environment from which various perspectives have emerged including:

- 1- Dialectical naturalism/ social ecology: this perspective considers that social reconstruction rooted in social criticism is the only way environmental and social concerns can be addressed (Bookchin 1989).
- 2- Ecofeminism: a perspective that addresses the relationship of gender with sustainable development. Within this perspective is also a range of views from the “cultural/biological associations of women with nature to more social analysis” to those who combine the two arguing that “capitalism attempts to detach production and social life from nature through gender and class divisions” (Hopwood, Mellor, & O’Brien p.46).
- 3- Ecosocialism: views the inevitable environmental and social catastrophes as the result of capitalism’s exploitation of people and the environment. Addressing this begins with repositioning humanity within nature, not outside: “we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing

outside nature- but we...belong to nature and exist in its midst”

(Ibid, p. 46).

- 4- Environmental justice: this perspective focuses on “meeting human need and enhancing the quality of life- economic equality, health care, shelter, human rights, species preservation and democracy- using resources sustainably ...demands major restructuring of the entire social order” (Ibid, p. 47).

And yet, in spite of the above discussion, the divisions between the different views of sustainable development are far from rigid. Placing this thesis within these different views is important conceptually and ideologically. Thus the reformist perspective on sustainable development is one to which the aims of this thesis can contribute. And while I contend that concerns for the environment and its future are central, a closer examination reveals that the root of society’s most pressing challenges can be found in the ever-increasing concerns for economic growth and the fear for wealth-generating resources (whether finding new ones or fiercely protecting existing ones). This is unsurprising given that our economic ideology is built on the premise of scarcity; resources (the inputs of production) are by nature finite. This scarcity fuels an exploitative approach to resources and a fear-centric view of the future of economic growth in what has become a vicious cycle; the more resources used the more prominently the threat of scarcity looms thereby making the idea of *us surviving* today appear more pressing than *others thriving* tomorrow.

Therefore, tangible shifts in the way sustainable development is viewed necessitates the acknowledgement that this vicious cycle is imbedded in the political, social, and cultural psyche of most countries over centuries. The kind of change that transformationists demand can only be achieved over an equally long period of time (if not longer). However, the road to that transformed future begins in the present and within current economic and political structures.

Acknowledging that economic concerns are prioritized, a viable solution is one that addresses the issue of resource scarcity. During times of crisis, governments and policy-makers would welcome billions of dollars in returns on investments they made years ago. Today as most governments, particularly those in the Arab world, try to stretch what they think is their “last dollar” well into the future, they have turned their back on potentially billions of dollars in resources they have invested in long ago. A generation of human resources, in whose education governments have invested heavily, holds the potential to make tangible contributions to the economy (and society) at every level. Those human resources especially are women, who in the case of the Arab world, are among the most educated and yet comparatively low contributors to their economies. Without their *active participation* the kind of economic, political and social changes that would enable radical developments in sustainability are unlikely to occur. In other words, without new players the game can *not* change. But before we frantically try to force more players into the game we must first understand why they either never participated, didn’t continue, or

remained on the side-lines; and this is at the heart of this thesis.

The Role of the Individual & Organizational Sustainability

The discussion thus far has focused on sustainability at the social, and to some extent political, levels, however, for change to occur at the macro level its seeds must be sown at the level of individuals. Consistent with the argument so far, the way in which academic discourse views the importance of the individual in achieving sustainability goals is nuanced. While some argue that a top-down approach in which policy changes are enforceable using a variety of means is sufficient to achieve sustainability goals, others see this as a superficial exercise incapable of enabling real change. As Capra (1982) describes

[Our current approaches] will never resolve any of our difficulties but will merely shift them around in the complex web of social and ecological relations. A resolution can be found only if the structure of the web itself is changed, and this will involve profound transformations of our social institutions, values and ideas (in Kurucz & Wheeler 2002- 2008).

This perspective on change is rooted in viewing the role of individual agency and participation in operationalizing sustainability in the contexts with which they interact as fundamental. Extending this argument further, given that “our individual and collective experiences are now dominated by organizations in that institutions have become intimately entwined with our lives providing the kinds of services that communities and small organizations used to deliver ...it is critical to understand the nature of interactions between individuals and the organizations they inhabit” in order to understand the way in which this

interaction can and should enable sustainability goals. This interaction is better understood by exploring organizational sustainability, which can be conceived of as “research and practice into the implications of sustainable development *for* organizations and *of* organizations for sustainable development” (Kurucz 2005, p. 53).

Within organizational sustainability are a multitude of perspectives each with unique key assumptions about the locus of sustainability, organizations, and individuals as they interact with one another. One perspective suggests that “sustainability is a social fact, is observable and manipulable and can be objectively or probabilistic defined” and thus efforts in this regard focus on the way in which sustainability objectives are pursued and motivated by the promise of potential economic benefits of sustainability (Kurucz 2005, p. 60). Hence, sustainability becomes a strategic direction for organizations that are in search of opportunities, sustainable value, and/or competitive advantage via corporate social responsibility (whether tending to the environment or to the concerns of stakeholders) (Hart, 1995, 1997; Wheeler & Silanpaa, 1998; Hillman & Keim, 2001; Pralahad & Hart, 2002; Vredenberg & Westley, 2002; Wheeler *et al.*, 2003; Hart & Milstein, 2003; Kurucz 2005).

Away from organizational sustainability as a business strategy fuelled by different motives, another view is one that understands sustainability as a socially constructed phenomenon; a social movement that calls for establishing new cultural priorities in order to enable social development (Melucci, 1994;

Piccolomini, 1996). Extending this further a focus on the politics of social relations is necessary in order to “challenge the dominant discourse” given that “the social construction of reality can favor certain interests, namely economic, and that sustainability will require a shift in the dominant discourse in order to promote environmental and social values” (Kurucz 2005 p. 63). Thus, exploring the influence of structures and organizations on the individual and vice versa becomes paramount, which some scholars argue can be better understood from an institutional theory perspective.

Institutional theory describes organizations as they interact with one another in their search for legitimacy in a process called institutionalization in which

...the structuring and behaviour of organizations becomes widely accepted as appropriate and necessary...Pressure for conformity to institutional norms is applied by institutions, defined here as the broader normative environment, the state and other dominant organizations, and professional norms and standards (Kurucz 2005, p. 66).

Consequently, organizations operate within a socially constructed system in which legitimacy is obtained via conformity to “norms, values and expectations” (Ibid, p.67) through which its actions can be deemed appropriate and acceptable thereby giving it legitimacy and social support. And while this process serves to “enhance the probability of survival of the firm” it also creates the conditions necessary for firms to undergo isomorphic transformation whereby they become increasingly similar to one another and the environment overtime (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Haveman, 1993;

Kurucz 2005)”. Hence, for institutional theorists certain behaviours “are adopted through habit and reflect the myths and rituals of institutional environments instead of work demands” (p. 67).

For many, however, institutional theory’s account implies that organizations are both passive and inert and exclusionary of the role of human behaviour’s role in producing organizational scripts (Oliver 1991; Tolbert & Zucker 1996). Institutional theories include different types of legitimacy and three common ones are described by Suchmann (1995) as follows:

- 1- Pragmatic legitimacy that is gained through “the expected value of a set of constituents” (p. 70).
- 2- Moral legitimacy that is gained through the belief that an activity is the “right thing to do” (p. 70).
- 3- Cognitive legitimacy that is gained through the belief that a particular action is “inevitable based on some taken for granted cultural account” (p. 70).

Accordingly, pragmatic and moral legitimacy can work to bring about cognitive legitimacy whereby increased isomorphism will lead to a “taken for granted” approach to particular issues. As has been discussed earlier, given that our lives are dominated by organizations, the isomorphism that will emerge in the pursuit of moral and cognitive legitimacy can potentially effect change even outside the walls of organizations. Hence, if sustainability in general (as defined earlier), and social sustainability in particular, is to become inseparable from the very fabric of organizations, a renewed focus on individuals and their

institutional mind-sets becomes fundamental; this is ideologically important for the present thesis as it calls for a new view of the role of women in organizations. If we contend that organizations can be viewed as “humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interaction. [and that] they consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct) and formal rules” (North 1990, p. 97 in Lawrence & Suddaby 2005) it then follows that “institutions rely on the action of individuals and organizations for their reproduction over time” (Lawrence & Suddaby 2005, p. 4).

It then follows that we move specifically to the determinants of “individuals thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individual and collective actors” (ibid, p. 4) and particularly the ways in which organizations provide the stage upon which they “define social relationships, help define who occupies what position in those relationships and guide interaction by giving cognitive frames or sets of meanings to interpret the behaviour of others” (Fligstein 2001 in Lawrence & Suddaby 2005, p. 5). This sets the stage for understanding the interplay of individual (and by extension collective) action and organizations in a way that views “action as dependent on cognitive rather than affective processes and structures, and thus suggests an approach that focuses on understanding how actors accomplish the social construction of rules, scripts, schemas, and cultural accounts” (Ibid, p. 8).

Hence, specifically, for Arab women, moving the conversation away from the dominant themes in discourse towards one that links women’s roles in

organizations to the larger sustainability goals of nations paves the way for the increasingly important role of individuals as agents of change in organizations and beyond. If the full and unhindered participation of women is to become part of the moral and cognitive legitimacy of organizations, then the reforms on the way towards sustainability in a more meaningful way become possible only when we understand the why's and how of individual actions in organizations. Thus heeding DiMaggio & Powell (1991) call to see individual actions as cognitive structures it is important that we now delve more specifically into the way in which “actors accomplish the social construction of scripts” (Lawrence & Suddaby 2005, p. 8).

The Public-Private Divide & the Role of Scripts

Up to this point discussion of the “individual” has been one-dimensional; an actor to whom our attention turns by virtue of a presence on the observable “stage” that is the organization and only through this presence does the actor’s observable decisions and actions gain “importance”. However, individuals are far from one-dimensional actors living on a single stage. Rather they are complex, multi-dimensional beings with a web of identities moulding within and onto one another in convoluted ways that inevitably impact the way in which they make decisions privately and publically including in organizations. We begin our exploration of this complexity by first turning to the question of the positioning of the individual in organizations in the context of the public-private divide.

The questioning of what constitutes the distinction between the public and private life emerged with the idea of “separate spheres” in which it was argued that

...the social world is organized around contrasting and incompatible moral principles that are conventionally linked to either public or private...by using the public/private dichotomy, participants can subdivide, recalibrate and thus make fractal recursions in their categorizations of cultural objectives and personae (Gal 2001, p. 77). Since the emergence of the public-private dichotomy various discourses

have given rise to countless conceptions of what this dichotomy entails. And while fully delving into the history of this distinction is beyond the scope of the present thesis it's sufficient at this point to assert that both the “public” and “private” have been used to denote several things whether they be “a certain kind of discursive practice, a physical space, or a set of spatially located relationships that define a community” (Brodin 2007, p. 47). The distinction between the public and private is always relative to one another yet once established it can be “projected onto different social objects- activities, identities, institutions, spaces and interactions” and repeatedly reproduced in increasingly narrower or broader contexts (Gal 2002, p. 81). Thus rather than being a static delineation the public and private spheres refer to a “social realm of action and communication” (Brodin 2007, p. 47). As Arendt (1958) describes the public “is the realm of action, of seeing and being seen by others- which is what, for us, constitutes our reality. The public realm, in other words, is a space of appearance, and “[we] always appear in a world which is a stage...” (in Brodin 2007, p. 51). And interestingly the “public” became

associated with masculinity and the “private” with femininity with an implied assumption that this reflects a “natural order” in which the

....human universe is segregated into two social worlds marked out by the nature of the two sexes, and that these two social worlds are by definition characterized as being private (the women’s) and the public (the men’s)...the former world is invariably described as domestic, narrow, and restricted whereas the latter is described as political, broad, and expansive...(Nelson 1974, p. 552).

Where do organizations feature in this divide? Historically, “work” and in turn “organizations” were considered the public that stood in contrast to the “home” with everything it encompasses as the “private”. Organizations are thus the stage upon which the individual’s “public” performance can and should take place. This stage is produced and reproduced through the interaction of the performances between actors as they navigate an intricate web of social relationships at the heart of which are power dynamics that are negotiated and renegotiated to navigate the limits of who is “allow[ed] or den[ied] entry into the [stage] by society or the state which sets up barriers around participation based on citizenship, social or economic status, [gender] or other criteria of belonging” (Brodin 2007, p. 56). Thus, based on one’s belonging along various elements of identity an individual’s performance in the public space of organizations is built around gaining legitimacy and access to specific roles on particular stages by adhering to their “assigned scripts”.

We begin our discussion of scripts by first defining schemata, which “organize knowledge about specific stimulus domains...and guide both the processing of new information and the retrieval of stored information. They can

be viewed as cognitive models that provide structured information about people, situations, and events” (Poole, Gray, Gioia 1990, p. 213). Hence, an individual relies on schema as a guide to better understand both social information and situations meaningfully (Gioia & Poole 1984). A script is thus

A schema held in memory that describes events or behaviors (or sequences of events or behaviors) appropriate for a particular context. [It] is a knowledge structure that fits predictable, conventional, or frequently encountered situations...People in organizations know how to act appropriately because they have a working knowledge of their organizational world. They “enact” the right behaviors most of the time in part because they retain a cognitive repertoire of scripts fitting a host of organizational settings (Gioia & Poole 1984, p. 450).

Scripts are constructed from “vignettes” which are “basic representation[s] of an event and can involve individuals, behaviors, or contexts”; together several interrelated vignettes comprises a “scene” upon which a script related to a specific situation is built. Interestingly, however, not all scripts are the same and have been categorized by Abelson (1981) as weak or strong scripts (Ibid, p.450). The distinction between the two is that while weak scripts can “organize expectations about the behaviors of others or oneself...they do not specify the exact sequence of these behaviors” while strong scripts “contain expectations not only for the occurrence of events, but also for the progressive sequence of events [as is the case with] stereotypical and ritualistic occasions” (Ibid, p. 450).

From where do scripts emerge? At its heart, script acquisition involves experience. Thus, as people interact with and observe one another in particular

settings a script develops built on an internalization of observable “rewards and reinforcement” associated with particular behaviours, which, when repeated enough, facilitates the acquisition of a script that can be repeatedly relied upon in similar interactions or situations. And while direct experience is one way in which a script is acquired, scripts can also be “transferred” via indirect experience through observing the modelling of “the right script for behaviour in certain situations [in] a learning-by-example [mode]” (Ibid, p. 451). Hence once individuals engage in this sense-making process they perform a script as expressed in specific behaviours that appropriately match the expectations of the situation. Interestingly, given that “scripts aid in both the understanding and performance of conventional activities” they are also by extension essential in decision-making in which

prior experiences relevant to the current situation is likely to be remembered schematically. The decision-maker by use of a recalled decision script, has structured expectations not only about the appropriate process to be used to make the decision but also about the likely subsequent events that will result from the decision being considered (Gioia & Poole 1984, p. 454).

What does this mean for individuals as they go through their daily interactions both privately and in public? In any given setting individuals are acutely aware that there is a corresponding expected performance that they can actively conjure while equally aware that they are “performing” though this awareness varies depending on the setting (i.e.: performances in a ritualistic setting appears more “naturally” than those in a new setting in which the individual is less familiar with the corresponding script requirements) (Goffman

1959). Scripted decision-making, however, is not always “good decision-making” as it does not always fully capture the uniqueness of a given situation. In addition, as Gioia & Poole (1984) describe scripted decision-making is affected by several key factors including:

- 1- Action typicality: which describes the degree to which the “typicality” of a situation “evokes scripted behaviour” (p. 455).
- 2- Priming: which describes the way in which “perceived purpose for information processing tends to cause script selection bias” (p. 455).
- 3- Self- concept: which describes the way in which the “need to preserve self-esteem can cause script selection bias” (p. 455).
- 4- Information complexity: the more information appears complex the more likely the enactment of a protoscript.
- 5- Activation frequency: the more a particular script is enacted the more this enactment becomes “automatic”.
- 6- Activation recency: the more recently a particular script is enacted “the more accessible in memory” (p. 455).

Thus, taken together an organization can be conceived of as one of the stages of the “public” space upon which individuals are not only aware of the expected performance delineated by the corresponding script, they also feel accountable for that performance. Ultimately, “most scripts (perhaps all) have goal attainment as an objective” that can be understood in terms of implicit and explicit reward/punishment systems that have a direct impact on an individual’s

“social world” and the configuration of the relationships within them including both the public and private spheres of life (Poole, Gray, Gioia 1990, p. 212).

From Sustainability to Scripts: Summary

This section began with an exploration of sustainability and the multiple ways with which discourse has defined sustainability and the changes necessary for its achievement. Given the dominance of organizations in individual lives operationalizing sustainability necessitates an understanding of the role of organizations in achieving society’s sustainability goals, which is best understood from the perspective of institutional theory. However, at the centre of organizations are individuals whose daily interactions within and outside organizations are governed by the decisions these interactions entail and their consequences for both individuals and organizations. Understanding this decision-making process and the interplay of individuals and their organizational contexts emerges from an appreciation for how the public-private spheres each delineate specific scripts that govern interaction. More specifically the question now becomes how and why do individuals, and particularly women, acquire particular scripts? How do they view and acquire access to and legitimacy on particular stages but not others? Answering these requires that we first delve into the woman question and its evolution in discussions of work and organizations.

Women, Work & Organizations

Introduction

The present section begins with an overview of the ‘woman question’ as addressed from the multiple perspectives offered by the first, second, and third waves of the feminist schools of thought. More specifically how these undertook to address women’s positions in organizations in terms of career barriers and facilitators and the underlying causes of these as well as the different perspectives on the kinds of reforms needed to lessen the barriers to women’s progression in organizations.

“The time is long overdue for women to dream the possible dream... In the future, there will be no female leaders there will just be leaders... Women systematically underestimate their own abilities... It’s hard to visualize someone as a leader if she is always waiting to be told what to do. Fear is the root of so many barriers that women face... Fear of not being liked. Fear of drawing negative attention. Fear of overreaching. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure... If we want a world with greater equality, we need to acknowledge that women are less likely to keep their hands up... I believe if more women lean in we can change the power structure of our world and expand opportunities for all”; with these words Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, became an icon and celebrated voice speaking on behalf of all women when her book “Lean In” became an overnight sensation in 2013 (Sandberg & Scovell 2017, p. 5, 9, 15). And it was no surprise; here was a woman at the helm of one of the most powerful companies in the world, a loving wife and mother, providing a long-

awaited explanation for why women don't make it to the top asserting that women hold *themselves* back. The solution? Equally simple: women must teach themselves to "sit at the table" and lean into their careers and if enough women do this, then surely their exclusion from decision-making and the top ranks of organizations will become a distant memory.

A simple problem with a simple solution the best part of which is; it came from a woman, and who better than a woman who has made it to the top? Sandberg is not alone, nor at fault, but rather a symbol of the way in which the "woman question" was detached from a long, convoluted, multidisciplinary history to become a reduced narrative engrained in popular culture ("western" popular culture at least) and touted as "absolute", objective, universal truth that is informing organizational decisions through various programs, initiatives, and even structural changes. That Sheryl Sandberg would be a feminist icon is symbolic; this thesis is undertaken at a time when "pop feminism" is presented as an alternative to the "other" kinds of "feminisms" that appear much more morose and confined to the limited circles of scholars and activists. However, if we are to meaningfully contribute to the conversation about women it is important that we first understand the evolution of the historical positioning of the "woman question" within, across, and outside discourse. Choosing a particular point from which to start this exploration is challenging and hence we will travel across different historical standpoints throughout this section.

Women in organizations became a focal point of exploration when the taken

for grantedness nature of the assumption that women are excluded from the top levels of organizations came under fierce questioning; a movement spearheaded by second wave feminists. Whether heeding their call for action, or attempting to shred their arguments, by the late 1970s and early 1980s discourse was brimming with discussion that acknowledged that the status quo could no longer serve as a foundational assumption. Turning to the experiences of women in organizations the conversation moved towards understanding the hallmarks of women's disadvantage and particularly their exclusion from the male-dominated realms of power at the top of organizations (Billing & Alvesson 1989). And while research on this area has been prolific and rich, they can be classified into three main lines of argument

- 1- The equal opportunities perspective: this view asserts the historical exclusion of women from access to power and resources is then reflected in their exclusion from top positions in organizations. In addressing this there are two approaches; one that views the differences between the genders as an issue that can be addressed with certain mechanisms that would alter the status quo in time much like affirmative action, and another that views that the differences between the genders don't necessitate any "special treatment" rather a more conscious approach to gender balance in organizations.
- 2- The meritocratic perspective: the central concern of this line of argument is the departure from discussions of social inequality and the

directed focus on “the idea that society would benefit if it widened the pool from which it was selecting people to place in positions of power. A central assumption is thus that “people move freely up and down the occupational hierarchy, according to personal merit and to the contribution they can make to the organization in which they work and to society as a whole...organizations will thus look for qualifications and disregard gender, class, background, religion” (Billing & Alvesson 1989, p. 69).

- 3- Women can contribute something special: central to this view is the idea that women, for a variety of reasons, bring unique characteristics, abilities, and qualifications that make them more suited to some jobs than men and organizations should therefore consider the gender perspective for particular roles. This would then allow women to achieve their highest potential in the roles that are best suited to their “unique” abilities.

From the perspective of feminist theory the above themes of women in management discourse are insufficient, as they appear superficial at best and reductionist at worst. For feminist discourse, there is no consistent line of argument on the “woman question” if justice is not rooted in the fundamental belief that change in the status of women is a social and moral imperative. Fully exploring these issues is beyond the scope of the present thesis, however, presently it is sufficient to draw from Lorber (2001) who

proposed that feminist theory could be divided into three frameworks as follows:

- 1- Gender reform feminism: departing from the idea that men and women have more in common than differences, this framework enables the understanding of comparisons between the sexes in terms of inequality that sees gender as a variable and in turn “women” as a separate category of research (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Lorber, 2001; Kark 2004 in Omair 2008).
- 2- Gender resistance feminism: here differences between the sexes are celebrated. This framework “stresses the importance of women’s voice, and experiences that contribute to an effective management style. They emphasize the positive value of qualities identified in women (e.g. sensitive, supportive and emotionally expressive), and highlight the benefits of women’s ways of knowing (e.g. intuitive, non-verbal and spiritual) (Jagger, 1983)” (Omair 2008, p. 110).
- 3- Gender rebellion feminism: this is the most “radical” of the frameworks since it rejects the focus on the “female advantage” and instead calls for challenging the way that gender is constructed. It focuses on “the relationship between knowledge, discourse, language and power, revealing the ways in which the theories privilege stereotypically masculine attributes and demonstrating how the gendered assumptions underlying the theories can limit our understanding of organizations”

(Mumby and Putnam, 1992; Omair 2008, p.111).

Interestingly, the different lines of argument that have dominated discussions of women in organizations have converged on the acknowledgement that the “uniqueness” of the “woman question” necessitates a closer look at the way in which women’s experiences are “dynamic, continuously shaped by the multiple identities she holds, such as based on her religion or family role” (Charmes & Wieringa 2003 in Syed 2010, p. 291). These dynamic overlapping identities uniquely position women in places where they face “acute family-work conflict causing them to simultaneously shy away from aggressively pursuing promotion opportunities as well as them being passed over for such positions particularly given that the decision-makers are predominantly male” (Lyness & Heilman 2006; Hoobler et al. 2009; Heilman 2012). This idea re-emerged in the literature with a popularized label: the glass ceiling understood as “women’s inability to rise up the ranks of organizational hierarchies that can’t be attributed to differences in education, experience and/or any other qualifications” (Cotter et al. 2001). Consequently, for the first time, attention shifted specifically towards the progression of women to top management and the role that attitudinal bias could be playing (Powell & Butterfield 1992). While the term glass ceiling became a popular one, the term “glass house” was also coined to refer to the horizontal and vertical biases women face, where they are not only excluded from top managerial

positions but are also pressured to conform to “male-centric” organization cultures that compel them to conform to particular behavioural patterns at the threat of further exclusion from advancement opportunities (Jain & Mukhreji 2010).

Hence, attention shifted to identifying facilitators of women’s career advancement that suggested that women benefitted from education and training opportunities, mentorship, and changes in organization structures that allowed women to expand their networks. And while these have been extensively investigated they have been more focused on the advancement of women from lower to mid-level managerial positions and less on their movement towards the top. Interestingly, one possible explanation for this is the notion of social capital vs. human capital. Adler and Izraeli (1994) suggested that women’s human capital in the form of education

...gives them access to the lower levels of management and that women’s lack of social networks prevents them from advancing to the higher levels. Women’s entry into the lower management levels has been accompanied by a decreasing supply of qualified men for those positions... women have failed to gain access to executive positions partly because there continues to be a supply of men for these relatively scarce and well-remunerated positions. At the higher managerial levels social networks are important in allowing members of the group (i.e., men) access- and in preventing nonmembers (i.e., women) access- to information and advancement opportunities (Portes, 1998). It is this social capital that has been used to explain differences in achievement between individuals with similar human capital. It is expected, therefore, that human capital is important to gain entry to low (i.e., supervisory and junior) management levels and social capital to advance to high managerial levels (i.e., middle and senior management) (Metz 2001, p. 314).

Thus, belonging to social networks enables women to receive career

encouragement from colleagues and superiors, provides mentor support, and helps women gain legitimacy, credibility, and information about career opportunities at the top managerial levels (Adler & Izraeli 1994, Ibarra 1997, Dreyfus, Lee & Totta 1995, Burt 1998, Schor 1997, Rusaw 1996, Metz 2001). And consequently, social capital in the form of “mentor support, networks, career encouragement, comfort level of the decision maker, and personal tactics used to get a promotion...assist women to overcome the obstacles and social isolation encountered at high managerial levels” (Metz 2001, p. 317).

In understanding women’s “condition” in organizations a rich body of literature emerged that explored the ways in which women’s private lives in the form of family commitments influenced their public lives at work and vice versa. From this emerged several key concepts that set the parameters for exploring the work-family dynamic of women, which are summarized by Edwards & Rothbard (2000) as follows:

- 1- Spillover: which defines the way in which the impact in one domain as expressed in terms of affect, values, skills and behaviours spills over across the two in ways that facilitate an isomorphism between the two.
- 2- Compensation: which explains the relationship between satisfaction in one area and behaviour associated with seeking satisfaction in the other as expressed in “a reallocation of importance, time, or attention” (p. 181).
- 3- Segmentation: which describes the extent to which a division is

maintained between work and family and the rigidity of that division

“such that the two domains do not affect one another” (p.181).

- 4- Resource drain: which describes the way in which “finite personal resources such as time, attention, and energy” are transferred from one domain to the other and the decisions involved in this transfer.
- 5- Congruence that “refers to similarity between work and family owing to a third variable that acts as a common cause ...including personality traits, general behavioural styles and social and cultural forces” (p. 182).
- 6- Work-family conflict: which emerges when the role expectations at work are irreconcilable with those at home rooted in “expectations expressed by work and family role senders as well as from values held by the person regarding his or her own work and family role behaviour” (p. 182). This conflict can be expressed in terms of a time-based conflict that is centred around the ability to devote time to one area without impacting time in another, strain-based conflict which describes a kind of spillover of dissatisfaction in one area to the other, and behaviour-based conflict in which “behaviours developed in one domain are incompatible with role demands in the other domain and the person is unable to adjust behaviour when moving between domains” (p. 182).

Conclusion

From the above discussion there emerge several overarching themes of the many possible ways of discussing women in organizations. And indeed the

possibilities of how work and family roles are navigated appear endless though at the heart of each is the idea of an expected role performance; an important idea given previous discussion of the role of individual decision making both within and outside organizations. However, within our discussion up to this point lies the implied assumption that a woman is a woman and all women are alike; that being a woman is a universal experience with biology as a starting point for dictating all the elements of womanhood. But, what *really* “makes” a woman? And how universal is that experience?

The Being, the Doing, and the Crossroads of Womanhood

Introduction

We now turn multiple dimensions that constitute the category ‘woman’ beginning with a discussion of gender and specifically the way in which gender is, rather than being a static state of being is in fact a dynamic act of doing that is accomplished upon the performance of specific scripts that are acquired in multiple ways. In this light discussion then turns to organizations themselves and how they are gendered given that they are the stage upon which these multiple performances take shape impacting everything from structures and hierarchies, to jobs and performance-expectations, and interactions among workers in ways that dynamically influence reproduction of scripts and role-performance expectations of women.

Gender: Between Construction and Performance

Discussion of women in organizations has long been intertwined with

discussions of gender. Bredahl (1996) contends that

...gender is culturally constructed, whereas sex is biologically defined. Gender refers to the social-psychological categories of masculinity and femininity, and sex...the biological categories of male and female. Both scholarly and popular conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Bem 1981; Gilligan 1982; Spence & Helmreich 1974; Williams & Best 1990) treat the constructs as distinct and complementary...(p..23).

Taking this further Scott (1986) explains that

the core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions; gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (in Acker 1990, p.145).

Consequently, the “gender” discussion appears to be straightforward; we live in a binary world of two sexes that are determined by the presence of distinct biological signals that are accompanied by undeniable differences between the sexes. From here emerged the idea that “gender was certainly fixed, unvarying and static” in its relation to the undeniable facts brought about by observations of biology (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 126). And thus, gender is a *state of being* constructed around the consequences of a biology-determined reality the implications of which has historically varied across and within societies in different contexts. And while this view dominated discourse for decades, a new perspective emerged when it became increasingly apparent that “the relationship between biological and cultural processes was far more complex- and reflexive...Reducing gender to a fixed set of psychological traits or to a unitary “variable” precludes serious consideration of the ways it is used

to structure distinct domains of social experience” (Ibid, p. 126). Hence, given these concerns, a more nuanced view is one that sees “men and women as distinct social groups, constituted in concrete, historically changing- and generally unequal- social relationships” (Thorne 1980 in West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 126). For Goffman (1976) as individuals interact with one another they are governed by the implicit assumption that they

...each possess an ‘essential nature’ - a nature that can be discerned through the natural signs given off or expressed by them. Femininity and masculinity are regarded as prototypes of essential expression- something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual. The means through which we provide such expressions are “perfunctory, conventionalized acts” (1976, p. 69), which convey to others our regard for them, indicate our alignment in an encounter, and tentatively establish the terms of contact for that social situation. But they are also regarded as expressive behaviour, testimony to our essential nature (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 129).

And thus, rather than a static state of being, gender is a dynamic *act of doing*; a social script that is produced and reproduced in special locations as a “dramatization of the culture’s *idealization* of feminine and masculine natures, played for an audience that is well schooled in the presentational idiom” (Ibid, p.130). This begs the question: what does “doing” gender entail?

The accomplishment of gender necessitates that one “produce configurations of behavior” that can be perceived by others to be gender normative (Ibid, p.134). Doing so requires the display of gender in particular situations *and* making needed alterations to suit specific occasions. And hence “doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the

particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate” (Ibid, p.130). Taking this further, if we contend that as individuals interact with one another they are acutely aware that they are not only observed but also subject to comment from others then it follows that “actions are often designed with an eye to their accountability, that is, how they might look and how they might be characterized” (Ibid, p.136). Consequently, our sex category serves as the ever-present backdrop as we *perform* in social scripts; and for every role we play we are

...held accountable for that performance as a woman or a man and [our] incumbency in one or the other sex category can be used to legitimate or discredit [our] activities... Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the “essentialness” of gender...Any social encounter can be pressed into service in the interests of doing gender (Ibid, p.136, 138).

In our efforts to achieve gender as we perform the multiple elements of our identity we inevitably contribute to the gendered production of particular institutional arrangements within the broader social order such as the division of labour. And in what is akin to a vicious circle; the inevitable *doing* of gender creates differences between men and women with social arrangements reflecting those differences in a way that makes those differences appear natural and as such “the institutional arrangements of a society can be seen as responsive to the differences [and] the social order being merely an accommodation to the natural order” in turn further reinforcing the created differences in an endless cycle (Ibid 138). The resultant social order and

institutional arrangements were such that men had access to power and resources that women did not; a subordination that carried outside the walls of the home and into organizations. In the words of Frye (1983):

For efficient subordination what's wanted is that the structure not appear to be a cultural artefact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appear natural- that it appear to be quite direct consequences of facts...beyond the scope of human manipulation...That we are trained to behave so differently as women and men, and to behave so differently toward women and men, itself contributes mightily to the appearance of extreme dimorphism, but also, the *ways* we act as women and men, and the ways we act toward women and men, mould our bodies and our minds to the shape of subordination and dominance. We do become what we practice (Ibid, p. 34).

Where does this leave gender and organizations? Are organizations only mirrors that passively reflect what happens outside of their walls? Or are they the stage upon which men and women perform the roles ascribed to them in broader society? And if so can we actively change the stage, the actors, or both so that we may produce a different “script”? Exploring these questions and the positioning of gender in organizations necessitates that we re-examine the evolution of the construct “organization”.

One perspective sees “organizations as gender neutral...it is argued that gendered attitudes and behaviours are brought into (and contaminate) essentially gender-neutral structures...certainly a gender-neutral structure is also asexual. If sexuality is a core component of gender identity, gender images and gender inequality, organizational theory [is also] blind to sexuality” (Acker 1990, p. 142). Sacred to this genderless, asexual organization is rationality and

reason that in turn construct bureaucracy with its own dynamic, rules and procedures seen as the ultimate expression of rationality (Hartmann 1976; Kanter 1977; Young 1981). This in turn sets the stage “for the organization of power, bureaucrats, workers” (Acker 1990, p. 143) along an ethic that values such traits as a “tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interest of task accomplishment; a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision making” (Kanter 1975 p. 43). These are, however, not genderless traits, but very much rooted in a masculine ethic that values traits distinctively ascribed to men and in opposition to those attributed to women. Though the gender-neutral view of organizations dominated discourse for decades, it failed to account for the persistent subordination of women, gender segregation and “the structure of the labour market, relations in the control of the work process, and the underlying wage relation[s]” (Acker 1990, p. 145).

An alternative view is one posited by Joan Acker (1988-1990) who suggested that organizations are in fact gendered. In her view:

To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing process, which cannot be properly understood without analysis of gender (Acker 1990, p.146).

The gendering of organizations takes place over several processes. To begin with, it is perpetuated in the organizing processes where “inequalities are built

into job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the workplace, and rules, both explicit and implicit at work” (Acker 2012, p. 215). This also seeps into organizational culture with gender divisions along power, and particularly the means of maintaining the division, acceptable behaviour, locations in physical space and even “the belief that equality exists when measures of wage differences and segregation, for example, indicate that equality is far from a reality...a culture of denial and invisibility of inequities perpetuates the inequities” (Acker 2012, p. 216). This division and its consequences are furthered through symbols and images that are constructed such that they “explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose those divisions...language, ideology, popular and high culture, dress...” (Acker 1990, p.146). Hence, even interactions on the job produce and reproduce gendered substructure where “interactions may belittle or exclude women, particularly in male dominated groups. Sexuality may complicate working relationships. Whether it is exploitative or consensual, just joking or harassing, sexuality is a clear confirmation of gender difference” (Acker 2012, p. 216). Most importantly, gendered identities are a fundamental component of the gendered substructure of organizations which are brought to the workplace by individuals and reconstructed in it with fundamental questions about what it means to be a man or woman on the job scrutinized in the interactions among “women and men, women and women, men and men, including all those patterns that enact dominance and submission” (Ibid, p.147).

Consequently, gender, rather than being an intruder on the genderless organization or an outside structure reflected in organizational fabric, is in fact “implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures [it] is a constitutive element in organizational logic...the underlying assumptions and practices that construct most contemporary work organizations” (Clegg & Dunkerley 1980 in Acker 1990, p. 147). The legacy of the genderless organization discourse is a set of deeply rooted assumptions about jobs, evaluation systems, and hierarchies the abstraction of which is central to organizational logic, where there are “no human bodies, no gender...filling the abstract job is a disembodied worker who exists only for the work. Such a hypothetical worker cannot have other imperatives of existence that impinge upon the job. Too many obligations outside the boundaries of the job would make a worker unsuited for the position” (Ibid, p. 149). Hence, we begin to see the gendered nature of jobs, hierarchies, and in turn organizations that organizational logic posits is gender neutral. The abstract conception of a “job” necessitates an individual whose public and private life is rigidly separated, who, because of this ability to be *unwaveringly* committed to the job, is capable of assuming increasing responsibility (and thereby move up the hierarchy with increasingly complex tasks). This “abstract, bodiless worker...occupies gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate” (Ibid, p.151). The closest we can ever get to such an ideal “worker” is a man who is capable of devoting his life fully and for a long time to his job with minimum disruption *because* there

will *always* be a woman at the helm of his private life; tending to his and his children's needs. As such our construction of jobs and organizations is tailored to the male body and the masculine identity.

Where does this leave women with their “bodies- female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding, and child care, menstruation, and mythic emotionality”? (p.152). The inability of women to be more like the disembodied genderless worker with their divided loyalty between the organization- and more legitimately- the home, and their sexuality that renders gender segregation “natural” in “skilled blue-collar work or top management, where most workers are men, on the grounds that potentially disruptive sexual liaisons should be avoided” partially accounts for why women remain low in the organizational hierarchy (Ibid, p.152). And should a biological woman, acting as a social man, fall through the cracks and reach the top she is paraded as a token who is the exception to the norm (Acker 1990). The danger of this parading is the touting of these women's experiences as evidence that the problem does not lie with the system, that the genderless organization and its logic are flawless, and that the exclusion of most women is their individual fault and testament to their weaknesses. After all, if the system was unforgiving how could these few tokens make it to the top? And with that men, women, organizations and society are absolved of the responsibility to not only delve deeper but also attempt any kind of reform; after all there is “nothing” to be reformed.

Conclusion

The discussion of the ‘woman’ category explored the way in which gender is a performance accomplished by a performer who is not only aware of the role performance expectation but also feels accountable for it. And given the dominance of organizations in our lives, ‘work’ is not genderless but rather an important stage upon which gender is accomplished (and in many ways mirroring the performances of the private realm of the home). However, it is important to acknowledge at this point that the discussion thus far has implied that we have told the story of *all* women. As if the doing of gender set against the backdrop of a gendered organization and fuelling a cycle of subordination is *universally* shared and experienced by all women in the *same* way. However, if we are to do justice to the gender discussion then we must ask “which women’s experience?” (Shields 2008, p. 302).

Gender, Intersectionality & the Many Ways of Being

Introduction

If gender is a performance then do all women face the same role-performance expectation? What determines the role performance expected from each woman on every set including that of the organization in which her career takes place? Answering these questions necessitates that we explore the many layers of identity that constitute women’s social lives and how these overlap in specific ways as explored from the perspective of intersectionality the evolution

of which is discussed in the present section.

Intersectionality: An Overview

In 1863, Sojourner Truth, a black abolitionist and women's rights activist, stood before a crowd at a Women's Rights Convention in Ohio and asked:

What's all this talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed (sic), I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much...as any man... and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?" (in Brah & Phoenix 2004, p 75).

With these words Sojourner Truth asked what would become the central question of feminist thought a century later; what does it mean to be a woman? When, where, and how does this "womanness" take centre stage and when does it take the backseat to other areas of identity (such as "blackness" in her case)? In order to fully appreciate the magnitude of this question and the implications of trying to answer it we must first visit the evolution of feminist thought.

From the outset, it is important to assert that there is not one feminism but rather many feminisms. And yet at their core they are all concerned with the position of women in general and their marginalization in particular with "inequality in gender central to all behavior" (Irefin & Ifah 2012, p.8). How this marginalization was defined, expressed, and addressed is where the multiple feminisms have offered different perspectives. These perspectives emerged in movements akin to "waves" with first wave feminism emerging from the heart

of women's movements in the mid 19th century with a strong political agenda calling for women's "basic political rights". Third wave feminism then emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s with a focus on equality in the multiple arenas of women's public and private lives.

As second wave feminists carried the torch of first wave feminism its aim was to unify the women's movement based on a common sisterhood built on suffering the same injustice. However, it was this very essentialism and downplaying of differences among women that fuelled heavy critique of second wave feminism as characterized by "a pretence to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist...white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age" (Lorde 2000 in Mann & Huffman 2005, p. 59). The essentialist view of second wave feminism also meant a view of "multiple and simultaneous oppressions" in one of two ways; one that "treated multiple oppressions as separate and distinct or what ...critics called...additive approach to multiple oppressions. The second hierarchized oppressions or treated one form as more fundamental than another" (Mann & Huffman 2005, p. 60). This critique heralded the era of early third wave feminism.

As the questioning of the "global sisterhood" gained momentum in the 1970's with more feminists and scholars of colour pointing out that "most feminist scholarship at that time was about middle-class, educated, white women" (Sheilds 2008, p. 302), the call for a more inclusive view of women

enabled the acknowledgement of the ways in which “social positions and group membership overlap and change the experience of social identity”, where identity refers to the “social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories” (Ibid, p.303, 301). Consequently, discourse witnessed the birth of what has been dubbed as the most profound legacy of second wave feminism; intersectionality (Collins 1990).

What had been considered feminisms of “otherness” such as Africana feminisms or Black Feminist Thought or Women of Colour Feminism was rearticulated by the work of Patricia Hill Collins who called it intersectionality theory representing a

...new feminist epistemology and a social constructionist view of knowledge that linked identities, standpoints and social locations in a matrix of domination. [She describes]: the overarching matrix of domination houses multiple groups, each with varying experiences with penalty and privilege that produce corresponding partial perspectives [and] situated knowledge...No one group has a clear angle of vision. No one group possesses the theory or methodology that allows it to discover the absolute ‘truth’ or, worse yet, proclaim its theories and methodologies as the universal norm evaluating other groups’ experiences (Collins 1990, p. 234 in Mann & Huffman 2005 p. 62).

Hence, at the heart of intersectionality is the questioning of “what it means to be a woman under different historical circumstances” (Brah & Phoenix 2004, p. 76) with the acknowledgment of “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation –

economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (p.76). It then follows that the social life of individuals is multidimensional with multiple identities that can’t be separated but are rather interlocking in ways that are “unique for each individual (as they) construct novel and distinctive experiences” (Parent et al. 2013 in Corlett & Mavin 2014, p. 76). Hence, understanding the interplay of the different categories that constitute multiple identities became central.

For Collins (1990) we can conceive of each category as the different forms of exercising power within historically dependent contexts that create a “matrix of domination” with various interlocking oppressions (Collins 1990, p. 261). As such understanding women’s experiences necessitates an understanding of the ways in which gender and other identities intersect with other categories and “therefore qualitatively change the experience of gender” (Warner & Shields 2013, p. 804-805). Various definitions of identity exist. Watson (2008) views the self as “the individual’s own notion of who he/she is becoming and social identities as the cultural phenomena related to various social categories existing societally and are, in effect, ‘inputs’ into self-identities“ (p.131). For Beech (2008, 2011) social-identities “consist of the self’s projections towards others, others’ projections towards the self and reactions to received projections and are “‘sites’ in which people draw on and are imposed on by external discourses” (in Corlett & Mavin, 2014 p. 265). According to Shields (2008) social identities:

mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalise one another. By *mutually constitute* I mean that one category of identity, such as gender, takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category. By *reinforce* I mean that the formation and maintenance of identity categories is a dynamic process in which the individual [...] is actively engaged [...]. By *naturalise* I mean that identities in one category come to be seen as self-evident or “basic” through the lens of another category (Shields, 2008, p. 302 in Corlett and Mavin 2014 p. 265).

Consequently, individuals are continuously engaged in a “dynamic, emergent and on-going process of becoming” as they negotiate and renegotiate the positions of the various categories of their social identities (Shields 2008, p. 308). At the heart of this process of categorizing oneself and reacting to the categorization by others is a negotiation and renegotiation of power and privilege that is central to the way in which individuals exercise agency. And hence intersectionality

first and foremost reflects the reality of lives...there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others...Which components of intersectionality are in the foreground and which in the background and how those constituent identities are seen to articulate (Shields 2008, p. 304).

Thus, intersectionality rejects the viewing of gender (or any similar grouping) as a single, independent, category of analysis and instead mandates that intragroup differences at particular (often-neglected) points of intersection provide the pillars upon which we build our inquiry into any group particularly marginalized ones (Shields 2008). Looking at women:

...the differences within the “class” of women: racism, sexism, class oppression intersect in their everyday daily lives

but they seldom do in feminist practices...considering how the social world is constructed we cannot study gender in isolation from other inequalities nor can we only study inequalities' intersection and ignore the historical and contextual specificity that distinguishes the mechanisms that produce inequality by different categorical divisions (Shields 2008, p. 404).

Thus, emerged the “triad of race, class, and gender” as a framework for understanding neglected points of intersection in the experiences of women (p. 404). Yet, beyond an acknowledgement of the dynamic interaction of social identities and the consequent production and reproduction of systems of privilege and oppression, intersectionality has emerged as a “major paradigm of research” particularly where women are at the centre of enquiry (McCall 2005, p. 1771).

Conclusion

Intersectionality makes it almost impossible to ignore the determinants of the unique social position of individuals by virtue of the complex interaction of the various categories of their identity and particularly their *own* construction and reconstruction of their view of themselves even as it interacts with others' views of them. How does this sensitivity to, and acknowledgement of, the indivisibleness of the various layers of identity particularly at neglected points of intersection, in the construction of the Arab woman's reality in organizations from *her* perspective? Answering this question is a rare occurrence in discourse (and a formidable motivation for the present thesis) as will be explored in the coming section.

Arab Women in Management Research

Introduction

Earlier discussion explored the interaction of multiple layers of identity that qualitatively changes each woman's experience of gender and the role performance expectations as they interact with their organizations. We now turn more specifically to Arab women who are at the centre of the present thesis and explore where and how they have featured in light of the discussion thus far.

The present section provides an overview of Arab women as described specifically in management discourse and explains how this thesis contributes to the emergent picture of Arab women pursuing management careers.

Women in the Arab World: An Overview

Postcolonial feminists point to the ways in which

...women in the third world often have been essentialized in Western feminist thought. The application of the notion of women as a homogenous category to women in the third world colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous locations of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency (Mohanty 2000, p. 349).

Before we delve further the reader is to remain mindful of the discussion in Chapter One on the meaning of "Arabness". An Arab living in the Arab world in 2017 is one of more than 400 million people, the majority of whom are below the age of 30 and braving one of the most violently turbulent times of the century (World Bank Report, 2016). And while the Arab world is

no stranger to political instability, the fateful events of the September 11 attacks in the United States marked a fundamental shift in the portrayal of the Arab region to the world while also catalysing seismic shifts in the way the Arab world grappled with questioning its own identity.

Today, the Arab world is one of many contradictions; it is simultaneously home to some of the richest countries and the poorest; those that are liberal and those that are vehemently religious; those who have enjoyed decades of political stability and those for whom war has raged for decades; those in which illiteracy is rampant and others where it is a thing of the past; and those who have turned inwards and those who have turned to the world with open arms. Some of these countries that are polar opposites are separated by a border that in several places looms at the end of only a half hour journey by car. And yet, in spite of an incredible number of existing realities across and within each country, more than 400 million people are reduced to a single narrative; an amalgamation of fragments of stories heavily rooted in a colonial past and justified by the presence of a common history, a single language and a dominant religion. This narrative's stubborn persistence is sustained by the absence of the Arab world from the centre of hegemony outside and within discourse. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the Arab woman.

Much like the countries of the Arab world, the "Arab woman" has been a highly contested, claimed and reclaimed presence in multiple discourses. Whether she is viewed with a touch of orientalist curiosity or pursued with the

zeal of a self-proclaimed hero charging to the rescue of a victim (and all that's in between), Arab women, at least in management discourse, have been spoken for and about, but rarely do the speaking and in that way, their stories, when told, have been rewritten such that it is no longer their own:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the centre of my talk (Hooks 1990 in Ferguson et al. pp 241).

How this has transpired, and where it leaves Arab women in light of our earlier discussion of sustainability, organizations and intersectionality is explored in the rest of this section.

The Arab woman has been described in numerous ways, though all within a common theme; chained by tradition and bound by religion Arab women are portrayed as weak, inferior, marginalized who “hardly leave their houses” (Omair 2008, p. 107) let alone dream of “taking the first step in the road to genuine equal rights and opportunity” (Abdalla 1996, p. 37). Ironically, this exclusion and deprivation describes to some extent the position of Arab women in management discourse. Arab women as a focal point of enquiry in management research have been pursued as a novelty at best (finding a warmer welcome in the social sciences) or one of the many groups that form part of the category “others” delineating anyone outside of a “dominant Eurocentric paradigm of gender that...suffers from a secular and capitalist bias” (Sikdar &

Mitra 2012, pp. 292). Hence, “Arab women have suffered from a triple bias; male bias, class bias, and a western bias. This is true not only for Arab women in general, but [especially] those in management” (Abdel Kader 1987 in Omair 2008, p. 108). As one management professor asked early in my research process: why does the experience of Arab women matter?

Close to 49.7% of the Arab population are young women (World Bank Report, 2016) who seem to suffer the “largest mismatch between [levels of] education and work participation in the world” (Abdalla 2015, p. 218). Thus, in a world where 55.2 % of women participated in the global economy “a mere 29 percent of Arab women participated in the national economies of the Arab region” (Omair 2008, p. 108). And the largest gender gaps in the participation rate in the labour force is in countries where women were not only highly educated but also more educated than men, they were the least active in the labour force (UNDP 2013). The future of the Arab world is relying on less than half of its population; and the half sitting on the side-lines of its development efforts is the one whose education has cost billions of dollars. Returning to our earlier definition of sustainability that calls for a future where humanity not only survives but also flourishes “for time immemorial”, especially in a region where some of its key players will be looking forward to rebuilding themselves hopefully in the next decade, only magnifies the urgency of utilizing every available resource rather than searching for new ones (Ehrenfeld 2000, p. 6-7). And in that spirit, the Arab future, if not for the sake of justice but for the sake

of prosperity, *must be* female.

The careers of Arab women have an interesting history. While their recorded work activities date as far back as the Early Islamic era (with the wife of the Prophet Muhammad being one of a few notable exceptions of women entrepreneurs from Pre-Islam) these activities have “traditionally been carried out in exclusively female circumstances” (Omair 2008, p.108). This has carried over to present times with women “engaged in sectors that are traditionally female: nursing, teaching and clerical work” (p.108). Thus, women’s education, which is encouraged and even seen as a social necessity, has prepared women for specific careers that have become overcrowded and partially explaining the “low percentage of women participating in the labour force [as] mainly attributable to a lack of employment opportunities rather than a lack of interest” (p.108). A fuller picture of the careers of Arab women, and their presence in some arenas and absence in others necessitates that we visit a prominent feature of discourse on the region; the role of Islam, culture and tradition.

While discussion of the intricacies of Islam as a religion of countless sects and schools of thought is beyond the scope of this thesis it is important to note that while Islam is a dominant religion in the region it is not the only one. That Islam seems to appear in every discussion of the region (whereas, for example, Christianity or Judaism is not as prominent in discussions of “Western” companies) is due to the fact that Islamic tradition is heavily intertwined with cultural practices or “Urf” (many of which are rooted in pre-

Islamic history) such that it can no longer “be understood as a religion *per se*, but rather as the dominant identity factor in a complex cultural milieu” (Metle 2002, p. 247). Therefore, separating Islam from the culture of people of the Arab world is no easy task and as such Al-Hibri (1982) suggested distinguishing

between Islam, Islamic tradition and culture. The purpose of this distinction is not to ease the confusion in the conceptualization of Islam, but rather to facilitate an understanding of the line between patriarchy and Islam. Several writers seem to agree that the existing gender inequality is not due to Islam, but to a patriarchal interpretation of Islam...it is not so much the religion, but the interpretation of Islamic doctrines that has the most significant effect on its followers (p. 117).

And in many cases the ambiguities surrounding Islamic materials (religious texts and teachings) that are the basis of Shari’a law whose presence is felt to varying degrees in the legal systems of most Arab countries has given way to many of the practices erroneously ascribed to the religion itself (Omair 2008, p. 117). One legacy of this, that is central to the present thesis, is the way in which the role of family and by extension women has taken shape in the Arab world:

Family permeates society upward and outward, personalizing different societal institutions in a way not found in the West (Alajmi, 2001). For Arabs, the family lies at the core of society playing a major role in political, economic, social and religious spheres with people being highly conscious of each others’ family memberships, identities and status (McElwee & Al-Riyami 2003) (Omair 2008, p. 117).

Thus, understanding the “Arab” individual, be it a man or woman, necessitates sensitivity to the complex intricacies and many nuances that shape

their identity. This is especially significant in the case of Arab women as the many layers of their identity unfold and intersect in countless settings. Rizzo et al. (2007) asserts that a “better understanding of the difference in gender equality in this region needs to consider tribal, Arab and nation-related conservative customs rather than simply relegate to a matter of Islamic conservatism” (Abdalla 2015, p. 220) while Karam and Afiouni (2013) call for the “need to overcome the stereotypical presentation of Islam as a monolithic and oppressive force that subjugate women and to move research in directions that explore both the positive, negative and neutral influence of Islam” (in Abdalla 2015, p. 220).

Has this been the case in management research on the region in general and women in particular? Management research on the region has been satisfied with “Arabness” as a research category defined by geographic location. With that, research that looks at Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Egypt (for example) is sufficient to make conclusions and offer recommendations for “Arab” employees, managers, and organizations. And as such the experience of women in those very same countries can be explained away by religion, culture and tradition. Research on the region has taken as its point of departure an outside-in approach; that what is *already* known about management, which is mostly based on the experiences of “white” men is the lens with which the experiences of Arabs, both men and women, can be compared with and legitimacy being gained from mirroring those experiences (and thereby earning the label

“modern”). Any “deviance” from this is then considered a remnant of archaic tradition that is “correctable” with research recommendations also rooted in what is already known. Research on the region suffers from what Mohanty (2000) describes as “binary thinking [that] implicitly entails “secret hierarchies”- a dominant group and a marginalized group, where the latter is viewed not only as other but as lesser” and as such Arab women have not only been “portrayed as a singular or essentialized other, but also implicitly as lesser- as ignorant, tradition-bound and victimized...contrasted with equally singular representation of Western women as educated, modern and having control of their bodies and lives” (p. 346 in Mann & Huffman 2005, p. 68). Accordingly, it is argued in this thesis that what is desperately needed in intellectual discourse on the region is a picture painted from the inside out; one that recognizes the diversity across and within the countries of the Arab world and allows the stories to be told by the people themselves without filtering only what is relevant for the sake of making comparisons (a call I am trying to heed). Enactment of this research intent, however, is no easy task.

It is important to acknowledge that this reductionist narrative of the region in the Arab world is not an intentional assertion of hegemony by researchers imbued with a colonialist “nostalgia”. A significant contributor to this narrative are the Arab countries themselves and their unwillingness to transparently share the kind of data that can richly inform research forcing researchers to make do with what they have or try to gather what they cannot

adequately access. This has also contributed to making empirical studies on the region in general more heavily quantitative with sample sizes that are relatively small compared to the general population researchers are trying to represent (oftentimes the entire Arab region). The common exclusion of Arab women from management research mirrors the representation of women in discourse in general. Omair (2008) interestingly points that when searching the literature using keywords such as “women”, “Middle East”, “management”, and “careers” did not lead to desired results on their own requiring the addition of terms like “attitude surveys”, “entrepreneurship”, or “executives”. And in the nine years since this shortcoming was acknowledged, the situation has not significantly changed and a similar approach was necessary when undertaking the searches for review of the literature; an indication that research on Arab women in management specifically is rare.

Interestingly, the bulk of research that deals specifically with Arab women in management has been published after the year 2000 making it a relatively young area of inquiry. Perhaps the most limiting element of research on Arab women in management is the geographic focus of research with much of it focused on some of the GCC countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, KSA and Oman in addition to Egypt and Lebanon. Thus, out of 22 Arab countries the biggest share of research has centred on some of the richest and most conservative in the Arab world (the GCC) or the most liberal such as Lebanon (that has often been hailed as an example of successful amalgamation

of “East vs. West” and a beacon of modernity). Given our earlier discussions about the wider Arab region the ability of this research to provide recommendations that are truly meaningful for the “Arab” region is called into question.

This limitation is furthered by limitations of methodology where the majority of the available research has preferred to use quantitative methods. One reason for this is that in terms of feminist ideology, according to Omair (2008), majority of published research on Arab women in management research ascribes to gender reform feminism “viewing women as a separate research category” and whose main focus was to draw comparisons between men and women’ attitudes and perceptions requiring a quantitative approach (p.111). Interestingly, research that subscribes to gender resistance feminism with its emphasis on trying to “explain the lower status attributed to women, either at the organizational, cultural or national level” were not only a rare exception in terms of aim and ideology but also methodology making them the rarer exceptions using qualitative methods. Even more interesting, while most research on women is undertaken by women, research on “Arab women in management [is] written by male authors” (p.111).

The literature on Arab women in management can be classified into five different though interconnected themes that focus on career barriers and facilitators, attitudes towards working women, work-life balance, the role of cultural factors and the impact of role models. Together these themes have

attempted to paint a picture of Arab women's journey in management careers as one that is facilitated by such factors as "family support, educational opportunities, academic success, job opportunities, determination, inner drive for success, qualities and attributes conducive to successful management, the ability to handle multiple tasks and self-confidence" (see Alajmi 2001; McElwee & Al-Riyami 2003; Al-Lamki 1999; Omair 2008, p. 115). Though these factors sometimes pale in the face of such barriers as "exclusion from formal and informal networks, the absence of relevant benefits and exclusion from corporate developmental assignments that are used to groom male managers for senior leadership in their companies" (Omair 2008, p. 113). Research on both career facilitators and career barriers have predominantly focused on the wealthy GCC countries where most of the samples are taken from the public sector (see Metle 2002; Wilkinson 1996; Jamali et al. 2005; Metcalfe 2006; Al-Lamki's 1999). These barriers tend to be compounded by predominantly negative attitudes towards women in positions of leadership particularly in areas outside of the traditionally female arenas (see Kemp & El Saidi (2013) who explored women leadership in the UAE and Kemp (2012) who saw that women's career choices in the UAE are impacted by their education decisions early on). However, whether a negative attitude towards women in management prevails is highly debatable given that most of the research addressing this problem had relatively small sample sizes (the largest being 278 participants) and the research subjects were students in countries as diverse as Egypt and the UAE (see Abdalla 1996; Mensch et al. 2003; Mostafa

2003; Mostafa 2005).

One source of the negative attitude towards women in positions of management and leadership is a concern for work-life balance raising doubts about a woman's ability to balance her primary role as a wife, mother, and housekeeper with the demands of being an effective manager. This is particularly interesting given that in wealthier countries such as Kuwait and Oman where women enjoy the professional support services such as housemaids, nannies, and child-care centres and work-life balance is presumably easier to achieve than in the case of countries like Lebanon, even so, the impression of the impossibility of balancing the domestic and public roles is widespread (see Shah & Al-Qudsi 1990; Jamali et al. 2005; Tlaiss 2013). The question of the woman's primary role in the private realm of the home is imbedded within the sphere of cultural factors affecting women's management careers; the most dominant research theme (Jamali et al. 2005). Thus, the focus of this stream of research was on understanding the ways in which the experiences of women are embedded within the religious tenets of Islam and the patriarchal gender socialization of Arab societies. And while more often than not a reductionist view of Islam as an oppressive force is the central theme of most research on women in the region there are some attempts at redirecting the conversation towards understanding how Arab women are navigating their careers and carving out their own place of power and influence while simultaneously accepting their pre-assigned roles (see Alajmi 2001;

Abdalla 1996; Metle, 2002; Kausar 1995; Khattab 1996).

This complex process of balancing their identities as wives, mothers, daughters, and managers makes the need for role models even more crucial. The importance of role models in the careers of Arab women is another theme in research that paints a picture in which women's' limited social circles at home and at work restricted their access to role models, and, given that "relationships are mostly confined to other women with similarly limited work experience. Also at home, the traditional Arab wife does not attempt to impose her work problems or tensions on her family members, especially her spouse, and tends to suffer in silence and solitude" women reported feeling a desperate need for a role model in their careers (see Metle, 2002; McElwee & Al-Riyami, 2003). In fact, "the lack of women role models, professional management development programs, and the dual responsibilities of traditional and professional roles, and family obligations as a wife and a mother for child-bearing and child-rearing" were often described as the biggest obstacles to Arab women's career progression (Metle 2002; Wilkinson 1996; Jamali et al. 2005; Metcalfe 2006; Al-Lamki's 1999; Omair 2008).

Thus, if we conceive of research on Arab women in management as a portrait then the outlines are certainly present, however, discourse is yet to fill in all the colours. Instead it has implicitly asked viewers to assume that the outlines are not only enough; they are also a substitute for the entire portrait. However, while the themes that have emerged from research are indeed

powerful outlines, a fuller, more detailed, and intricate picture is needed. Doing so requires that we view the ways in which “Arab women study, negotiate, and construct their careers” from their own perspectives and with a “relational multi-layered approach (Syed & Özbilgin 2009, p. 2435) that helps contextualize [their experiences within] factors at the national, organizational and individual levels [and that] integrates the societal and cultural values and ideologies about gender roles with organizational realities and agency matters to underscore [their] subjective experiences” (Tlaiss 2013, p. 757). This, along with the discussion thus far, paves the way for this thesis’s contribution to research on Arab women in management by narrowing the geographic gap (covering 17 countries many of which have rarely, if ever, been researched such as Palestine and Sudan) but also placing the experiences of Arab women within the macro-national and meso-organizational contexts. In doing so this thesis can also pave the way for a more nuanced understanding of what “Arabness” can and should mean in research on the region. An understanding of the way in which “individual choices, organizational processes, and structural conditions- all of which collectively account for unrelenting power disparity and disadvantage within social and employment contexts [will enable] a more comprehensive, realistic, and context-specific framing” of the experiences of Arab women as their management careers undergo a dynamic and complex process of unfolding across and within different settings” (Syed & Özbilgin 2009, p. 2435). How this thesis undertook achieving this research intent is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The ontological and epistemological positioning of this thesis evolved over an extended period beginning with my early attempts at formulating the aims, objectives and main research question. In order to fully appreciate not only the research methodology but the way in which it positions this thesis's contribution to discourse it's important that we consider the journey of "epistemological becoming" of this work.

Claiming A Place in Epistemological Third Space

The problem of the East vs. West occupies an apparently secure position in research is the legacy of a complex history that finds its roots in colonialism the impact of which has been explored in the debates within postcolonial theory. Colonialism is defined as "the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically", while "postcolonial," signifies phenomena "occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule" (Seremani & Clegg 2015, p.1). Nowhere is this more applicable than in the case of the Arab world whose history, and arguably movement into "modernity", is heavily influenced by colonialization via several "western" powers (most notably French and British colonialization). Thus, postcolonial theory emerged out of an "appreciation of the historical and colonial origins of the dominance of "western" perspectives [and a commitment to] the inclusion of previously excluded voices from the periphery [that] is usually constructed in terms of a binary "east versus west"

depiction” (p. 1).

Thus, the epistemological foundations of postcolonialism, or how it undertook the construction of knowledge finds its origins in “dualism of simple polarities” that was expressed in such terms as east and west, and by extension western and otherness referring to anything that is non-western (Benson 2000; Seremani & Clegg 2015). At the heart of the perpetuation of these dualisms is the consistent emphasis on their nature as fundamental opposites built on insurmountable differences (Said 1979). As such “knowledge is reduced and rendered in binary categorizations. Such an approach places *a priori* emphasis on division and differences rather than union (wa Thiong’o 1986). The ideas collected under postcolonial theory have been reduced to an oppositional role without an agenda much beyond that positioning; ideas from the “non-westerns” are restricted to taking a confrontational stance whenever they engage dominant worldviews” (Seremani & Clegg 2015, p.3). This has partially constrained the contribution of postcolonial theory in management discourse as many of its ideas emerged only as an “antithesis to “western” discourse” (Ochoa 1996; Seremani & Clegg 2015, p. 3).

Indeed, the impetus that initially motivated this thesis was rooted in a post-colonialist concern for making the Arab voice heard in management discourse with the assumption that this necessitated rejection of all that is “western” as a starting point. This eventually became exhausting, increasingly futile and most importantly unauthentic in the face of the stories heard from

Arab women themselves (as will be discussed later). The increasing emphasis placed on “the differences between the views of the non-westerns from those of the westerns reinforces the “oriental” image of the non-westerners whilst positioning these western “critical” scholars as the embodiment of radical chic” (in Seremani & Clegg 2015, p. 3). This crisis of epistemology proved fruitful as it informed the way for judiciously examining the research agenda, its aims, and a commitment to critically investigate the term “Arab” as a research category. Therefore, this thesis calls for a “careful, historically specific generalizations responsive to complex realities” (Spivak 1996, p.67).

Thus, rather than asserting difference from the “other” it was considered important that this research was undertaken with a view to bringing to attention voices not often heard, not only because they are different from the mainstream but because they can and should contribute something valuable to academic discourse. This enables the researcher to view the experiences of women in their totality rather than trying to find *only* what is different from anything “western”. This necessitates a “space in which cultures overlap and create “hybrid” spaces in which there is no dominant or dominated...zones of overlap and displacement of domains of differences. [A] third space [that] is an interstitial passage between fixed identifications that opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. [This] does not mean ignoring history and asymmetrical power relations. It merely suggests collapsing the boundary between “west” and “non-

west” and allowing for hybridity, without denying the asymmetrical power relations that exist between them” (Bhaba 1994; Frenkel & Shenhav 2006 in Seremani & Clegg 2015).

Seremani & Clegg (2015) extend the call for third spaces into what they term “epistemological third spaces” that “reorients the manner in which we understand interactions among different worldviews as well as the manner in which we understand inclusion of previously silenced voices. In epistemological third spaces, diverse epistemological stances can be embraced without any one being privileged over another. These “epistemological third spaces” are spaces of dialogue in which diverse epistemological stand points and perspectives will be allowed to coexist and cross-pollinate, providing rich insights, whose outcome would be hybrid perspectives emerging from dialogue and exchange amongst different epistemological positions” (p.2). This shaped the present thesis not only in terms of the positioning of the research aim, objectives and research questions as discussed earlier but also in the research philosophy as will be explored later.

Philosophical Positioning

In his treatise titled “On What is Not” Fifth-century Sophist Gorgias explains “Firstly ... nothing exists; secondly ... even if anything exists, it is incomprehensible by man; thirdly ... even if anything is comprehensible, it is guaranteed to be inexpressible and incommunicable to one’s neighbour”; thereby setting the stage for discussions of ontology and epistemology

(O’Gorman & Maclintosh 2015, p. 53). Ontology asks “what is the nature of reality and therefore, what is there that can be known about it?”. In light of the discussion thus far, this thesis places itself firmly within the realm of subjective ontology that “sees facts as culturally and historically located, and therefore subject to the variable behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and interpretations...of both the observer and the observed” (O’Gorman & Maclintosh 2015, p. 57).

This commitment to the acknowledgement of “multiple subjective realities and meanings of social phenomena” has its implications for epistemological positioning (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 in Tlaiss 2013). “Epistemology is at the heart of knowledge” as it expresses the relationship between “the knower and what can be known” (Seremani & Clegg 2015, p.1; Kurucz 2005, p. 19). Given the ontological positioning as one with a subjective view of reality this thesis is driven by an interpretivist epistemology that “seeks to ‘understand’ social phenomena in terms of ‘meaningful’ categories of human experience” (O’Gorman & Maclintosh 2015). Taking this further the

...interpretive paradigm takes into account the multiple realities which are inevitably revealed by the perspectives of different individual(s), the context of the phenomenon under investigation, the contextual understanding and interpretation of the collected data and the nature and depth of the researcher’s involvement (O’Gorman & Maclintosh 2015).

This ontological and epistemological positioning falls within the umbrella of a wider philosophical approach to which this thesis subscribes;

phenomenology. In order to understand the importance of this positioning in the formation of the thesis's research paradigm and eventually its choice of methodology it is important that we address phenomenology both as a philosophy and a method.

Phenomenology: From Philosophy to Methodology

Phenomenology has a long and multi-layered history. At its heart phenomenology is a philosophical movement rooted in a search for truth and logic about human existence through both critical and intuitive modes of thinking (Jones 2001). It is not explanation that phenomenology seeks but rather descriptions of human experience as it is perceived and lived; to uncover the way in which experiences appear in the consciousness of those experiencing a phenomenon as it unfolds (Kafle 2011; Jones 2001; Vis 2008).

For many, the foundations of phenomenology were first established in Vienna through the work of Franz Brentano and his student Carl Stumpf who together “pioneered phenomenology and viewed it as a way to describe and clarify human experiences before making causal explanations” (Jones 2001, p. 66). For Stumpf “human consciousness is directed towards a purpose”; thus intentionality is key (p.66). This first phase established phenomenology as a prescience that precedes any claims to knowledge thereby laying the foundation for the emergence of the second phase of phenomenology in Germany.

Taking exception to positivist claims to reality and the direction of

philosophy towards a scientific worldview, German philosopher Edmund

Husserl maintained that

things existing in thoughts are real. From this idea, he derived the maxim 'let existence declare itself' [and as such he] acknowledges that a person's appreciation of his or her experience and is concerned with relationships between events outside awareness and articulated thought" (p. 68). The idea of phenomenology emerged as concerned for the deconstruction and description of lived experiences and as such the role of an investigator is to "define structures and understanding the roles they play in shaping human experience of the world [i.e.] a detailed investigation of human existence (p. 68).

Hence, for Husserl human experience is fundamentally shaped by

"familiar and commonplace events" and as such he believed in the power of experience in "finding knowledge and understanding the world" (p. 68).

Therefore, it was important that experience is transcended; that the relationship between one's consciousness and one's experiences be observed as a phenomenon away from preconceived notions such that only a pure description of a phenomenon emerges. In Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, "bracketing" means a suspension of belief that opens consciousness onto a state of psychological epoche, a term he coined to refer to a refraining from judgement (Husserl 1989; Jones 2001). Achieving this epoche necessitated a bracketing of personal judgment and the observers' prejudices, experiences, theories, traditions, ideas and beliefs via a state of pure consciousness in which the investigator remains detached from the phenomenon. And while transcendental phenomenology marks a fundamental philosophical (and consequently methodological) shift, its claims of being able to capture essence via transcendence (vis-a-vis bracketing) was called into question by Husserl's

student Martin Heidegger (Husserl 1989; Jones 2001).

Heidegger's point of departure was his criticism of transcendental phenomenology's insistence on phenomenological reduction arguing that a detachment from the world is impossible; achieving a state of pure consciousness can never be given that human beings are not only involved in the world but that this involvement is a core part of conscious experience so deeply engrained that it forms the core of an inner knowing that forms a foreknowledge that is inescapable (Heidegger 1962). For Heidegger how we live in the world is a fundamental point of departure for questions related to Being which he called Dasein or "being there" (Jones 2001, p. 70). Through these debates Hermeneutics emerged as an approach for "interpreting and understanding the ways in which people live in the world; the ever present deceptively simple" question "Who am I?" (p. 70). In this way of thinking, there is no room for the phenomenological epoche for

We do not know ourselves better than we know the world...we do not know ourselves and we do not know the world. Yet by thinking we can discover both...we do not live in a world of choice but a world dictated by the past. Yet...we can discover possibilities. We can choose how to respond to the past and how we allow our present and future to be shaped by it. Nevertheless we cannot escape it (p. 70).

Hence, hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive at its heart rather than rejecting "being" via insistence on unapologetic objectivity. As van Manen (1990) describes "a good [phenomenological] description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is

revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way” (p. 39 cited in Kafle 2011, p. 189).

This potential for interpretation was built upon by Heidegger’s student Hans Gadamer who saw hermeneutics reflecting meaning (much like a mirror) with understanding emerging from dialogue and a fusion of horizons via a hermeneutic circle (Vis 2008). Gadamer acknowledges that prejudice and tradition are ever-present pillars that form the backbone of our perception and as such precede conscious thought. And therefore one can not ignore the impact of such things as “culture, race, social class, gender, sexual orientation” on the formation of horizons of prejudice (Kafle 2011, p. 190). This awareness of preconceived notions is fundamental to hermeneutic phenomenology accompanied with the acknowledgement that one’s understanding is “always on the way, partial and particular to the experiences from which the interpretations were formed” (Kafle 2011, p. 190). As such there exists an interpretative circle that moves “from the parts to the whole and the whole says something of the parts” giving way to the constant expansion of horizons of understanding that proceeds in a circular, dynamic, interpretation process that sees no subject-object distinction” (Jones 2001, p. 73). Time and life events “cannot be viewed as fixed because horizons are forever changing” and hence their fusion is temporary and flexible (p.73). For Gadamer, each dialogic encounter with a participant forms a subjective reality that changes with each participant while

the dialogue itself also asks questions of the interpreter.

Interpretation is multi-layered; while it allows for the description of an experience it is simultaneously a new interpretation emerging between observer and participant. The interpreter has neither a subjectivist nor objectivist positioning but rather interpretation is

heavily influenced by shared and historical experiences. The subject understands through the world of understanding already given in and through language and the historical personality in which understanding stands. To call this subjective or to trace it back to the individual consciousness is untenable, since the individual did not create the shared understanding and language but only participates in them (Palmer 1969, p. 229).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the interpreter participates much like a player does in a game; while he/she may have his/her own experience rooted in foreknowledge he/she is absorbed in the game such that he/she is part of the circle and dialogue that creates understanding (Vis 2008).

In light of the research paradigm explored thus far we now return to this thesis's aim and research question to give Arab women's stories a voice and the opportunity to tell those stories in their fullest away from the confinements of a pre-programmed lens that sees only the parts that fit with the narrative that has been told and retold. And while this certainly requires looking with a "fresh set of eyes" full of wonder and free of judgement I, much like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, believe that "the most important lesson which reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction"; we are in the world and of the world where the fusion of horizons characterizes our interaction with one

another and our world in a way that can never be fully bracketed out” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xiv). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology is the key to this thesis’ ability to not only describe but also interpret the essence of Arab women’s experiences as they navigate careers in management; to describe their experiences as *they* see it and then locate the meaning of these stories is at the heart of this undertaking. How this was achieved in the research design is explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Research Design

The semi-structured life world interview is the tool with which this phenomenological inquiry undertook to explore the experiences of Arab women pursuing management careers. From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that an inquiry of this kind necessitates close attention to participant selection criteria that were as follows:

- Between the ages of 24 to 40 years.
- Of Arab descent with both parents being from any one of the Arab countries as follows: the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, KSA, Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan.
- Who has lived in an Arab country for at least ten years.
- Has obtained at least one degree in a higher education institution in an Arab country with a concentration in management.

- Has previously worked or currently works in an Arab country for at least three years.

The selection criteria are rooted in the thesis's commitment to advancing a view of "Arabness" that is rich, nuanced, and inclusive of the wide range of diversity across the region. More specifically to explore the essence of experiencing a management career as an Arab woman *in* the Arab world necessitated a careful selection of Arab countries to include as many countries as possible particularly those that have been under-explored in research.

The choice of business management graduates is due to the assumption that these women must have, at least at some point, had an interest in pursuing management careers after graduation. The choice of age from 24 to 40 is also critical given the assumption that these women have undergone at least one of two critical points; the decision to begin a career at some point after graduation, and the decision to move up from the mid-levels of their organizations or outside altogether.

Initially, it was decided that four women from each country would be selected for interview at random from the list of business management graduates from public and private universities. However, it quickly became apparent that particularly in some countries like Syria, Palestine, and Libya among others, establishing contact with these universities was challenging and obtaining accurate contact information even more difficult. As such, the

recruitment process had to be adjusted instead turning to snowball sampling with “word of mouth travelling from one participant to the next” that began with a chance encounter with a CEO of an investment consulting company who was of Palestinian origin who fulfilled all the selection criteria for inclusion in the sample and who granted me access to select participants from her Dubai-based company of 320 employees (Patton 1980). I was given the opportunity to speak to the staff, explain my research and participant selection criteria and ask them to recommend anyone whom they thought would be willing to participate. Thirty-four employees contacted me either to volunteer or recommend someone, of whom 19 fulfilled the selection criteria.

Another pool of participants emerged from 3 sources: the alumni networks of my alma mater-a semi-private university, a public university in where a close friend currently works, and a private university in which I am currently employed as an instructor- the universities were spread across three emirates in the UAE. In all three cases I initiated contact with Alumni managers and Deans of the colleges of Business Administration and met with them individually where I described my thesis’s research question, aims, and methodology and the selection criteria of participants. Alumni managers contacted potential participants, obtained permission for me to contact them, upon whose approval I proceeded to communicating with them explaining my research and requesting permission to determine a suitable date, time, and location for an interview. This recruiting process enabled 37 more interviews.

For the sake of organizing the results the interviews are organized into ‘clusters’ whereby countries that are geographically close and culturally similar are grouped together. Thus, there were a total of 56 interviews conducted over an 11-months period distributed as illustrated below:

Table 1: Cluster 1

Lebanon	Syria	Jordan	Palestine	Iraq
4	4	4	3	4

Table 2: Cluster 2

UAE	Oman	Bahrain	KSA	Kuwait	Qatar
4	3	3	3	4	4

Table 3: Cluster 3

Egypt	Libya	Algeria	Tunisia	Morocco	Sudan
4	2	2	3	2	3

The total number of interviews brings the question of saturation of data to the forefront. Whether I would reach a point where new knowledge would no longer be generated well before the end of the all interviews was not a concern going into the process (Morse 1991). This was partially due to the fact that it was imperative that all the countries must be covered in order to achieve the

research aims. Additionally, my experience with the region as well as my own background (which will be discussed in more detail later on) enhanced my intuition that with country and interview there was great potential for new insights. As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 my intuition was right in guiding me to undertake all the interviews. The details of these interviews are explored in later sections.

Data Collection

Phenomenological research is concerned with the lived experiences of a phenomenon; what was experienced and how it was experienced and as such interpreting the texts of life are central (van Manen 1994). Hence, it is important that we explore the concept of lived experience. The central concern of this thesis is the phenomenon of how Arab women experience their management careers; these experiences are lived experiences of the

...everyday moment-to-moment of the here and now...it is a reality that manifests itself immediately, that we are reflexively aware of in its entirety, that is not given and not thought. [A] lived experience is delimited from other lived experiences by the fact that...it constitutes a separable immanent teleological whole (Marquard 2011, p.50).

For van Manen (1994) this lived experience can be viewed as a

pattern, or a unity of meaning, which can be explicated through a process of reflection. This reflective process is necessary to manifest an event [given that] there are temporal structures in which a past event cannot ever be fully grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as part presence. It is within this reflection where...the lived experience becomes the starting point and end point of phenomenological research [and hence] transforming lived experience into a textual expression of its essence [is key] (p. 51).

And while hermeneutic phenomenology enables “a reflexive reliving of experience such one can begin to describe the richness and fullness of this experience” yet it does not have a strictly defined approach to the ways in which an investigation is to gather and analyse data (Marquard 2011 p. 51; Creswell 2006, p.59). In determining the steps and procedures that would form the methodology of this thesis I adopted van Manen’s (1990) approach to phenomenology, which views it as the dynamic interaction among six methodical procedures.

First, we must turn towards a phenomenon or an abiding concern of fundamental interest. A phenomenological researcher is, according to van Manen (1990), someone who sets out to pursue an aspect of human existence; this pursuit is, in essence, the first step that is made explicit in the formulation of the research question “What is the experience of young Arab women as they pursue careers in management?”. This question must not only be made explicit, clear and understandable but also be lived by the researcher whose description of the question and the build-up towards it must capture the reader such that he/she is encouraged “to wonder, to question deeply the very thing that is being questioned by the question” (Marquard 2011, p. 59).

Second, we must investigate experience of the phenomenon as it is lived and reconnecting with the lived experience, exploring it with openness to looking at the world with new eyes. According to van Manen (1990) doing so necessitates that the researcher’s own lived experiences form the initial point of

departure given that “one’s own experiences are also the possible experiences of others” (p. 59). Hence, I described my own personal lived experience as I wrote it early on as I engaged with the research subject; this reflection is expressed in my introduction in Chapter 1. This reflective awareness of my own experience enabled me to later connect my experiences with the experiences of others such that the emerging “description not only enhances the evocative value of a truth experience, but also shows that [I] recognize both that my own experiences are the possible experiences of others and also that experiences of others are the possible experiences of oneself. This reflection allows an understanding of the deeper meaning of an aspect of human experience in the context of the whole” (p.59).

The third step is reflecting the essential units or themes of meaning constituting the lived experience. Van Manen (1990) argued that

where the phenomenologist begins to reflectively bring into nearness that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life...this is what separates hermeneutic phenomenological research from any other kind of research for it is this reflecting on essential themes that makes a distinction between appearance and essence, between the things of our experience and that which grounds the things of our experience (p. 115).

In other words, themes are where lived experiences are brought to life. We will return to the discussion of themes in a later section.

Describing the phenomenon via writing and rewriting is the fourth research activity and perhaps the most crucial. Writing enables a distancing between the researcher and the world, where it both abstracts and makes concrete our

understanding of the world (van Manen 1990); “writing both objectifies thought into print while it subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us” (p. 129). Hermeneutic phenomenological writing has three fundamental elements; silences, stories and examples. When it comes to silences van Manen (1990) conceives that there are three forms of silence; silences that are the result of our choices of what to put into the text and what to leave out, epistemological silence that the researcher confronts in the face of not having “a language” for writing what he/she is trying to write. Van Manen asserts that “by way of writing, reflecting and rewriting, we may write our way into these epistemological silences” (Ibid, p. 113). And finally, ontological silence that “occurs upon the realization of our fundamental predicament of always returning to silence- especially having been enlightened by a concept, a reading, or a conversation. Through insight and reflection, this silence can bring us closer to the presence of truth” (Ibid, p. 114).

Hence stories become crucial in that they enable an understanding that is otherwise lost in the face of abstract theoretical thought and enables a connection between theory and life in ways that have eluded us “connecting the particular with the universal [and] demonstrate wisdom, sensitive insight and proverbial truths” (Ibid, p.120). A powerful story enables the phenomenological researcher to engage the readers, cause them to reflect, involves and transforms them “ultimately creating a tension between the pre-reflective and reflective pulls of language” (Ibid, p.121). Examples form a powerful element of this with

every phenomenological description being an example composed of examples which, when done well, enable us to understand more deeply the significance of the lived experience that the example is describing.

The fifth research activity is to maintain a powerful connection to the phenomenon at the centre of inquiry facilitated by an unwavering commitment to the research question and the acknowledgement of the researcher's preconceived notions. This connection ensures that the researcher does not lose focus by engaging with the text dialogically "where he or she does not separate theory from life, the public from the private: we are not simply being pedagogues here and researchers there- we are researchers oriented to the world in a pedagogic way" (Marquard 2011, p. 67). The emerging text should enable a deep and rich description of the phenomenon that does not simplify life but rather engages readers with its mystery and depth. As van Manen (1990) describes, the text must be read "as a poet would- meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it" (p. 67).

The sixth and final element is balancing "the parts of the writing to the whole" that involves moving between the parts to observe the whole of the phenomenon as they are described in a circular process that "involve[s] continual dialogue between seemingly meaningful words, phrases and concepts" (Williamson 2005 p.59, 67). This requires careful attention to identifying the experience that is being studied, its intelligibility, and the experiential situations that the researcher enters, which along with the research

question are constantly brought to the forefront throughout the research process (Marquard 2011).

How these six steps were undertaken throughout the research process are discussed at various points throughout the coming chapters. We now turn our focus to a discussion of the primary research tool.

The Research Tool: Semi-Structured Life World Interview

The semi-structured life world interview enables this thesis to explore its main research question and objectives consistent with its ontological and epistemological positioning. Alvesson (2010) asserts that interviews are not a path to the “truth” but rather a way of constructing one piece of reality as experienced by participants and imbedded within the “local, social context...If an interviewee exists in a pluralistic-meaning filled world, one constructed by power and discourse, what does it really mean when researchers try so tidily to make sense of this in a 45-minute interview?” (p.611). For Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) interview knowledge can be characterized by seven key features as follows:

- 1- Knowledge as produced: where an interview is the site of knowledge production, where knowledge is socially constructed and is “actively created through question and answers, and the product is co-authored by interviewer and interviewee [a] process that continues through transcription, analysis and reporting of the original interviews” (Ibid,

p.54).

- 2- Knowledge as relational: “the knowledge created by the interview is inter-relational and inter-subjective” (Ibid, p.54).
- 3- Knowledge as conversational: “qualitative interviews as having the potential of producing descriptions and narratives of everyday experiences as well as the epistemic knowledge justified discursively in a conversation” (Ibid, p.54).
- 4- Knowledge as contextual: the knowledge generated from an interview is positioned within the understanding that given that “interviews take place in an interpersonal context and the meanings of interview statements relate to their context [and] are sensitive to the qualitative differences and nuances of meaning [and therefore acknowledges] that human life and understanding is contextual, both in the here and now and in a temporal dimension” (Ibid p.54; 55).
- 5- Knowledge as linguistic: the qualitative researcher must acknowledge that “the transition from one linguistic modality to another, such as from oral to written language is not merely a technical question of transcription, but raises issues concerning the different natures of oral and written language” (Ibid, p.55).
- 6- Knowledge as narrative where “the interview is a key site for eliciting narratives that inform us of the human world of meanings” (Ibid, p.55).
- 7- Knowledge as pragmatic that asserts that “good research is research that works with a [pragmatic] insistence that ideas and meanings derive their

legitimacy from enabling us to cope with the world in which we find ourselves...knowledge becomes the ability to perform effective actions” (Ibid, p.55; 56).

With these features of knowledge in mind, an important question that emerged from the outset was that of language; would the interviews take place in English, the language of this thesis, or Arabic the native language of the participants? Discussion of language particularly in the context of hermeneutic phenomenology necessitates addressing the Gadamerian view of history, tradition and language.

For Gadamer, we participate in historical and cultural traditions that not only position us towards the world but also establishes the foundation upon which we build our assumptions and expectations about the world and as such equips us with a language “for what we understand before we consider it more explicitly” (Warnke 2014, p. 347). Language is the mode of communication that makes the “hidden manifest via speaking and as such every word prompts a designated name assigned to an object and an associated mental image; we unconsciously connect our internalized thoughts within the shared, externalized medium of communicating with other people“(Gadamer1976, p. 62). As such language provides a foundation for shared, accepted meaning and an ability to explicitly vocalize thoughts whether when thinking or speaking. Given that we learn

to think and use language from the first steps of cognisance, a familiarising engagement experientially with the world and it with us...we are always biased in our understanding of the spoken and written language...there is a presence of spirit when using language...language delivers pointers to the truth concealed within word meaning and reveals that something exists in a (hermeneutic) circle of ontological possibilities (Warnke 2014, p. 288-289).

It is at this point that we return to Clegg's epistemological third spaces and explore the question of language. As Seremani & Clegg (2015) describe

in the postcolonial perspective those discourses that pre-existed the dominance of colonial conquest were regarded as fit mostly for the graveyard of unreason, such that the dominant discourses of conquest should be regarded as the only legitimate languages of science and knowledge. Hence, the dominance of the English language, particularly, in academia (p.14).

Can Arab women in management discourse truly claim their place alongside their "sisters" who sit at the centre using a language other than Arabic? In other words, can "the very language of the colonizers [be used] so ...the "colonized" emancipate themselves from the intellectual yoke of their former colonizers?" (Seremani & Clegg 2015, p.15). If we contend that language is fundamental to the "formulation of self-perception and the lenses" with which individuals view the world that brings with it "cognitive and evaluative judgment" then speaking in a second language inherently brings about

cognitive and evaluative judgment that are distinct from the relevant actual beliefs and desires of the actors. In other words, critique of domination 'requires an external standpoint' [that] must reside in the repressed traditions, language and culture. It is for this reason that acceptance of the dominant languages as the only legitimate language is confirmation and acceptance that these dominant perspectives and languages have put all other languages into the grave (Ibid, p. 15).

Thus, power and hegemony are imbedded in language; one must only look at Lebanon that boasts a francophone identity; a legacy of its history French colonialism whose impact remains strongly present in terms of language and school systems (to name a few key areas). In fact, fluency in the English language, except for some GCC countries, is accessible only to members of privileged groups who have access to international education that is usually reserved for the affluent and powerful. Arabs grow up not only speaking their diverse dialects of Arabic, but also learn in classical Arabic that has remained mostly unchanged for centuries. To conduct the interviews in English would have implicitly biased the selection of participants in a way that would have limited the richness and diversity of the stories to be told.

Taken together, given the use of hermeneutic phenomenology and the views of Gadamer as related to language and its role in prejudice, play, and the hermeneutic cycle, as well as the view of Seremani & Clegg (2015) on power and hegemony, the use of Arabic as the language of the interviews is justified. It should be noted that at no point was it explicitly required that the interviewees use Arabic; it occurred naturally in every interaction with participants. Hence the interviews took place in Arabic, transcribed, coded and thematically analysed in Arabic, with the results then translated into English and back translated to ensure accuracy. I now return to the interviews themselves.

Interviews, the Interviewer & the Interviewee

For an interview to achieve its full potential the role of the researcher becomes vital especially in qualitative research where he/she is the primary research instrument (Alvesson 2010). This role involves a combination of thoughtful interview techniques/strategies and effective interviewing skills. However, successful execution of this role begins long before the actual interview itself takes place. And while we will return to the ethical considerations of the thesis in detail in a later section it is important to assert here that “academic integrity and honesty and respect for other people” were the starting point for the interview process (Punch 2006 p. 56 in Appleton 2010, p. 5). This began with obtaining approval for the research from BUiD’s Ethics Committee and ensuring compliance with BUiD’s Code of Conduct for Research and compliance with the Faculty of Business and Law Ethical Guidelines. After receiving formal approval, I proceeded to the creation of Information Sheets that would explain in simple language the aim of the research and the requirements to potential participants and Informed Consent forms that assured them of the anonymity and confidentiality of the information shared. In all cases participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study, stop the interviews at any point, and assured of their ability to contact me via phone and email before or after the interviews to discuss any concerns they might have.

In both the case of the participants with whom my point of contact

began with a visit to the investment consulting company where employees volunteered or recommended people as well as the alumni from universities whose alumni managers requested permission to share their details with me, I initiated contact with participants first via email introducing myself, explaining the purpose of the research, the nature of the interview and what is involved in their participation, and requesting permission to contact them via phone to answer any questions they may have and finalize a day, time, and location for the interviews. If the location was “convenient, available and appropriate” the participants’ comfort was important and as such were given the liberty of choosing the locations and hence interviews took place in a variety of locations either in participants’ offices, cafes, their homes, or in my office at a university in Dubai. It is important at this point to acknowledge that all the interviews took place in the United Arab Emirates- the implications of this is discussed in a later section.

The interviews were individual ones and ranged between one to one and a half hours and were audio-recorded. These often began with me expressing my gratitude for their acceptance of my invitation and the confirmation that their participation is important and valuable and that they can share as much or as little as they like during the interview. I then gave them the space to address their questions before proceeding. To enable the beginning of the flow of data collection, I would signal the formal start of the interview by beginning the recording and asking the participants to introduce themselves. Though the

interview technique involved both semi-structured and unstructured questions I was determined to allow the flow of conversation to determine the transition between the questions. The semi-structured questions guided the conversation around the participants backgrounds particularly their family and upbringing, the motivation behind pursuing a degree in management, their experience with their careers thus far, their view of their future, their imagining of what a successful management career looked like, and to recount an incident that they felt was a turning point or defining moment of that experience. This question of a defining incident is particularly significant; while participants are able to elaborate on their experience in their totality it was important to hear them describe what they thought was a defining moment that was symbolic of their experience. This question was usually left towards the end and, more often than not, participants themselves were surprised by the incidents they recalled. The significance of this will be elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 5. We now turn specifically to the role of the researcher.

The Researcher As Instrument

In qualitative research in general and hermeneutic phenomenology in particular, the researcher is the primary research instrument (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 in Chennail 2011). In fact

It is through the researcher's facilitative interaction that a context is created where respondents share rich data regarding their experiences and life world. It is the researcher that facilitates the flow of communication, who identifies cues and it is the researcher that sets respondents at ease" and yet "the greatest threat to trustworthiness in qualitative research [is] the researcher if time is not spent on

preparation of the field, reflexivity of the researcher, the researcher staying humble and preferring to work in teams so that triangulation and peer evaluation can take place (Chennail 2011, p. 255).

I begin the discussion with the importance of interview skills. I am a firm believer in the power of stories; that “to understand the life world we need to explore the stories people tell of their experiences” and doing so required that I approach each interview with a genuine curiosity and openness, and “a sensitivity to what is said- as well as to what is not said” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p.31). This is particularly important given the inherent power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee; to be on the receiving end of questions, the “object of study”, particularly where one’s own life and experiences is at the centre places the participant in a vulnerable position. As such communicating a “strong regard for the respondents, consciously adopting a warm and welcoming professional but conversational interviewing manner and tone” as Ritchie & Lewis (2003) advise helped to ease some of that tension. Throughout the interview I was conscious of verbal and nonverbal cues from both the participants and myself. I made sure that I listened attentively, maintaining eye contact and showing encouraging gestures, particularly during emotional moments, and affirming my engagement with the interviewee at all times either through affirming nods or verbally. I followed Collins (1990) advice to uphold an ethic that “presumes that investigators are committed to stressing personal accountability, caring, the value of individual expressiveness, the capacity for empathy and the sharing of emotionality” (p. 40 in Appleton 2011, p. 5).

Additionally, I was conscious of the possibility that the respondents

would be equally curious about my background and motivation for the study and welcomed their inquisitiveness with warmth and shared with them both willingly and cautiously so as not to create a situation where they felt the need to respond to the interview questions in ways that might prompt them to be “explicit or rational in their responses and are possibly motivated by self or political interests, and that they may do a bit of impression management or presentation of self” (Gearity 2011, p. 611). That I would also be subject to the questions of my participants is in no way a weakness of method. On the contrary, particularly for hermeneutic phenomenology “the interviewer’s own identity, and its different categories, intersect[s] with that of interviewees; the researcher is also a participant in the ongoing process of inquiry” (Tsui 2008 in Appleton 2010, p. 9).

Based on the idea that I am the primary research instrument and a participant in the process of inquiry, and keeping in mind our earlier discussion of Gadamer’s concepts of prejudice, fusion of horizon, the hermeneutic circle, and play, it is then fitting that I present some of my background as a prelude to later discussions of prejudice, reflexivity and trustworthiness. It is therefore interesting to note that I would not qualify as a participant for this study; with an Iranian mother, and a Lebanese father, American citizenship, and an upbringing between Syria, Egypt and Dubai. While my formative years between the ages of 5 and 15 were spent in Damascus in a private, though state-controlled Syrian school, I spent the next 15 years in American schools and

universities across Egypt, and then Sharjah and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Married at the age of 23 and a mother of two children at 30 I found myself with few people to whom I could turn to in navigating the challenges of balancing full-time employment in the public sector with graduate school. My three-year hiatus from paid employment brought me in contact with a different kind of world of young, educated women, who were also unemployed; some explicitly by choice, and others implicitly coerced. Their stories and experiences painted very different pictures than what I had read in the literature on women and their careers in the Arab world. It was at this time that I undertook the PhD programme and read further into the literature to try and understand where these stories fit, whether there was more to explore, and what they meant for the present and the future of the region. This curiosity was transformed into a passionate search for “us” in the discourse; men and women like me, in organizations like ours, experiencing life in ways that were simultaneously different and similar to what we know.

There was only one occasion where my enthusiasm came to a brief halt. In one of the last modules I undertook, a Professor, who had become a trusted mentor, engaged the class in a discussion about innovation that eventually spiralled into a discussion about diversity at work. Clearly enthusiastic and at ease with the class the Professor asked “Do you really want to know the problem with society?” which he quickly followed with a response “the problem with society is that women don’t let men lead anymore. If you think

about it most of society's ills, look at the West, you will see it's because women are no longer running the households. The heart of society. And men now have to compete with women both at work and at home". Though this is not a direct quote now that years have passed, yet those words remain fresh in my memory. How many young women heard similar statements early in their careers and felt in them the final push to leave? If an Arab PhD holder, the most educated in society, expressed such sentiment is there really any hope for change? To argue against the reductionist view of gender as biology-determined seemed futile in discussions with peers and fellow researchers. Fortunately, this turned my point of departure towards sustainability. The question of women and work had to move away from binaries and ideologies; I became determined to show that re-examining the "woman question" was essential.

Taken together these experiences brought me to the thesis at hand. To claim that these, along with my personal background, can ever be fully "bracketed out" in a way that would win Husserl's approval would be far from true. However, it is not Husserl's blessing that I seek but rather Gadamer's to whom the discussion now returns. For Gadamer the existence of prejudice is not negative but rather is a kind of knowledge, meaning, and understanding that one possesses before entering the research process; an initial horizon of understanding; as he describes "recognizing the interpret[ers'] prejudice gives hermeneutics its real thrust" (Gadamer 1975). That I am the product of my background and experiences, personal, professional and academic, can impede

on my ability as a researcher only when I deny the multiple influences that have shaped my thinking. I recognize my biases as an insider and outsider simultaneously, as an Arab, feminist, employed, wife and mother. These multiple identities not only intersect within my own life but also intersected with the lives of the participants; an intersection that enabled the constant expansion and flow of our horizons of understanding that had the potential to alter some of our pre-understanding.

Hence, heeding Gadamer's call that the interpreter "work out their own presuppositions (fore-having, fore-sight, fore-conception) should be the first, last and constant task" and as such for each interview I maintained a rigorous commitment to journaling and extensive field notes; having obtained at least some information about participants (sometimes formally and others through intuition such as from a particular dialect) I would ensure that I wrote my thoughts about what I thought I knew in a journal prior to an interview (Gadamer 2004, p. 269). During the interview I would take notes particularly when certain responses would strike a chord with me. However, the most extensive journaling would take place immediately after the interview to gauge my own thoughts, feelings, and impressions of the interview while it remained vivid in my memory. I would often return to these at different points; a day later, a week later, or even a month later. This is consistent with the importance of recognizing that returning to a text as an interpreting researcher "understanding may be heightened by the temporal distance and time to think

about how the text makes sense with what one already knows [for] understanding is ultimately self-understanding and any unchallenged presuppositions only serve to maintain a restrictive interpretation of the text” (Regan 2012, p. 296). The practice of journaling and rigorous note-taking on the field fits in with Gadamer’s idea of play in which the researcher is also a player; I have my own views and experiences yet I am also absorbed into the “game”. As I undertake the interpretation of the experiences of participants unfolding before me I am not a distant observer; I am also interpreting myself individually and in relation to the participants in a cyclical marriage of horizons. Thus, through a rigorous process of reading, reflective writing, interpretation and back I am able to see the whole (the phenomenon) as understood from the parts (the women’s experiences) and the parts in relation to the whole.

One Pilot Study & Four Critical Friends

To acknowledge prejudices does not absolve the researcher from endeavouring to keep those pre-understandings and biases in check. As such I undertook a pilot study early on and employed the concept of critical friends throughout the research process.

A pilot study is much like a “test run of [researchers’] means for collecting and analysing data on a small sample of participants with the same or similar inclusion criteria as would be the case in the main study. In this “dress rehearsal” researchers run through their study in an abbreviated form and make

adjustments based upon the performance of the method” (Chenail 2011, p.257). Upon obtaining Ethics Approval I proceeded to conducting a pilot study where the inclusion criteria was mostly followed but participants were recruited directly by me from my workplace through face to face conversation. A total of 5 participants were contacted via email after obtaining their verbal approval. They also received the information sheet and the Informed Consent form and the interviews were held in a meeting room or office afterhours. The insights generated from the pilot study proved valuable. First it made me acutely aware of the importance of establishing good rapport with the participants and ensuring that they feel at ease. I was surprised that although the participants and I knew each other as co-workers there was a noticeable nervousness at the beginning of these interviews.

The question of language came to the forefront yet again; with so many diverse dialects phrasing the questions clearly without “unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous” terms became especially important. It was also important to phrase the questions such that they appeared conversational rather than “complicated professor talk” like one participant put it; this was not only significant in ensuring that the participants understood the questions clearly but also in flattening the hierarchy between us. At the conclusion of each interview, I ensured that I ask participants for feedback about the information received prior to the interview and the interview itself. The pilot study made it clear that 45 minutes was insufficient but anything beyond 90 minutes proved unproductive.

In two cases I asked respondents for a second interview to test the effectiveness of multiple interviews (especially when the first were 45 minutes or less) but the outcome determined that a single interview no less than an hour and later sharing the transcripts with the participants was the ideal way to conduct this research. It was important to journal and revisit the field notes several times after the interview was completed, during transcription, and even interpretation as each time a new understanding emerged.

However, though the pilot study generated great insight into the “mechanics” of the interview design and strategy as well as data organization and interpretation this “test run” was certainly a one-time undertaking. However, as the earlier discussion explored, and for many reasons the real key is self-reflection and the “ability to examine oneself”; this is termed reflexivity in qualitative research (Appleton 2011, p. 3). As Mezirow (1990) explains “Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built” (in Appleton 2010, p. 2). And while self-reflection via journaling regularly and at several points during the research was certainly important, I felt that it was equally important to form a baseline of accountability. Hence, I employed a group of critical friends.

While the role of critical friends is open to discussion, an essential feature of the critical friendship exchange is the ability to listen, critique, offer interpretations, ask further questions, and even challenge the researcher’s own

assumptions and encourage critical reflection while simultaneously being champions for the success of the work. The value of critical friendship's contribution to the rigor of the research is related to the robustness with which the researcher ensures openness in the critical friendship exchange (Appleton 2011). Hence, a critical friend is one who engages the researcher in reflective conversations, asks questions, challenges values and assumptions, with a genuine interest in the subject and the ability of the researcher. Interestingly I had been regularly discussing my research with a diverse group of women some of whom are academics, professionals, or stay-at home mothers; some colleagues and others were friends, but all with a common interest in the conditions and experiences of women in a variety of contexts though with very different views.

Thus, I decided to formalize some of these conversations in terms of a critical friendship exchange. The group of critical friends was comprised of four individuals; a Lebanese academic in her early sixties, an Emirati consultant in her thirties, an Egyptian-Libyan senior division head in her forties, and a Syrian stay-at-home mother of two in her mid-thirties. Beyond these simple descriptions, these women were different from one another in more ways than one. Some were religious, others were not, some were proud feminists, others vehemently abhorred the label. And it was this diversity of backgrounds and experiences that made them ideal for this group; though they were all passionate about the "woman question" they saw it through very different

lenses from one another and myself. As such I was assured that they would be critical of my assumptions, prejudices, and questions and would be unafraid to express these (as I knew from my relationship with them prior to this research). I would meet with them individually at least twice a month and in a group though this was less frequent. I would text, email or call some of them before interviews, or after them, share my journals, field notes, and ask them questions throughout the process.

This is not to suggest that formalizing these conversations in terms of critical friendship exchange does not have its dangers particularly the possibility that they “might bias the research process or approach it in a non-critical manner. The possibilities of reproducing counter-productive patterns, of reinforcing prejudices, and of being insensitive to racism, sexism and stereotyping” (Appleton 2011, p. 6). However, the selection of the group was key in ensuring that these concerns are met. I also used each member to varying degrees and at various times carefully selecting whom I sought for help and for what purpose given their personal, professional, and academic backgrounds. I found that I came out of these exchanges with a new understanding of myself, the participants, the interview, and even the data. I would either emerge reaffirmed in what I may have been sceptical of or on the path to a re-examining. This now brings us to the data interpretation stage of the research.

Data Organization, Analysis, & Interpretation

Journal entries along with field notes were kept together in a notebook.

Interviews were audio-recorded and immediately after I would take notes, followed by replaying the interview hours later, where I would reflect upon the interview and journal with a special focus on verbal and nonverbal cues from the participants and myself, my own feelings and thoughts, certain words or phrases that stood out for me; and an overall impression of the interview. Each interview was usually transcribed within 24 hours of it taking place to ensure accuracy of transcription given that the interviews were easy to recall at this stage.

With that began the essential task of reading, or in the words of Dey (1993) “[loosening] of the soil [such that] it is possible for the seeds of one’s analysis to put down roots and grow” (p. 83). With each transcript, as I read, I returned to van Manen’s six steps. With the research question being at the heart of the “quest” of this thesis I would return to the phenomenon of Arab women’s experiences in management careers and would “relive and relearn” those experiences in all their modalities. Dialogue with the text often began and ended with a return to the question of “what is the experience of young Arab women as they pursue careers in management?” that ensured I maintained a powerful connection with the phenomenon via an unwavering commitment to the research question. With each interview, and transcript, this continuous return to the phenomenon gave way to the rise of multiple layers of meanings that fuelled the emergence of different directions for analysis that were shaped and reshaped several times throughout the analysis and interpretation.

Development of Themes, Subthemes & Structural Analysis

As I moved through the hermeneutic circle of reading, writing, and reading, and moving from the “parts” of the stories of each woman to the “whole” of the phenomenon and back the analysis began by writing the story of each woman. As the stories took shape, the coding process began, which Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain has two aims; to segment data into general categories, as well as expand the data in a way that enables the formulation of new questions and interpretation levels as horizons fuse through dialogue with the text.

As such, for each interview, and ultimately each country, I found key words and phrases that were then grouped under concepts, sub-themes, and themes by asking “the interrogative quintet; who, what, when, where, why?” (Dey 1993, p.83). These were re-contextualized at various stages until a final picture emerged showing the linkages among the keywords and phrases, concepts, sub-themes and themes. Once this picture emerged I could then return to the stories of the participants (i.e.: the parts) and place them within the broader context of the themes and concepts that enabled the emergence of an “essence” as will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

Arriving at the keywords and thematic phrases was the result of a combination of van Manen’s (1990) sententious approach, the selective approach and the line-by-line approach briefly described as follows:

- 1- In the sententious approach the researcher reads the text as a whole and with an eye for finding a critical/sententious phrase that captures the essential meaning and significance of the text as a whole.
- 2- In the selective approach the researcher reads the text several times where phrases, statements, or words that appear to be particularly meaningful in relation to the phenomenon of inquiry are highlighted.
- 3- In the line-by-line approach the researcher reads, and rereads, every sentence, and group of sentences, also asking what it/they mean in relation to the phenomenon.

The structural analysis began with the line-by-line approach, as I read the interview transcripts, returning to the research question and the interrogative quintet, I would then reflect on the meaning that would emerge. A second reading would follow, this time in a selective approach, highlighting the keywords and phrases. This was followed by listening to the interview recordings while reflecting on the key words and phrases, while also reviewing the field notes. I would then move onto finding the sententious phrase that captured the fundamental meaning of the interview.

It is at this point that we return to the last question in every interview where participants were asked to recount an incident they felt was a turning point/defining moment of their experience. The significance of this question is multi-layered. While the conversation was allowed to flow such that participants reflected on their experience as a whole, stopping at a turning point

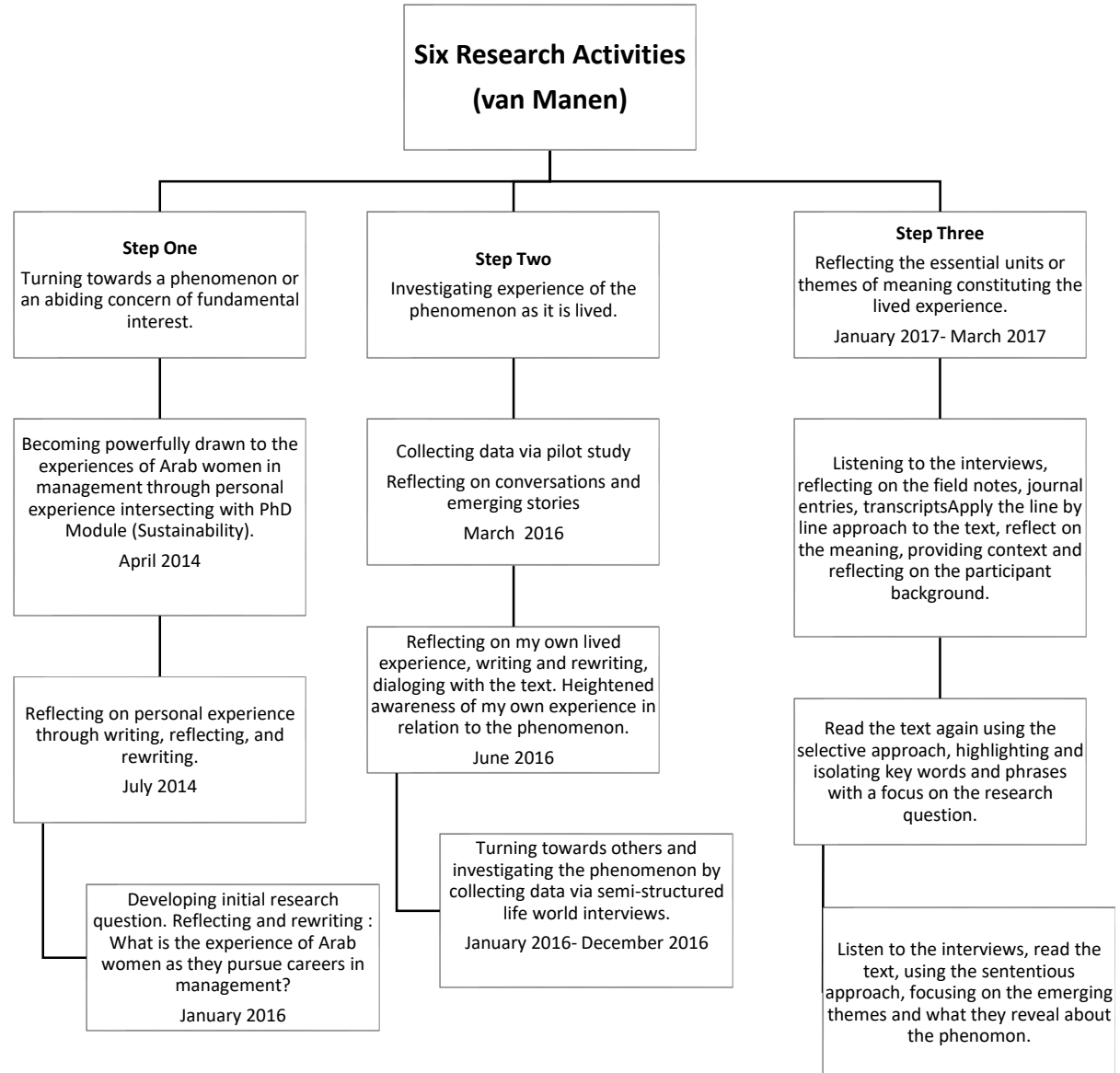
symbolic of their experience was essential as it allowed them to reflect on their experience and highlight what they saw as significant. As such, the women were invited to participate in trying to capture the essence of their phenomenon alongside me. Thus, responses to this question served as the initial point of departure of the structural analysis rather than my own pre-understanding alone. The first keywords, phrases, and concepts emerged from the line-by-line analysis of the responses to the question of the critical turning points, which formed the first layer of understanding of the participants' experiences that would often expand and converge with the remaining parts of the interview. Hence the stage was set for the emergence of subthemes and themes.

The search for themes and subthemes began with a coding process that emerged from dialoguing with the text with asking the interrogative quintet while maintaining a focus and commitment to the research question. It should be noted, however, that this process necessitates moving beyond the data to thinking creatively about it in a process of both data compilation and reduction. This is in-line with Streubert and Carpenter (1999) who saw structural analysis as a two-fold process that begins with observing patterns of meaningful connections and then an observation of the text as a whole with a view of identifying the key words and phrases that are meaningful to the research question as a whole. As such for each story, key words and phrases were highlighted in each transcript and then organized in a separate document. The entire transcript would then be looked at as a whole with the key words and

phrases in mind to ensure that all the words and phrases captured the significant elements as viewed by the participant. Statements or words that stood out that were different than the already identified key words and phrases would then invite another reading and subsequent dialoguing with the text until a clearer picture emerged allowing for themes and subthemes to emerge.

As the structural analysis progressed key words and phrases were soon linked under key concepts and eventually subthemes. These subthemes would then also be linked to form themes; some of which were implicit and others explicit as van Manen (1990) classifies; those that are *veiled* and those that are *revealed*. While explicit themes emerged more easily through the sententious, selective and detailed approaches, the implicit themes emerged with each reading, reflection, and intersection of transcripts in a fusion of horizons of lived experiences as the stories moved between my thoughts about the women's experiences and the phenomenon as it unfolded through dialoguing with the texts allowing for a fusion of horizons with the text and my role as interpreter (Annels 1996). This process was undertaken for each transcript, with the emerging themes and subthemes then combined for each country. The figure below illustrates the discussion thus far.

Figure 1 Research Activities



Data Interpretation

We now move to the interpretation of the data which Patton (2002) describes as “attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world” (p. 480). For Gadamer, at the heart of interpretation is “the willingness to engage in a dialogue or a “dialogical journey” for the purpose of creating meaning as opposed to merely reporting it. [He] challenges the researcher to a continual commitment to deepen his/her own understanding throughout the process” (Vis 2008, p. 6). As such the researcher and the participants are co-creators of new meanings and possibilities “regarding the phenomenon of interest” (p.7).

For a researcher undertaking hermeneutic phenomenology there is no clear distinction between when data collection stops and interpretation begins. Interpretation often begins from the openness to the stories shared by participants (stories that were often not linear as they moved across time and contexts). Particularly given that language, and by extension words, is the basis of phenomenological inquiry, familiarity with the text is of fundamental importance. Hence in the interpretation of data I turn to van Manen (1997) hermeneutic cycle “that constitutes of reading, reflective writing and interpretation” as illustrated in the figure below.

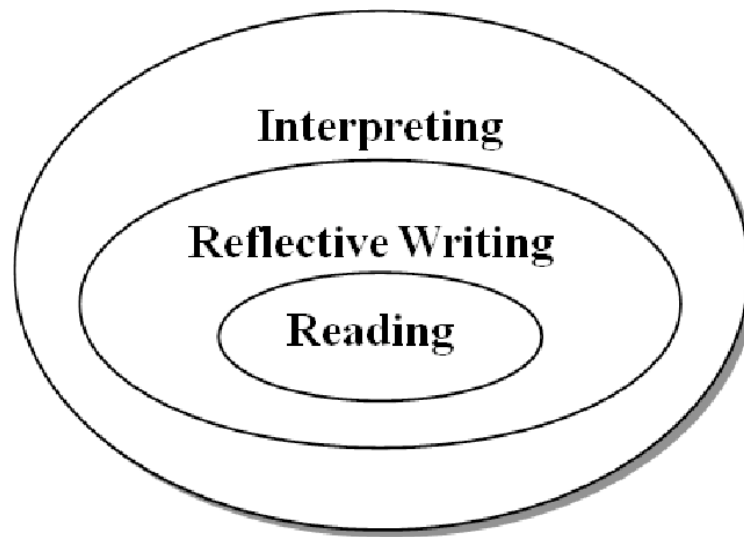


Figure 2 Hermeneutic Cycle van Manen (1997)

Moving through the hermeneutic cycle, I maintained a commitment to “an openness to emerging possibilities [acknowledging prejudice], engaging in dialogue, interpretation, feedback, continued dialogue” such that I focused on the experiences as they are lived, and which are of fundamental interest to me, keeping the research question before my eyes and balancing “the parts of the writing to the whole” in a constant fusion of horizons (Vis 2008, p. 7). The philosophical underpinnings of the thesis’ approach to interpretation as well as the discussion that emerges from it are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Jibran Khalil Jibran describes “Between what is said and not meant, and what is meant and not said [much] is lost... If you only see what the light reveals and only hear what sound announces, then truthfully you can neither see nor hear...”. And as such it was important that each story told was seen in its own right and as part of the totality of all the interviews.

Interestingly, the interviews told 56 stories that simultaneously bore similarities and differences within and across the different countries from which they were told. Interestingly, and in spite of the uniqueness of each participant’s experience, every woman spoke of her view of the different elements of her identity, and the ways in which these intersected within her personal and professional lives, the role of education and training and social support networks in shaping her career decisions particularly in the early stages, and the importance of the nature of the relationship with managers and the structure of the organizations in which this relationship takes place. How these combined to create distinctive management career decisions and experiences in each cluster is explored in this chapter. The chapter at hand explores each cluster individually beginning with a general overview of the participants before delving into the stories of one participant from each country whose story represents some of the major themes that emerged from all the interviews as will be discussed in Chapter 5. After prolonged engagement with the text, dialoging with it, and moving through the hermeneutic cycle, each story was

written with a commitment to producing an account that captures the essences of each woman's experience as she viewed and lived it paying close attention to what she said through both her words and her silence.

Cluster 1

It is important to assert at this point that countries are grouped into clusters based on geographic proximity only as a way of helping organize the data (this clustering mirrors the way in which these countries are grouped and referred to in the Arab world). The countries in this cluster is unique given that it includes some of the most politically turbulent countries (both historically and at present) several of which are interestingly described as some of the most liberal of the countries of the Arab world. And yet in many cases this reputation has not made it easier to navigate management careers for most of the 19 women interviewed in this cluster. A preview of the subjects can be found in the table below.

Table 4 Cluster 1 Overview

Name	Age	Nationality	Religion	Marital Status	Education	Employment Status
Fatima	30	Lebanon	Shiite Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (4 children)	Masters	Middle Management
Rana I.	27	Lebanon	Sunni Muslim	Married	Bachelors	Junior Administration
Rana T.	29	Lebanon	Christian	Married (2 children)	PhD	Mid-level Consultant
Hala	30	Lebanon	Druze	Single	Masters	Junior-Level Management
Hanin	27	Jordan	Sunni	Single	Masters	Junior

			Muslim (Former Hijabi)			Management
Ons	31	Jordan	Sunni (Hijabi)	Married (1 child)	PhD	Junior-Level Management
Dyala	37	Jordan	Christian	Married (2 children)	Masters	Junior Administrator
Nada S.	39	Jordan	Christian	Married (1 child)	Masters	Unemployed
Sherine	31	Syria	Druze	Married (2 children)	Masters	Mid-level management
Nare	26	Syria	Armenian Christian	Single	Bachelors	Junior Administration
Fidaa	37	Syria	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married	Masters	Middle Management
Maha	25	Syria	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Unemployed
Hanin	25	Iraq	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelor's	Junior Management
Suha	32	Iraq	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Mid-level management

Aroub	30	Iraq	Sunni Muslim	Divorced	Masters	Unemployed
Mais	32	Iraq	Sunni Muslim	Married	Bachelors	Top Management
Salma	38	Palestine	Sunni Muslim	Single	MBA	Top Management
Walaa	25	Palestine	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Junior level administration
Sereena	32	Palestine	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (1 child)	MBA	Entrepreneur

Cluster 1 Themes: An Overview

For the 19 women in cluster 1 there appears to be a clear distinction between being employed and building a career; a conscious act of planning rooted in a particular motivation beyond the financial one. At the root of this distinction is a combination of social class and cultural capital at the home that qualitatively changes their view of education, careers and the relationship between the two. Thus, for the middle-class women who describe their families as being “average” or “getting by financially” pursuing an education is one tool for ensuring the ability to possibly gain employment opportunities. A degree in management specifically was often born out of the desire to pursue

management careers in the hopes of escaping what one subject described as “the typical cycle of just working at the bottom and never move from your position and just being thankful for the salary at the end of the month”; a sentiment shared by several participants. Pursuing a management career, however, out of ambition for progress to the highest levels of an organization is a more boldly stated desire among women from privileged backgrounds with access to the kind of networks that appear to guarantee them access to the positions and companies of their choosing. This “wasta”^{*1} that seems so illusive to women from non-privileged backgrounds appears to be an ever present “ghost”; for some women it is the disadvantage that causes them to seek other “ways of making [their] position stronger” whether via higher education/training, working harder, or “making sacrifices under all the bad circumstances”. Similarly, women who acknowledge their access to wasta equally recognize that it requires them to also “do whatever it takes to prove [they] deserve [their] position...but sometimes even that is not enough”. And yet both groups of women seem to agree that there’s a limit to where they can reach within their organizations and careers.

Hence, and regardless of how they gain access to the first step in their management careers, these women’s relationships with those careers and the organizations in which they take place are heavily influenced by important elements of their identities. Femininity and the idea of appearing to be “a real

¹ Abdalla (2015) defines wasta as “use of powerful social connections and nepotism” (p. 32).

woman” emerged as a prominent theme in this cluster (and more boldly stated compared to other clusters). While most made a connection between a management career and power with such descriptions as “being a big boss”, “being in control”, “commanding respect”, and “boosting prestige”, they were also conscious of how those descriptors may clash with the ideals of femininity that either emerge from core self-beliefs or from social expectations in both their personal and professional lives. These expressions of femininity are reflected in questions of appearance, demeanour, and the nature of the relationship with managers and colleagues (including other women). Thus, for some women wanting to pursue management careers, they saw that it requires that they gain support (or at least avoid resistance) from their colleagues and managers that necessitates conforming to what is expected of them as women “to look attractive” and “be known as friendly and gentle” or “not showing to be aggressive or that you have a strong personality”. For some even these displays are used as a tool to help them gain access to certain opportunities “if I didn’t take care of how I look and know how to use it in the right way my situation would be different...it’s part of the game”. Interestingly this struggle with the idea of “womanhood” persists even when progress is made towards more senior managerial levels though the form of this struggle shifts as they feel the pressure to deliberately deny what may appear to be overtly feminine (including feeling the need to hide pregnancy or marriage). Interestingly using “beauty” or “femininity” as a tool to gain power in organization was viewed similarly among hijabis and non-hijabis of similar backgrounds and age groups.

The women's experience with the question of femininity was different among younger, single women compared to older, married women with children. Here the struggle with reconciling the pursuit of a management career with the idea of "womanhood" was directly related to the other layers of their identity as wives and mothers. And it is also here that the distinction between the middle and upper classes became visible once again. For women of the first group, because work is often a necessity born out of financial need, they face little resistance in their personal lives to the idea of pursuing management careers because it is related to a higher salary and social prestige. These women still take-on the majority of household work and childcare duties drawing on the support of their families. They also experienced more positive support from their personal networks of working women (though often not in their own organizations). Interestingly women from privileged backgrounds appear to struggle more with navigating their roles as wives and mothers *because* of their access to professional childcare and household help. Hence, women seem to experience more feelings of guilt and failure in those roles and more resistance from their husbands and family circles that is only intensified when they climb the career ladder, which equally intensifies their questions about their femininity. Interestingly both groups of women appear to self-impose and implement a strict division between their roles at home and roles at work with significant effort exerted to ensure that the two roles never intersect often fuelling feelings of alienation, loneliness and the "need to maintain appearances". This strict division is often described as the "price needed to be

paid for [the] decision to do what [they] want professionally” in the pursuit of a management career.

It’s important to note that for many of the women who chose not to pursue a management career or chose to drop out from one, the very same questions of femininity and the roles as wives and mothers (whether they were married or hoped to be at some point) appeared to prominently influence those decisions. As Maha, who is not alone in her sentiment, explains:

...I know I’m smart and capable and all of that...I know that if it was just about the work...achieving targets and all that I could have been a CEO if I wanted...but don’t get me wrong that would have been a good future...that’s why I studied so much ...but let’s be realistic at the end doing that meant I had to choose one of two ways...either I was going to have to make concessions like some women...you understand me...so I had to smile and joke and say sweet words with everyone who had power to help me move forward or I had to put on a grey pantsuit and act like a manly woman and fight my way through everything and become one of the men...but either way that makes it 1000 times harder to get married because either one of those reputations would have stuck...

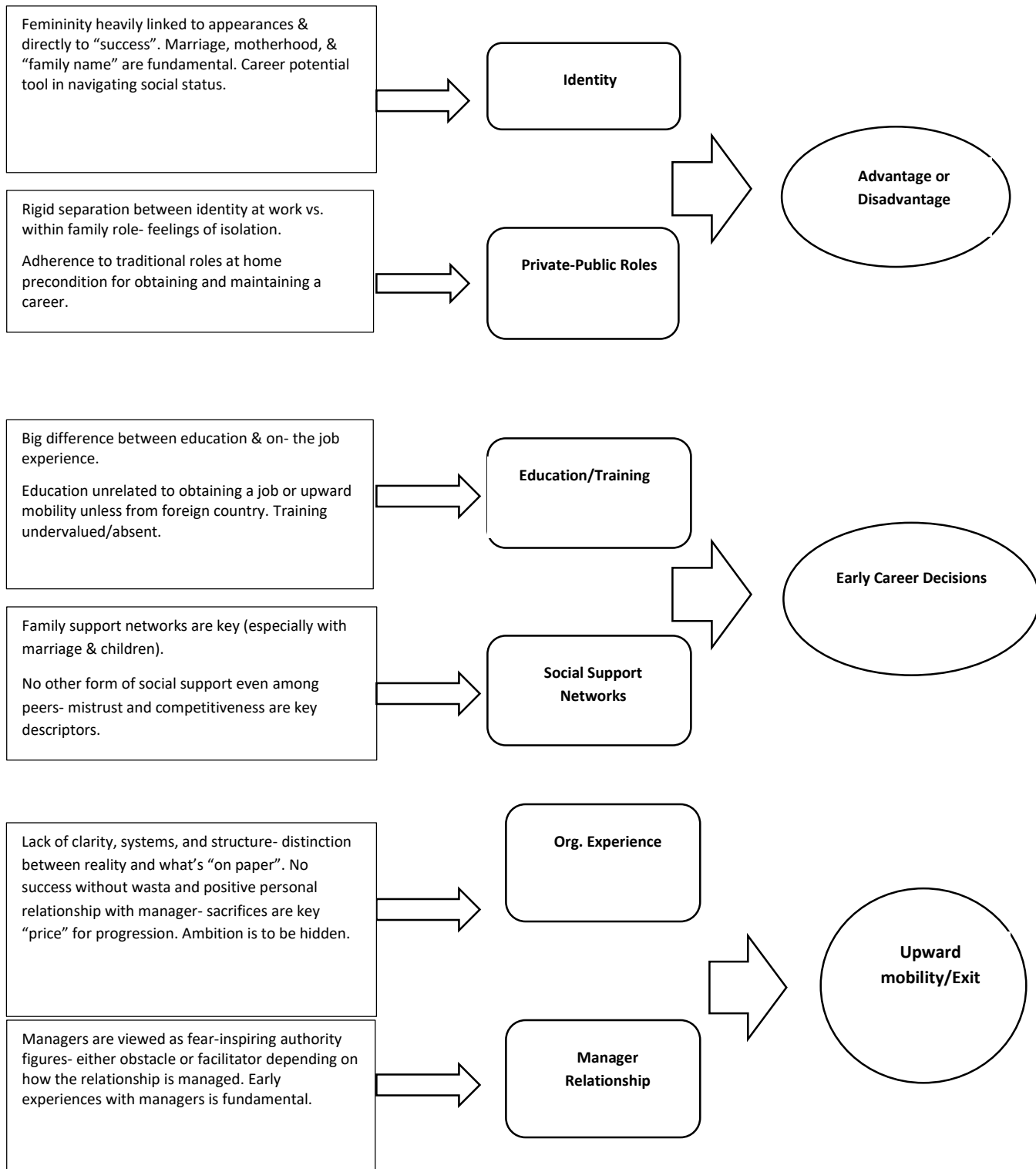
Interestingly, a management education was viewed as an empowering tool that could, depending on various circumstances, allow women to “escape” from the restrictions of social position and the seemingly taken for granted need to make “concessions” that may clash with their personal values. This was particularly true in the case of women who pursued graduate degrees and/or obtained their education in non-Arab countries. However, the positive influence of a “strong degree” was mostly empowering in enabling women to access opportunities they would otherwise be unable to (due to other elements of their identity and circumstances) and in navigating some of the resistance

experienced both within and outside organizations. However, regardless of the nature of the degree and the level of seniority of the women interviewed, there appeared to be a common assertion that there was a significant difference between what they were taught in university and what occurred “in real life”. This distinction often created feelings of fear, anxiety, and loss of confidence among women particularly in the early stages of their careers- an experience that sometimes discouraged them from pursuing management careers altogether. This discrepancy between what was learned and what was experienced was magnified in interactions with managers, who were often older men described as authoritative, fear-inspiring figures, frequently viewed as an obstacle in the movement towards the next step in the women’s career journey. This negative relationship often thrived in organizations in which there is a clear absence of systems and processes that assure women of their ability to be objectively evaluated as well as the assurance of the protection of their rights as individuals and employees. A majority of the critical incidents described by women involved situations in which they experienced traumatizing interactions with managers and/or colleagues causing them to suffer intensified feelings of fear and anxiety that further fuelled the feelings of isolation that they also experienced in their roles at home.

Taken together, the intersection of specific elements of a woman’s identity appeared to make them feel advantaged or disadvantaged in their ability to pursue their management career goals. For some this was their

physical appearance, their age, a privileged background, marriage and children, divorce, sexual orientation, family name and many more. These feelings of advantage or disadvantage emerging from the intersection of particular layers of identity were often qualitatively influenced by the presence of social support networks and education that appeared to be more influential in the early stages of women's management career decisions. These decisions were either enforced or unenforced by the relationship between these women and their managers and the structure of their organizational systems that together contributed to a positive or negative view of upward mobility. Thus, when women experienced positive relationships with their managers (particularly in the first few positions held) and within supportive organizations, women were open to pursuing management careers with the goal of reaching the higher levels of management, while women who experienced negative relationships with their managers were hesitant to accept promotions to avoid further interaction with "more angry managers and more competitive enemies". However, this is not to suggest that this, or any other single element, was the most important factor influencing women's experiences. Different women with similar circumstances had radically different interpretations of their experiences and the decisions they made depending on the interplay of the different elements shaping their identities and lives in different settings-this is shared among all 3 clusters as will be evident in the stories. The discussion thus far is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 3 Cluster 1 Themes



The Stories

Salma is a 38 year-old Palestinian woman and the CEO of an investment consulting company. Born in Palestine to a Christian mother and a Sunni father, Salma spent her childhood moving across towns in Palestinian cities before moving to Lebanon at the age of 18. In Lebanon, Salma would go on to earn a Bachelor's in Management then move to the USA to earn an MBA from Yale University. A year later Salma began work first in Palestine and then in the banking sector in the UAE. Salma has never been married and has no children; a fact she references several times throughout the interview. As a Palestinian teenager in Lebanon Salma often felt like "a second-class citizen"; a feeling she was familiar with as the child of a mixed-religion family. Salma acknowledges her financially privileged background though she asserts that when she began work at 24 she started "at the bottom of the bottom of the bottom" at a renowned international bank soon after she returned with her MBA.

Far from a privileged background and an Ivy-League education, I meet Fatima, a 33 year-old Lebanese hijabi² woman from a devout Shiite family. Married at the age of 19, Fatima is now a mother to 4 children ranging in age from 10 to 2. Fatima describes her upbringing as a typical

girl from the South with a conservative family and very traditional in every sense... My mother was a housewife and my

² A hijabi is a woman who wears a "hijab" which is a headscarf some Muslim women wear.

father a schoolteacher... I was a good student all my life and really loved studying. Top of my class and class president [at an all girl's school].

Fatima had what she describes as a “traditional marriage” where she knew her husband briefly before marrying him. Prior to marriage, and a year after graduating high school, Fatima was working as a secretary to be able to pay her way through university. Fatima describes that the primary reason she agreed to marry her husband was that he was

...very ambitious mash'Allah³! First thing he told me... was look Fatima for me my first priority... is to get a PhD and I want the same for you when we are married... PhD was the magical word for me!

And while Fatima is a division manager today she describes the first few years of her career as “shocking and traumatizing”.

Born an hour away from Fatima's homeland is Fidaa, a woman who boastfully describes her career as a “stunning success”. Fidaa is a 37-year old Syrian hijabi, sunni woman who is married with 4 children ranging in age from 17 to 4. She lived in Damascus all her life where she was mostly a stay-at-home mother, except for the occasional government-commissioned project she joined by virtue of her UK Master's Degree in Management and family connections. This is until moving to the UAE 7 years ago, where she began full-time employment, first at a large events management company and later as a division

³ Mash'Allah is a common phrase in Arabic translating to “God has willed” that is used with a variety of connotations whether expressing joy or protection of someone mentioned.

manager at a university where she is also a part-time instructor. She describes this transformation of hers as a surprise

...really no one expected me to become this successful. I lost lots of friends because of it...no one wants good for other people...most of my friends still stay at home and they are jealous of me and my success...but I want to reach even higher than this and that's what got me to this level...

From the other side of the border in Jordan I meet Hanin a 27 year old single, bisexual woman; a statement she makes early in her interview much to my surprise "I'm not your normal Jordanian girl I think you should know that before we start". Hanin endured a turbulent childhood after her parents' divorce where she was forced to briefly live with her father (a successful entrepreneur). After earning her Bachelors in Mass Communications and Media, Hanin enrolled in an MBA program with a management track while working as a social media and marketing executive and specializing in high-profile accounts. This is a job she undertook recently in the wake of the failure of the marketing company she opened two years ago. Hanin comments

...I never wanted to be like everyone else and I usually take the hard way always...I get in trouble a lot but that's who I am and it took me a long time to accept that...

In neighbouring Iraq, Mais describes her journey as "half fate and half planning"; she laughs as she says this reflecting on a career that saw her move from an administrative assistant at 21 to a vice president at 32. A married mother of one, Mais describes her upbringing with a stay-at-home mother and a Professor father whom she credits for instilling in her a strong sense of drive

and ambition. Mais began her career at the age of 21 at a semi-private company when she first graduated, working her way up the ranks

...I knew I wanted to achieve great things I used to say it always as a kid but I didn't really know what I was saying (laughs). When I started here I also didn't think to myself ok Mais you will be here eleven years later let alone a vice president...no way... I mean who would? I started as an administrative assistant!...

Mais views her career as a positive journey of “finding myself through my work”.

Career Journey

Finding oneself through work was a powerful motivator for Salma whose facial expressions harden as she describes the “need to be in control and move to the top at any cost...all the inner anger I felt as the outsider...the stranger everywhere I was... I had to define myself for myself and the world”. While she did not need to work to financially support herself she asserts that her father's influence as a successful entrepreneur made it difficult for her to “accept anything less than big success...the kind that astonishes the world”. And while Salma had no shortage of passion, she describes feeling lost in the ambiguity of her first job, which she describes as

...a real education let me tell you! I mean the Yale MBA on one side and the reality of this job was something completely different! ..I found myself lost ...really let me tell you... but thank God I learned fast!

Less than a year into the job, Salma recounts an awakening when she felt she was alone. Salma describes:

I remember the day I realized I was the only woman who was not a secretary in the whole bank (shakes her head). I was walking to the meeting room and my boss said ‘Salma can you take the minutes’. I said yes because what can you do when the boss asks you? Right? In the middle of the meeting *I swear* it hit me... that I had been working there for close to a year and there are men everywhere... It was a boys’ club with the only women there, 9 or 10 of them, no matter their title they were there to support them as secretaries, receptionists, office managers and everything you can imagine except being one of them...when I started talking to the women and saying we need to make some noise...this is me always the trouble maker ...they said Salma no please don’t shake things up we are happy like this as long as they leave us to do our work we are comfortable here thank God...I was thinking what do you mean you’re happy like this! But that’s it in my mind I wasn’t going to take it...one day I went to my boss and I said I need a parking spot like everyone else on the team, because where I had to park was a good 15 minute walk, and you know how streets in Lebanon are especially in summer... and he just looked up at me as if I had asked for a promotion. He said “when you prove yourself you can ask for parking space...Or maybe you want to take my place darling?”. And he was laughing so hard I wanted to scream...the way he said darling...so...disgusting but when you’re young and starting and you are taught that you have to work hard and prove yourself what can you do? You don’t want to be known as the trouble-maker. But 12 years later I did take his place and I got my parking spot!

The sentiment of feeling lost as a young employee is echoed by Fatima who, while earning her Bachelors in Management, worked at a bank and then at a marketing firm. Fatima would quit work for a few years before returning at the encouragement of her husband who also enrolled her in an MBA program in spite of the ensuing financial strain. Eventually Fatima returned to work partially to “support my husband financially and partially for myself”; she currently works as a division manager overseeing a team of 6 employees in a large, private optical company that manufactures, wholesales, and retails optical products across the MENA and the USA.

Fatima describes her career as “a movie that starts out as a horror film

then slowly gets better”. Fatima says her experience in those first years in Lebanon were

...shocking! There is no clarity in Lebanese companies....no...how do I say it...there’s no honesty...I learned from the start that in Lebanon the only way to get ahead is if you know the right people... the whole country runs on wasta...you know how it is.... And I had none so I was lucky enough to have a job in the first place. But promotions and management and these things...forget it...I knew I could be the best employee and... and it won’t get me more than maybe a pay raise here and there...pocket change... nothing serious not if you have aspirations and I knew I did but how and when I would reach I wasn’t sure...All I had was myself and I had to work on myself... that’s why I never stopped my studies and whenever I could, either through work, which was rare, or by myself I used to go to training and pay for it myself...I still do!

With such clear ambition I ask Fatima why she quit twice in her career.

Fatima had been working in a marketing firm for some time reporting to a Lebanese manager. She describes

...the job was one thing and my manager something else... There was a job description on one side and the job I was doing... there was no system and no place to have a discussion. He would say and we would do, and for me I thought I understood the system... I do what he says and I will reach places... One time he gathered only the women in the boardroom and we were thinking what’s this about? And he starts by giving a lecture about clients and you know...dealing with them... which ended up being just an introduction to the real issue which was that he wanted us all to... “take care”... of how we looked...how we dressed... saying that having all these ladies was an asset and we had to use it. I was one of only two hijabis in the whole office; and the other hijabi dressed very tight and revealing for my taste ...God forgive me...I mean for me I lived in my uniform of pant suit as you can see (she laughs). That’s professional dressing for me ...I was in shock. What does that even mean? How is this even relevant to our work? What are we supposed to do? No one knew...It should have been an indication of how he was but I didn’t think much of it. I changed my hijab a little...added some style and colour although I wasn’t convinced of what I was doing. But I didn’t want to be a complainer I wanted to do whatever I had to do to succeed...but the demands became more and it sort of gave him the space to comment on the way we looked...I almost

wanted to hide myself...others could take it but I knew I had to leave and I did I didn't last very long after that...

Hiding oneself is no strange concept for Hanin who describes how she first hid behind her hijab "I thought that if I fit into what people think I should be then I would be okay (laughs) and so that's why I decided to wear it at 16". Hanin recounts how she never thought she would have career ambitions but learned quickly watching her mother struggle as a divorced woman

...my father just took us from her not because he wanted us but to punish her and...you know the law was on his side...and with that mentality he wasn't going to support her financially in any way...I mean her life ended before it really began because you know divorced at 36 meant she wasn't considered a real person...her family didn't want her and she had no education...nothing...so you become a floor mop to everyone and it would not have been that way if she had finished her education and had a job...that scared me into having ambition I guess...I couldn't imagine that there could come a day where someone else would have so much control over my life...

Hanin describes her first experience at work as something that ignited in her the desire to pursue a management career that would see her one day become "the CEO...I would look at him and think one day that's going to be me". Interestingly this ambition to reach the top was not born out of a positive experience, as she explains

...I don't think I had a normal experience I mean...I was a fat hijabi starting out at work you're immediately put into a box...you're working to meet a husband or because you need the money...don't get me wrong I respect whoever does that but that was not me! I just knew that when it came to interacting with clients, management only brought me forward when they needed a face to represent something... so like when we were looking to get the account with an Islamic bank... otherwise I would stay in the background doing the work...it's not so much that I wanted to be seen as much as I wanted

experience and to learn because honestly we don't work in meeting rooms we do our work behind the scenes and unless your boss is also fat hijabi... you don't really get invited to those things...you're not part of the gangs that make decisions... you're outside ... I think you end up trying to make yourself feel better by trying to hide yourself so at least you say fine it was my choice I didn't want to be seen...

Far from hiding herself is Fidaa, who explains "most people would be scared I mean when I started I had limited experience but I'm generally very confident in myself". Fidaa would go on to explain that while she's not arrogant, she certainly was aware of

...what it means being a beautiful woman especially at work...it creates lots of enemies but reality is... being a woman... I mean it's not enough to just say I have a good degree or work experience...you have to also be a real woman because every decision maker in the company is a man am I right...this means knowing how to dress from your hijab to your shoes...and how to use the right tactics with the right people to get what you want there's no other way believe me...

This confidence carried Fidaa through an unlikely career-path from a stay-at-home mother to a part-time instructor and manager of a team of 10 employees. Married at 19 and a mother at 20, Fidaa credits her father in law for encouraging her to continue studying despite the opposition of the rest of her family including her husband with whom she has a turbulent relationship. She explains

...my husband and I have a different relationship you can say.... before he was always fighting so I can be a traditional housewife like his mother...she used to push him a lot...but my father in law saw something different in me... I always had to hide myself around my husband...make myself smaller around him... I was busy with the kids and you know what it's like with 3 boys...chaos oh my God...and so it was easy to at least keep appearances... Anyway he

was a director of a big hospital in Damascus...his father helped him get that position and...I come from a big family as well I'm sure you've heard of us... but anyway my husband had the freedom to be out all day...and you know how women are they don't care if he's married or not...so what happened happened*⁴.... but it was the best thing because it gave me what I needed to be able to separate from him with the full support of my father in law who arranged for me to go to the UK for one year for my Masters... After that I had everything I needed when I got back with him... I could finally be strong and make my decisions because I had proved I could do it on my own without him...Everyone should also do the same really I recommend it ...anyway now I'm here and that's all old history...

With an equally surprising career trajectory but radically different experience in her personal life is Mais who saw herself transform from an executive assistant to a Vice President in 11 years. Mais describes

I can honestly say that I was very lucky to have had great supervisors and managers and great colleagues. God has really put some great teachers in my way. I was 21 I had no clue about anything but my manager, an incredible person...an Iranian actually...he recently passed away bless his soul...he really considered me as a daughter and he saw potential in me and taught me with patience how to do things...not just work but also the people and the politics and all the s**t that comes with working around here. I think your first boss really makes a difference... I was also lucky that my next two managers were incredibly inspiring ladies... an American and a Canadian and both gave me incredible experience. Sometimes it felt like my second family I turned to them when I was getting married and later when I had my daughter... It's a lot to figure out alone but I had that support at work and from my father. My mother still thinks I should stay home instead of leaving my kid with her but I don't care I'm happy, she's happy, the kid is happy, and our bank accounts are happy...

Mais explains that outside work things are different. She doubts whether she would have the same experience if her husband didn't work in the same company and understood her environment. I ask her about how she navigates that relationship to which she explains that it's a delicate balancing act

⁴ Alluding to husband's infidelity.

...He is very understanding and when we met he loved that I had dreams... We have big dreams and none of them could happen if we were on a single income. When he was thinking of changing jobs I encouraged him to join my company. We're in different departments and barely see each other but still...the difference in position needs to be handled...when people see us together I make it a point to be *his wife* not an employee and not a Vice President. Just like at work I'm just the VP not a wife mother... sister... nothing just it's the same at home; when with my family or his or our friends I'm Mais the wife and Mais the mother making Dolma*⁵ Mais the Vice President is kicked out of the house from Thursday Night to Saturday Evening... No VPs in the house...

Mais mentions the daily struggle dropping her daughter at day-care and questioning herself almost daily every time her daughter begs her to skip work and stay with her. On particularly difficult days Mais doubts her choice

...I swear I hear my mother and mother in law's voices buzzing in my ear telling me to stay home and take care of my family before my husband looks elsewhere and when I do take a few days off I realize that I can never be that kind of wife and mother...let's just hope my kid won't have complexes when she's older...

The daily struggle described by Mais is no stranger to Fidaa, who describes the challenges she has with her children who are still vehemently resistant to the idea of a housekeeper living with them and taking over Fidaa's caretaking role. Fidaa still feels she doesn't have support

...I won't lie and say having a maid is not incredible support... But to be honest I can never rest because I swear it's another full time job for appearances...illusions really...so there's a lot of coordination for me...I have to come home at a certain time to pretend that I cooked the main meal or my husband and kids won't stop nagging...I have to wake up early enough for the younger ones to think I made the lunch box...and I get my hair done at night so my husband thinks it's for him and not for work...if I'm having a difficult day at work I have to come home and pretend everything's fine because if I open my mouth I will hear "just quit" from everyone. My friends won't understand either but you know it's the same at work... I can't ever *ever* bring it up to my husband or my

⁵ A traditional Iraqi dish.

children or else anything that goes wrong, or if someone has an issue with you they blame it on that...it's like one big but lonely movie for me...

The idea of a staged production is a constant theme in Hanin's career who vividly describes how

...To this day I sometimes feel lost...not as much as the first few positions I had but...it's a miracle I even stayed really...if I didn't want the financial independence I would have quit purely out of the fear of having to deal with people... you're not prepared for that...I was at an all-girls school I mean...and suddenly men everywhere...I didn't know how to deal with them and they didn't know how to deal with me because it was clear I wasn't a regular girl so you enjoy being invisible...even if just for a little...but you have to still pretend like everything's normal...

Hanin speaks of a qualitative change in her life when she removed the hijab and started her own company

...it's not that the hijab was restricting me it' ... that it wasn't... *really* me and I think that stops you from a lot of things your body language changes...the important thing is...you're not easily put into an idea of how you should be so when I'm opinionated they don't find it strange for a muhajaba...or that I'm somehow a disgrace to the hijab ...

Hanin describes her current position as incredibly fulfilling because of the environment; young and dynamic individuals from every background enabling her to be comfortable with her sexuality openly. The rigidity of what she calls "old style companies" is replaced with a more fluid one

...there's no boss and no hierarchy...formally it exists but really we are just teams and we're evaluated on our work and that's something I'm sure of...it's not who you are it's not whether you're married or if you're from the boss's tribe ...it's just your work on the team that makes the difference I can anticipate becoming successful in what I do... but I know that I will eventually reach a point where there will be a red light that says stop... It happens to everyone... There will always come the time when you have to accept it's over for you unless you're a blonde woman with an exceptional degree then maybe...

Fatima, however, tells a different story. While she too is a mother of four children and without family support or full time help at home she asserts that her key to success is that she is

...very serious about work. When I'm at work I can only think of being the perfect employee and example for my team. I work hard to be good at what I do and this gives me confidence...and...energy... And no matter what's happening at home with the kids that stays outside. I don't let anyone know about my home even the women. When I come home it's another story. I cook I clean I take care of the kids and thank God so far they have been nothing but perfect at school...I won't lie to you and tell you it's easy...it's not but this is the choice I made and I'm willing to do what it takes. I can't be a half employee and also I can't be a half mother so I do it both at full capacity but separately...there's no other solution...the bosses are men... won't understand...the women colleagues will be waiting for you to fall...you know men compete on work only but women compete at a personal level and it turns ugly so at work I'm neither a woman or a mother or anything I'm just Fatima the employee who does things perfectly...

Things are different for Salma who laughs while asserting "I have no husband no kids and no headache!". Throughout the course of the interview Salma references her personal life often and at one point volunteers an almost apologetic explanation

...You know Shireen it's not like I made a decision by myself that I won't marry or have kids it just didn't happen...But people think of course it didn't happen when you're working all day and night and travelling. What man would put up with that? They say of course she became a CEO she had nothing else to live for. You know how it is... as if you're not a full person unless you're married between me and you though what man could handle a wife who's an equal or even more accomplished than him? If you find one let me know I'm still looking...

But beyond this, Salma's single, childless status has forced her to confront serious questions about her identity as a woman as she recounts the perplexed looks she receives when meeting people

I think I always surprise people...they definitely expect me to be a massive woman in a boring suit when they hear CEO...and maybe even have a shaved head...sometimes I think if I wore the hijab I would be taken more seriously that's for sure because it helps people know where to fit me (she gestures)...I mean if it was short like men's also they would say ok this is why she's a CEO but to look like a woman and be a CEO seems to be impossible!...you can never make everyone happy so I decided enough is enough! I will do what I want!...but all this and being unmarried... it runs their imaginations about what kind of woman I am that I couldn't get married... I've won awards no one can dream of and my mother still sighs with sadness that I know won't go away because I'm not married at this age...it's okay though it makes me put all my own frustration into work and it's worked so far and thank God he put some great women in my life who understand me...you know birds of the same kind find each other*⁶...

This camaraderie among women is a core part of Salma's personal and professional life. When Salma eventually left the bank and started her own company there came a point where she realized it was

Impossible to keep going with no friends or mentors or family to understand what I go through everyday...so I made it a point to hire more women and encourage them to work alongside each other and I made it a part of my leadership to change the idea that women can't help each other...that's a big lie...when given the chance and the right environment women can work together wonderfully...we need to let go of the sick mentalities we have about each other...

Mais would strongly disagree with this sentiment. While she speaks fondly of her women mentors from early in her career she tells a different story about her experience working with other women as a colleague and supervisor

...I think it's very difficult being a woman and supervising other women...It's difficult with men too but in a different way. Let me tell you...see...there's no one way to be with them. Arab women come in with baggage...*so much* of it! They come in with so many complexes*⁷ ready to fight ready to conspire... ready to hate you no matter what. Men just don't accept your authority you have to either

⁶ Arab proverb.

⁷ The word "complex" in this context is Arabic slang referring to one being "difficult" on account of having psychological issues (a jealous woman for example is referred to as having a "complex").

get them to do it by befriending them or you fight your way to it...
It's harder with women because they don't learn how separate work
from personal issues...

Similarly, Fatima simply asserts that

...the only women whom I have really admired and worked with to
learn from them were my professors...other than that colleagues or
bosses who are women are ten times harder to deal with than men
because of so many things like jealousy or their emotions or
problems from home...I prefer working with men... they're more
logical in my experience.

Fidaa feels an even stronger negativity about working with other
women. She tells many stories that she considers examples of why she prefers
to "stay away from women as much as I can" and these mostly revolve around
alleged jealousy and an unwillingness to be collegial

...that's why I don't get close to anyone here...I only work to
impress my managers and thank God I succeeded in that which is
why I am where I am...if my managers were women there's no way I
would have made it here...you can't trust them... they enjoy seeing
you down because there aren't many of us and so its eat or be eaten
with them...but with men you know how to deal with them...a little
politics and a little femininity gets things moving for you...

Interestingly Hanin asserts that being openly bisexual means she's

...free in some areas and helpless in others...I get to have a great
work relationship with everyone...the men think of me as one of the
guys and the women don't consider me a threat...and so at work I
definitely see how I have a different...better relationship with
everyone...it's not like I walk into a room and announce my
sexuality and I get hugs like in movies...but I don't get treated like
I'm a sensitive emotional woman who falls apart...I'm evaluated on
work...no nonsense or distractions!

The Brink & Pivotal Moments

While Hanin, Salma, Fatima, Mais and Fidaa tell different stories, at
some point they each tell of the time/s they thought of quitting during moments
that proved pivotal. For Mais a successful career is one where "I can be

successful at work without losing my home one can't come at the expense of the other...how you do it... that is a different story". A pivotal moment in her journey though was when she was appointed as Vice President

...I came into a very old team...these people had been working together for years. Mostly men and just two women; every nationality you can think of... But the Arabs especially the Iraqis...they were the hardest to deal with. They clearly had agreed to push me out. They tried everything you can think of from whispering in the hallways...spreading rumours...openly saying no to me. At one point we were onto a big project and it was time to get working. They worked as though I was a ghost; they just did what they had done when their old boss was around...I never told anyone but this honestly broke me ...from when I started working I had always found a way to move forward I had someone to turn to but I was on my own with this... At one point they all ganged up and complained to HR saying I was rude and condescending. I knew this was because up to that point I had not reacted to escalated provocations. And that was the day I called them for a meeting and gave them 24 hours to change or leave; I had a letter of end of service for all of them. I don't think I have ever been so aggressive in my life. But it worked. By the morning I had received 3 resignations out of 28 and it has been good since then. I had to command their respect and so it's a balancing act between nice Mais and scary Mais every hour of everyday...

Hanin tells of the many times she turned down promotions for fear of being

...unprepared...it's more work and responsibility and it means a lot more enemies...but there's no book to read...I wish there was...this one time a senior manager who had a habit of calling me into his office privately called me in to tell me that he was promoting me...with the...warning...that women who worked so close to him tended to fall in love with him...this kind of s***t humour is a fact of life for Jordanians ...but what I couldn't handle was the ways he crossed the lines with me from then onwards...and I realized that I wasn't alone...the closer you are to the managers the more these things happen...and if you tell anyone they will question what it is that you did to invite this behaviour...

Hanin speaks of how she was inspired to remain in her job and confront her manager on the advice of a former mentor who told her to

...man up and deal with it like a man...so I did...I fought...it scared him and others... now people know who Hanin is...

Salma recalled that she had thought of quitting many times but only came very close to doing so when she had been working in the bank for 10 years and was among the top 3 decision-makers when a new CEO came along

...He was Sudanese and I really looked up to him as a mentor...I mean his background was so impressive....and you know it's so hard to find someone you can connect with and he was definitely the kind of leader you enjoyed working with. Every time I went up to him with an idea or a project or a strategy to move us forward...strategy is what I love... always have....he would pat me on the shoulder and say "ok dada ok dada later". And it took me a year to finally ask someone what dada meant. And I realized it meant "ok child" as you would say to your kids. I know it seems like a small issue especially that he was such a great man but for me it was more than that... How much higher would I have to go before I was treated with respect and seen as an equal? It was really a moment where I thought to myself what's the point Salma? Why are you putting everything you have into this and make it to the top on paper for you to still be treated like when you were 23? I felt like the girl bullied in school "the girl from the camps"*⁸. I was ready to quit. I realized I couldn't go on any longer working for other people. I wasn't just going to start my own thing I was also going to make sure that no woman would feel that way...I didn't quit then but a year later I did... That's how I started this business and focused on the training so in a way my last boss did me a favour!...

Salma credits her perseverance to her upbringing with a father who demanded she perform like her brothers and her education acknowledging that

...the Khawaja*⁹ complex is a big one here. I could be the same Salma but without U.S.A on this paper in a frame I don't know if I would have had the opportunities that I did because it gave me the confidence to... not be afraid...I would remind myself sometimes of this and I would be able to speak up because I could be certain no one in the room would have that...

⁸ Reference to the areas in which Palestinian refugees live in neighboring countries- it is sometimes used in a derogatory manner.

⁹ Originating from the Egyptian term for "foreigner", the "Khawaja Complex" is a phrase common in Arabic slang that refers to the way in which anything foreign/western is assumed to be superior.

For Fatima, however, her life changed when she became a first-time mother. Though it was a nonissue for her, at work she describes how when she became pregnant

...it was as if my life turned one-hundred-eighty degrees! I was left out of more and more meetings and more and more projects as if he wanted to hide me somewhere. And then one day a colleague approached me telling me the boss had sent her to tell me that it's better if I resign early because surely that's what I would do when the baby comes and it was better now because there are no projects I can be involved in because my condition meant I can't interact with clients... I don't know how to explain it but I felt weak.... I... felt embarrassed and ashamed. All my hard work meant nothing. I wasn't judged on my work I was judged on how I looked and even worse being pregnant meant I had to.... hide myself! I resigned on the spot.... I regret it now I wish I had fought back or did something. But it took me a long time to come to accept how I felt and I think that's one of the reasons it took me so long to go back to work...I was scared...

But when Fatima decided to return to work she was shocked to find out that finding a job as a mother was even harder. She would spend two years applying and interviewing for job after job only to be faced with rejection

I lost confidence. I didn't know if it was because of me or because I had small kids. I would be so sure I got the job until they would ask personal questions and I could see their faces change when they found out I had small kids. One of them liked me so much he wanted to hire me but not for the job I applied for that fit my experience and degree... He offered me to be an administrative assistant! I was thinking to myself no way after all that studying I did. But after enough rejections you learn...I tried as much as possible to avoid the husband and children question and I accepted a job that I felt was not for my level. What can I do? I knew I had to start somewhere both for my career and financially it wasn't sustainable for us like this but it was hard for me to start from the bottom again...now I make sure I warn everyone not to quit no matter what...not to make my same mistake...

And while Fatima worked her way up through the years though it was not an easy journey. Mais tells a similar experience of when she became a first-

time mother and returning to the job

...I had been working for 6 years already and I knew I had proven myself...well I thought I did...after the baby though coming back felt like I was new again...nothing changed in me but for everyone around me...it was as if they had been waiting for me to fall...no wait I don't mean that having a baby meant I had fallen...but I felt that they were doubting if I could put all my concentration into the job and do it perfectly...and you know I think deep down I felt the same...how could I sleep 3 hours a night and come to work and do what I used to do...before all I could think of was work but now I was on my nerves all day thinking about the baby...it's normal I know but it was a whole other job trying to pretend like none of this was happening in my mind and....you know it's not like it's some box in the evaluation that oh she became a mother mark her down...but you feel it...I remember one time...the first time I cried at work actually...my boss sent my colleague to this big conference to present something I had worked on for a very long time! When I asked why I wasn't informed he was genuinely surprised...he assumed I wouldn't have wanted to leave the baby on a weekend...he was trying to be nice but to me it felt like a slap...that I was now...as if I didn't exist...people could choose for me and decide without me...and I thought this was going to be the way it is forever...I just didn't know how to be me...or actually I wasn't allowed to be me anymore...I felt alone because I knew if I said anything everyone would be ready to tell me that's why I needed to quit and take care of my baby till she's older...so I cried alone a lot until I got tired of it and decided I would just work double...no more than double even...as hard as I did before and sort of make everyone see me again as Mais the excellent employee not the mother...

For Fidaa quitting was never an option in spite of the challenges faced at work and at home

...not financially thank God it was taken care of but it was more important ... believe me my job was really like breathing for me I couldn't go back to being at home and just do that forever...being a great powerful woman is the only real success...

For her a pivotal moment that shaped Fidaa's idea of what was possible for her career interestingly took place before she took on full-time employment

...I was at a hospital in Syria when I was having trouble getting documents signed without my husband's presence...something

related to payment with his details...I'm not sure now but what I do remember is that the man in front of me wouldn't even look up when he was talking to me...he was so dismissive and talked to me like I was an uneducated child and I was so angry because I absolutely hate it when I'm not in control of a situation and I needed him. I started shouting and yelling and things were getting loud when the manager walked in and you could feel the atmosphere of the room change...there was a woman maybe in her mid forties but my God the way everyone stood up when she walked in and the way the man fighting with me shrunk into a mouse was something strange but... wow... She yelled at him and got my papers done and I was shocked I think for the next two days because seeing a woman command a room like that made me think that's how I want to be... that kind of prestige...wow...The first time I opened a bank account for myself here and my occupation was no longer listed as housewife on my visa I felt a different kind of respect and now it says manager and I feel I can stand on my feet and have my own presence. That's what pushes me to try more and more even if it's hard and even if no one likes it...

This pursuit of power and influence is clearly important for Fidaa who references that she manages a large team several times throughout the interview; she describes

...I know I'm going to get myself to the top even if just to show people that I can do it...I learned it's either the top or you're nobody...

Cluster 2

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council are incredibly unique. To begin with, the political and economic alliance among the six countries is relatively young having been formed less than four decades ago. This is unsurprising given that several of those countries are also relatively young compared to other countries of the Arab world. And yet in spite of this relative youth, the GCC has, for the most part, enjoyed the kind of political and economic stability that has enabled rapid growth that propelled several GCC countries to the forefront regionally and internationally on multiple fronts.

However, from a sociocultural perspective the countries of the GCC are characterized as being more religious, conservative, and traditional compared to other Arab countries. How these factors shaped the lives of the 21 women interviewed is explored in this section beginning with the table below providing an overview of the participants.

Table 5 Cluster 2 Overview

Name	Age	Nationality	Religion	Marital Status	Education	Employment Status
Maryam A.	30	UAE	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Single	MBA & MPA	Middle management (Public Sector)
Asma	24	UAE	Sunni Muslim (Niqabi)	Single	Bachelors	Unemployed
Noor	29	UAE	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (1 child)	Masters	Unemployed
Shamma	39	UAE	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (1 child)	Bachelors	Top Management
Neda B.	30	Oman	Sunni Muslim	Married	Bachelors	Top Management
Roya M.	35	Oman	Sunni Muslim	Married (2 children)	Masters	Middle Management

Maryam R	30	Oman	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Junior Administration
Amal	37	Bahrain	Shiite Muslim	Divorced (2 children)	Bachelors	Junior Management
Khulood	27	Bahrain	Shiite Muslim	Married	Masters	Unemployed
Wafa	28	Bahrain	Shiite Muslim	Married (2 children)	Masters	Entrepreneur
Hanan	31	KSA	Sunni Muslim	Single	Masters	Middle Management
Reem F.	33	KSA	Sunni Muslim (Niqabi)	Married (2 children)	Bachelors	Unemployed
Nour A.	24	KSA	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Junior Administration
Elham	24	Kuwait	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Junior Administration
May S.	32	Kuwait	Sunni Muslim	Married (2 children)	Masters	Unemployed

Leila W.	29	Kuwait	Sunni Muslim	Married	Masters	Unemployed
Nihal	28	Kuwait	Sunni Muslim	Married (1 child)	MBA	Junior Administration
Nadia	37	Qatar	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelor's	Junior Administration
Deena W.	28	Qatar	Sunni Muslim	Married	Masters	Middle Management
Abeer R.	27	Qatar	Sunni Muslim	Married	Bachelors	Unemployed
Leena A.	25	Qatar	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (2 children)	Masters	Unemployed

Cluster 2 Themes: An Overview

The ages of the women of cluster 2 make it relatively younger compared to the other two clusters. Family and “society” appear to be a more strongly articulated presence in the lives of the 21 women in this cluster who often felt the enormous pressure of ensuring that they positively represented their families, tribes, and even countries particularly when working with expats (a more common experience given the composition of the workforce in the GCC). Thus, particularly for young unmarried women, their roles as daughters are a key part of their identities with many of their fundamental decisions heavily

shaped by their families and the need for their approval. The generational gap in the families of these women is also more prominent with many of them being the first women in their families to pursue higher education and/or careers. This often made women's early career decisions more complicated particularly given that the financial motivation for pursuing a career was less visible in this cluster. These early career decisions were often more complicated by the perceived societal expectation of women as representatives of their families in the public sphere that only intensified upon marriage because "actions reflected on [their] own family and [their] husband[s]". Hence, considerations for adherence to culture as expressed in specific modes of dressing, speaking, behaving, and socializing in ways that ensure that it doesn't appear that "any rules are broken...just maneuvered smartly" is key part of the women's career experiences. This manoeuvring was oftentimes facilitated by supportive brothers, who acted as allies for these women, both within and outside the home. This isn't to suggest that these women lack individuality, rather individuality appears to flourish in the space that remains after they fulfil their duties as daughters, wives, and mothers and members of their tribes as *they* define those roles for themselves and from their *own* perspectives. Thus, how each woman interpreted and fulfilled her obligations in different settings varied even within the same country and often depended on how each role intersected with the other. And yet in spite of these differences women perceived the possibility of navigating their different roles facilitated through higher

education, which appeared more strongly valued in comparison to the other clusters.

For many of these women higher education in general, and a management degree in particular, was an empowering tool in manoeuvring the expectations they felt by virtue of particular parts of their identities. Thus for the woman from the prominent family for whom “work is shameful” and the woman whose modest family leaves her with no “way to get a good position or marry someone better” as well as the divorcee who was “tired of being treated like half a person”, pursuing higher education appeared to be what one participant describes as “the best insurance policy for a woman”. Interestingly, and in spite of all this, ambition is more strongly articulated in this cluster than the other two. Thus women in this cluster more comfortably expressed their desire to pursue management careers and reach the middle and top levels of their organizations.

Navigating that ambition, however, requires a strict division between their lives at work and their lives at home. This is particularly intensified in the case of married women and mothers who in most cases described maintaining their marriages necessitated that they sometimes over exaggerate the displays of adherence to tradition “even if it’s just for show... we will pretend to make the food and iron the kandora¹⁰ and act delicate as if we didn’t spend all day yelling and fighting and taking care of things at the office just like men” as Roya from

¹⁰ Traditional dress often worn by men across the GCC.

Oman describes. This is particularly interesting given that of all 3 clusters, the women of this cluster had more readily available childcare and support with household work. However, adhering to more traditional expectations was often linked to concerns for maintaining peace within the household and out of fear of losing a spouse either through divorce or to another marriage (polygamy being more socially acceptable in the countries of this cluster compared to the others). As such many women often reported hiding their career success from their spouses and extended families or even turning down opportunities for career progression out of fear of upsetting the balance in their relationships. This intense protectiveness of their private lives often exacerbated their feelings of alienation among women. This is particularly interesting given that they reported identifying that they have access to large social networks that include many women with similar experiences. However, the extent to which they leverage these networks for support and/or mentorship is limited by their concerns for “saving face” and not to appear to have failed to represent their families positively should their private experiences become exposed. For women who are “outside” the norm for whatever reason (divorce, “spinsterhood”, physical disability, family issues affecting its social status) their experiences are radically different as they tended to be more emboldened in their decisions and more willing to take risks.

However, at the root of these women’s experience with the strict division between the public and private spheres of their lives, is a very clear

expectation of a particular version of displays of femininity. And while the abaya¹¹ and hijab (in the style particular to some GCC countries) in many ways lessens the intensity with which the question of physical appearances feature in this cluster in comparison to others, yet this only intensified expectations in other areas that were sometimes difficult to reconcile with the expectations of a management career particularly in the private sector. Thus, in addition to the aforementioned discussion of the importance of the displays of the traditional roles as wives and mothers, women were often concerned about ensuring that their interactions, from the way they spoke to the way they behaved (including staying out late, travelling, shaking hands with men or particular seating arrangements within an office), particularly with other men did not “raise questions”. These concerns often caused women to gravitate more towards “women only” organizations and the public sector that appears to be an environment that makes these questions nonissues. This is in contrast to the private sector, which in many cases appeared to magnify these issues and intensify women’s struggles with determining how to best reconcile these concerns with the requirements of a management career. Women often expressed their disappointment at the realization that their management education did not prepare them to handle the “soft side” of the job; a weakness that is only magnified by the lack of mentorship and role models both on the job and outside. Hence, in trying to fill the gap left by their education, women

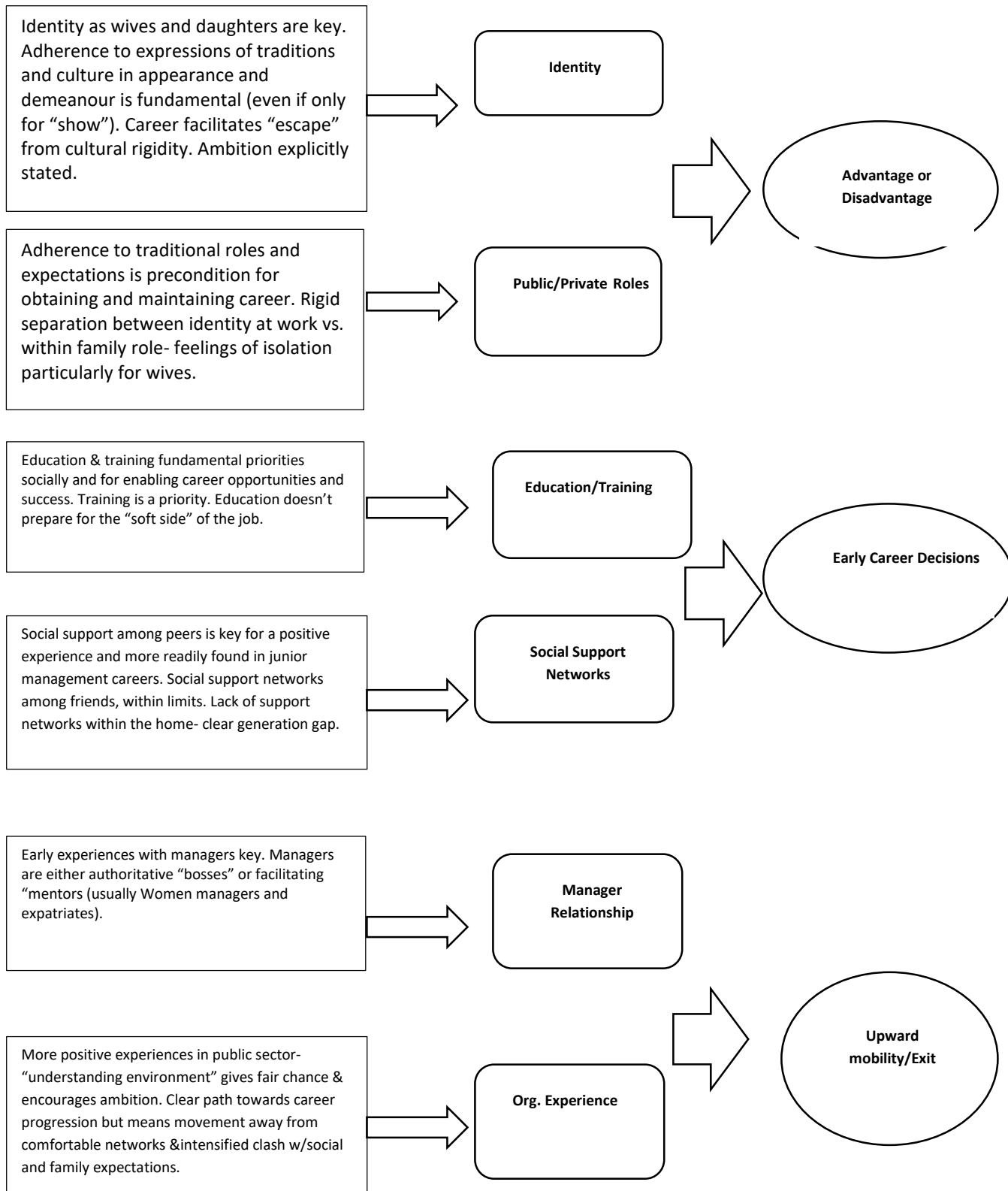
¹¹ Traditional dress for women in most GCC countries.

in this cluster strongly valued training and saw the support for training opportunities as an indicator of a positive work environment.

How the intersection of these different layers and “modes” of being qualitatively affected women’s career decisions depended on a multitude of factors. However, it’s interesting to note that oftentimes women’s early experiences with work and particularly their relationships with their first managers appears to have a powerful influence on women’s views of their careers and particularly their decisions to stay in place, move up, or out. Thus, while more often than not, and unlike clusters 1 and 3 where the concept of *wasta* features more heavily, women in cluster 2 saw a clear path towards upward career progression supported by clear systems and structures that enabled “anyone with a good degree, experience, and hard work to reach higher”. However, their movement along that path was complicated by the relationship with managers who were often described as gatekeepers who could not be easily passed without having to make compromises that would affect the delicate balance the women created between the public and private spheres and their identities in each. Exceptions to these, however, were usually women managers or expatriates who, when taking on the role of mentors, enabled women to see the possibilities of moving up without having to radically alter the balance in the other parts of their lives. In fact the women in this cluster appear to be among the most eager for “teachers” and mentors and felt more positively about working with women managers and colleagues.

Away from the relationship with managers, many participants described a strong desire to avoid upward movement altogether. In fact some of the women with incredibly promising career prospects, and sometimes strong mentors early in their careers, willingly turned down promotions for fear of losing the comfort of the support networks more readily found in junior levels of organizations, and the concern that succeeding in more senior management roles would necessitate fundamental changes in their identity “to become more aggressive”, “to travel more” and “stay out late”, or “to spend more time with men” either as managers or subordinates. For women whose experiences occurred in organizations with weak structures, and particularly mechanisms that ensured women could access support when needed, the professional fulfilment of a management career did not outweigh the risks of working “in a place that doesn’t care about your reputation or personal growth” and as such they often chose to quit after experiencing their first critical incident, often much quicker than women in the other clusters. An overview of the discussion thus far is presented in the figure below.

Figure 4 Cluster 2 Themes



The Stories

From the enigmatic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia I meet Hanan, a 31 year-old consultant at a world-renowned consultancy firm known for a “move up or out” policy. Born and raised in Saudi Arabia, Hanan attended an all-girls high school before earning a Bachelors in Management and a Master’s in Public Administration at a prestigious American University; a move she credits the insistence of her older brother in enabling her to do. Hanan’s mother holds a PhD while her father was a remarkably successful entrepreneur whose education did not go beyond a high-school diploma. Hanan’s affluent upbringing came to a surprising end when she turned 15; she reflected on this explaining

...the Quran¹² mentions that you should not hate something because that situation you hate might turn out to be the best thing for you and in a way losing everything was the beginning of me asking myself the important questions I was never allowed to ask about deciding what to do with my life...

For 37 year old Qatari Nadia it appears that her “destiny was set by God when he made me this way...thank God for everything...I look at my own sisters and doubt whether I would have been so independent and stubborn...and finish my studies if it wasn’t for this”. Nadia is referring to the wheelchair to which she has been bound from early childhood due to a condition she was born with. Nadia began working for the public sector after earning a Bachelor’s in Business Administration with a concentration in management and an MBA,

¹² The Holy book of Islam.

which she earned in the USA; today she is a division manager leading a team of

5. Nadia describes her family as a traditional one with a stay-at-home mother and a public sector employee father who retired early. Nadia is the eldest among four with two sisters and a brother none of whom share Nadia's genetic condition. She notes several times how her two sisters are unmarried and unemployed by choice though she has worked consistently since she was 21 years old mostly in the public sector. Nadia and her brother support the family financially with the heavier burden falling on her as *he* prepares to get married. The assumption from everyone around her (including herself) is that she won't ever marry, due to her condition, and will remain with her parents.

From neighbouring Bahrain I meet Amal, a 37 year-old divorcee and mother of two children. She holds a Bachelors in Management and currently works a junior manager at a bank in Bahrain where she has worked for 7 years. Much like Nadia, Amal talks about "destiny and the will of God...if it wasn't for that I would be helpless at home". Married at 18 and a mother to 2 children by the time she was 22, Amal passionately notes that she was adamant about divorce from "the first week of marriage I wanted out...my ex was an abusive drunk...I saw every woe with him...may God not show anyone what I saw". Amal's family refused her pleas for a divorce, but shortly after the birth of her second child she found out that her husband had a second wife. Amal was grateful for this information as it convinced her family to support her through a divorce

...all this before I turned 23...see my luck...I was a child...but our society shows no mercy...no one thought it was his fault they assumed it was mine! That I didn't know how to keep my home and my husband! People would pity my parents and ...I felt suffocated because I lost all freedom. I couldn't socialize with my friends like I used to...girls I grew up with...no one wanted to be around a divorcee...I won't lie I was so depressed...I mean I was a mother but treated like a child not just by my parents but everyone...my sister in laws added to my problems because they were angry that my brothers were supporting me financially and you know as kids grow so do their expenses...I was lost ... by coincidence I joined a group on Facebook for divorcees and I saw many of them had used their divorce as an opportunity to build themselves and I thought what am I missing? I can do that also and that's what I did I went back to school and thank God I graduated and got my degree and I told my family I want to stand on my feet and I found a job at the bank...

Standing on her own feet is a concept familiar to Maryam, a Omani woman approaching the age of 30, single, and employed as a marketing executive at a private distribution company. Maryam has a Bachelors in Management and Marketing and admires higher education asserting that she dreams of earning an MBA once she is financially stable. Maryam comes from a family in which her mother is a freelance hairdresser and her father a salesperson in a textile manufacturing company. Though Maryam doesn't "make that big of a salary it's still more than what my parents make and so I'm responsible for a lot around the house". Maryam describes how a childhood of financial difficulty made her incredibly determined to build a better life for herself. Maryam describes her career as "an airplane experiencing turbulence every now and again but keeps going in a straight line...a black airplane flying

around that's what my friends say"; Maryam is referencing her dark skin that peaks through the niqab¹³ she lifts when taking a drink.

A few hours drive from Oman, I meet Noor a 29 year-old Emirati, married mother of one. She holds a Bachelors in Management and an MBA and had a promising career as a senior strategist at an Emirati bank where she worked for 8 years until her marriage. Born and raised in Abu Dhabi, Noor describes her family as "true Bedouins from a well-known tribe mash'Allah" her mother was a homemaker and mother of 7 while her father was a high-ranking officer in the army. Noor describes them as being very traditional while also asserting

...I'm not like my mother for sure...she sits in a burqa¹⁴ in the majlis¹⁵ judging everyone with her sisters ...but in some areas I think I am traditional...like everyone else I mean there are some traditions we keep there are others we pretend to keep and others we are slowly letting go of...

I ask her to elaborate and Noor explains that she was expected to be married in her early 20s as opposed to at 27, which was considered too old for her family. Pursuing her masters was an uphill battle she only won after threatening to refuse marriage if she is denied the opportunity to pursue higher education. These battles were not new for Noor who fought her way through her career

...my mother called me a slave! In our family no one works...but my older brother is very open-minded and really was my

¹³ Full face cover worn by some Muslim women.

¹⁴ Face covering that covers the face until the nose worn by married women to signal their status in Bedouin tribes.

¹⁵ A special area in the homes of people of the Gulf that is used to receive guests. Each home has one for men and sometimes another for women.

support...actually hearing him talk about his work with me is what made me decide I wanted to also work...and he helped me get that job and protected me from a lot of the anger and nagging I had to hear about it...I now regret quitting...I don't even know why I did it so hastily...and now I don't know how to go back with the baby...

From neighbouring Kuwait, 29-year-old Khulood made a similar choice when she got married. Khulood earned a Bachelors in Management and a Masters in Human Resources Management from the UK. Khulood almost immediately talks about her family with a lot of pride; her father is a self-made millionaire and her mother was “queen of her home” as she describes. Khulood has a twin brother and an older sister together with whom she travelled abroad for her Masters; both she and her sister are unemployed by choice. Khulood worked in the public sector for 3 years after graduation and quit shortly after her engagement. She explains “I worked for fun...it was something to do and it was easy not very long hours and it kept me busy”. I ask Khulood about her motivation to pursue a graduate degree to which she responds “I think education is very important for a girl and these days everyone has a bachelor's and even a masters is becoming normal so for sure I was going to get one and my parents were very happy to send us abroad for it”. Khulood is quick to point that her husband barely finished his Bachelors though he is a successful entrepreneur. She is adamant that she would never willingly return to work explaining that it would make her husband less likely to “spoil me the way he does now...it's very dangerous to let a man stay with a full pocket...I make sure he has no money to spend on other women if God forbid his eye wanders...”.

Career Journey

Being spoiled is certainly a familiar concept for Hanan who grew up in an extremely privileged home. That was until it all came to a sudden halt when her father lost everything leaving them with nothing

...it was the scariest thing I ever went through...I was 15 and my father was in jail...just like that...we suddenly had to leave our house and rent a villa in a compound we used to own! Maids...drivers...assistants...all gone but the hardest thing was watching my mother be lost...she had never worked a day in her life and suddenly had 5 kids to take care of and no family to support...but Subhan Allah*¹⁶ I always say the best thing my father did was force my mother to study...

Hanan reveals that while her father barely finished high school he pushed his wife to get a PhD, which she did over an 8-year period during which she bore 3 more children. Hanan recalls waiting for her mother in the university hallways while her father took on primary responsibility at home “the only time he was not a typical Arab man”. Hanan’s mother would begin teaching at university, which enabled her to support the family. This fundamentally changed Hanan’s outlook on the importance of a career

I was engaged to my cousin...wedding dress and kosha*¹⁷ ready...I was stupid at the time I thought that was everything in life...good man, shopping... travelling and children and thank God what else do you need? But when we lost everything my fiancée and his family changed...I wasn’t equal anymore I was lesser... and I couldn’t handle that... so I left and started over...it was as if I had done something shameful...what happened to the family made everything else I had to offer useless...there was no way to recover from this in their eyes...so I chose to withdraw myself from that kind of life and had to find something else...

¹⁶ Arabic phrase meaning Praised be God for He does not err.

¹⁷ Traditional seating stage for a bride and groom at a wedding.

Hanan describes that since she was expected to have a traditional marriage, given her father's withdrawal from society after his losses, marriage was no longer in the cards for her. This motivated Hanan to focus heavily on her studies, which enabled her to graduate with honours and gain employment in the public sector almost immediately. Hanan describes her first work experience as being incredibly positive, where she describes her joy at finding

...many girls just like me...I could connect with them in a way that had nothing to do with family name...we were all the same there...the girl who worked harder got further than the rest...and so I guess you can control your status and prestige with your own work ... I really felt like I could be who I wanted to be and my managers many of whom were just like me were very encouraging and patient as they taught me things I could have never learned...at work my eyes opened to what I could beI wanted to be somebody on my own...I didn't have to be someone's daughter or wife...I wanted to reach the highest levels....

In stark contrast to this experience, Maryam describes her first job as a secretary in the company her father worked in as nothing short of traumatizing

...straight out of university and right into the job I didn't know anything I was just happy to have a job and be out of the house. My boss was French...a crazy *crazy* man I swear...he made it a point to humiliate me everyday...he called me stupid... even he made me bring him coffee and run his personal errands and he knew I wouldn't complain because of my father...it's giving me the shivers just remembering that place... for a year and a half I cried on the way to work daily...I was so alone you can't talk to your co-workers because they will pounce on the opportunity and I couldn't talk to my mom because she wouldn't understand...I mean she worked before but never in a company she wouldn't know what it means to have a boss and rules and the feeling that there's no way out...

For Maryam the turning point was when she realized that another administrative assistant was being paid almost double her salary

...I had a better education and by then much more experience than her and the only difference I could think of was that she was a blonde in a short skirt and I was a nutella jar*¹⁸ in a Abaya and niqab...no really I mean how else do you explain it?... my parents were yelling at me not to quit but I didn't want to be like my father working all his life and never seeing the next step...no better position...no appreciation...I didn't want to be stuck in my place...

In contrast with Maryam's experience, Noor found the first 3 years of her job incredibly rewarding

I was in a small team mostly Emiratis and my manager was also an Emirati woman...older than me but not much...and really we had a great relationship we became like family and I learned so much from everyone around me...and they were very supportive when I was studying and working...you know even though it was the first time I was with men but it was so normal I couldn't even feel the difference because thank God they were so nice...

Things changed for Noor when she changed departments and was promoted upon earning her Masters to a senior position working directly with a powerful Vice President who was an older Indian man. Noor's description of her experience over the next few years is shaped by a tumultuous relationship with her boss

...He was an idiot and a racist...he hated me and I hated him but he knew he couldn't get rid of me...all Indians have that anger when an Emirati makes it to the top management...they're scared...he thought I was after his job and I was not!! I didn't even want to be working with him but I had no choice and honestly I didn't want to give him that satisfaction of leaving...I just know he hated me from the beginning maybe our personalities didn't match but I know for sure he hated me because I was Emirati and as old as his daughter but he had to take me seriously...

¹⁸ Referencing her dark skin.

In spite of this Noor describes enjoying her work as it afforded her freedoms and privileges she would not have had by virtue of being an unmarried woman

...by my family's standards...and everyone really...I was past the age of marriage before I hit 24...so if I wasn't working I wouldn't have been allowed to do certain things...to be out...to travel...I would have always had to ask for permission and justify my every move and expenditure. But working...and especially reaching the level I did showed my family that I was strong and stubborn and capable of taking care of myself so they couldn't force anything or any husband on me...decisions about me were in my hands...

Deciding for oneself is a fundamental priority for Nadia, who has worked consistently since she was 21 years old mostly in the public sector. Nadia is clearly proud of her determination and her achievements as she explains

From when I was a kid I knew I was different but not in the way people think... I knew I was different because I was smart and I liked school more than my sisters...more than anyone I know really ...I always had the highest grades and my teachers loved me. I was the most social in my class I participated in all the activities...I never let anyone feel I'm different I didn't want to be... I wanted to prove myself and that's stayed with me the most important thing was proving myself...don't get me wrong my family is great thank God but they're very traditional my mother still thinks I'm like this because of an evil eye*¹⁹ and so she wanted to protect me by hiding me at first as a kid but going to school changed all that when they saw I can make myself with my own hands.

Nadia explains that she found her academic and extracurricular achievements afforded her privileges she would otherwise be denied because of

¹⁹ The concept of the "evil eye" is shared across the Arab countries and refers to the curse-like impact of the glare of an envious person.

her condition. The natural extension of this determination to not be hidden was to work. For Nadia her early experience was a mixture of

...good and bad...it was good because I was learning so much and doing amazing things...and I saw this ladder that I can climb and become the a leader one day...the first on a wheelchair I mean why not right?...and I had great support from colleagues and managers...once they learned how to deal with me...you know how it is in our societies and disability...but other than that they really made sure I didn't feel less than them...but quickly I realized all this was not just for the sake of being collegial...

Nadia describes that in spite of working in the same organization for 14 years she has only been promoted in grade not position. I ask why she didn't move to another organization to which she responds

I don't know...sometimes I wonder if I made a mistake...I got other job offers... I applied... especially every time I have a fight with my manager or HR or when I see my own staff getting promoted... but then I think moving won't change anything it's all the same anywhere I go and at least I know this place...it makes me sad because I really wanted to reach the top but what to do it's okay ...no offence but the best managers I had were the foreigners...they know how to deal with someone with special needs they know what to say and how to act...I appreciated it instead of the Qataris or Arab expats who just want me to hide in a corner and keep my mouth shut like my current manager wants... no one is very interested in developing you or teaching you or sending you for training like everyone else...they think you should be grateful for what you already have and have no ambition...between you and I, I got tired of fighting the older I got... I accepted that no matter what I think there's definitely a limit to where I can go and it's not in my hands...

For Nadia her gratefulness comes from the awareness that her experience is much more positive than many of the people with special needs she came into contact with throughout the years. Her ability to be a manager and financially support her family is, according to her, a rare occurrence.

Echoing this sense of fulfilment and independence is Amal, who describes her work at the bank as her key to escaping the restrictions that came with divorce. She too describes the ability to be a mother, manager, and financial contributor to the larger household as a rare occurrence among divorcees. Amal began as a receptionist and moved to the customer service department two years later working her way up from there to the position of a customer service supervisor responsible for training new employees in the all women section of a prominent bank. This gender division was the main condition for Amal's family to allow her to work. I ask her what it was like working for the first time and she describes

...like getting married...you don't know how it's going to be until you start I won't lie it was hard especially the first months I would say 'Amal you're not smart enough just quit before you embarrass yourself' but it was a different world I was able to go out get meet with people and do something useful and not need anyone...it was a different respect I didn't think I could get as a divorcee...

Amal expresses her surprise and relief at finding other divorcees who shared her experience at the bank. She describes her friendship with them as a source of learning

...how do I say it...we would teach each other everything from how to file the daily report to what to do when your son asks about his father and this is a support you can't find anywhere else...of course not everyone is like that...I mean there are women who will use the label divorcee to hurt you out of jealousy but I'm happy thank God...how do I tell you...my salary is good I can provide the best for my kids and I don't need my ex or anyone...and my position is good I am happy to stay in it until I retire... I'm happy where I am thank God.

Amal asserts that she does not want another promotion for the remainder of her career because

...it's a bigger responsibility and I don't think I am the type to be a manager it needs experience and as a divorcee I can't do more than this...top management is not for mothers...even now I spend all my time at work and my mother takes care of the kids and still I feel it's not enough thank God...but it's not enough... all the top managers at the bank they don't have kids and they are comfortable working with men and things like that and that's not possible for me as a mother and a divorcee.

Interestingly, though from an affluent background and considerably different personal life, Khulood echoes Amal's hesitation at working alongside men and the considerable responsibility associated with seniority. Khulood's first and only job experience also took place within a prominent bank, a position she got "by myself without any wasta although I had plenty but I wanted to test and see what I could do myself and I did it".

For Khulood the job began as an interesting experience as she observed

...everything I studied in real life...it was nice to see how I'm using the things I learned in university and I could see how my approaches were different than my colleagues who have a lesser education but after some time I was pushed in the opposite direction...I thought working would encourage me but all it did was convince me to get married as quickly as I could and stay home...I discovered the workplace is suitable only for girls who don't come from well-off families, divorcees, or other women...you know anyone willing to make compromises because they're desperate...I couldn't just be Khulood who wasn't working for the money...people assumed that I was in need and they took advantage of it...the whole thing is a show because men and women can't work together and just be normal...men don't know the limits and if you say anything they will look at you suspiciously so why bring headaches to myself?

The Brink & Pivotal Moment

Khulood's confident tone is clearly emotional as she describes a time when she was assigned to deal directly with someone from another department who was notorious for being a

...very difficult man...at first we were only dealing by email and then by phone and I don't know how he got my personal mobile...he would make up excuses to call me for silly things...I was uncomfortable but he hadn't done anything wrong so I just tried to ignore if he called after hours...then he started saying things on the phone...flirting you know...and I was not interested at all...I asked him to respect himself and I went to my manager and told him what was happening...at first he said I was just misunderstanding things then...one day I came to the office and there were flowers on my desk... a huge bouquet just sitting there in front of everyone...I was so embarrassed you know it looked so bad for my reputation...I went to the manager again this time and said what do you think now do you still think I'm misunderstanding? I demanded action against him and that someone else be assigned to work with him...And my managers reaction was...he told me 'ask yourself how you have behaved to make him think it's okay to do this'...that it's not his fault if I didn't know how to be professional clearly...I mean I was shocked...everyone knew this man was a womanizer and still...no protection no help!

Khulood explains that she returned home to tell her father and brother who came to the office the next day and fought with her manager and the man who had harassed her. Khulood resigned the same day "that's how people understand who you are... he thought I need the job or something but thank God I didn't and I walked away showing them who Khulood is". I ask Khulood if she considered going to HR to which she responded laughing and saying HR did nothing but process salaries. Soon after Khulood got married determined "to never go back to work...sure I wanted to be a successful and reach the highest levels at one point but I learned it's not possible" I ask if her husband is

aware of this incident to which she responds with an emphatic “of course not! Impossible!”.

Feeling vulnerable at work was a core part of Hanan’s experience in the private sector that saw her move to the UAE to live with her brother. After happily working in the public sector Hanan decided to broaden her experience and join the private sector where she worked for a multinational company, which Hanan describes

...this was the real first job ...I had a great experience in my other office...but really this was so different it felt like I was starting from nothing...there are some things I didn’t used to think of but now I had to...the awkwardness around the handshake*²⁰...being one of few abayas in the office was definitely something to see!...then I realized I was a seat filler...I was a number...funny enough my face even ended up on the website...my friends made so much fun of me for that...but this meant I wasn’t taken seriously. Even if I had something great to contribute it was taken with a defensiveness I couldn’t explain.

For Hanan a critical moment was when the office had a social event at an exclusive lounge after working hours. And while officially attendance was optional, Hanan quickly learned that was not the case when she approached her boss explaining to him that she wouldn’t attend

It wasn’t just that my brother would have never allowed me to stay out that late it’s also that it was in a place where everyone would be drinking and if someone saw me there it would be a catastrophe...my boss was...how do I say this...he...it’s not like he was ever friendly with me...but this time was different...he looked at me and basically said that if being in this office and having normal interactions is against my religion then maybe this isn’t the place for me...I was frozen...I wished the ground would swallow me...I was so embarrassed and angry and ...well I apologized and left...it took

²⁰ Men and women do not shake hands in certain cultures and contexts (such as religious conservativeness).

everything in me to go to the office the next day and face him...he was the wrong one but I felt like I had no face...

Hanan turned to her friends for advice and at their urging filed a complaint with HR which she regretted immediately; the process was long and confrontational and the lack of privacy meant everyone in her office found out making it difficult for her to stay. Hanan would quit almost a year later

I won't lie and say it was only that situation but...it's a lot of things that made me quit not just that...there was lots of conspiracies and ganging up and it's hard not to have anyone stand on your side...but this made it easier for me to leave...now I know it was a wrong decision but I was inexperienced...no one teaches you how to fight these battles...I know that if I had the experience I have now I would have shut him up and put him in his place...it was a good lesson because now they can't even get me to shut up in a meeting...since then I don't let anyone make me feel as if I don't exist...

This sense of being invisible is a daily occurrence for Nadia; something she has fought since childhood. Nadia recalls a particularly important moment in her career, when her manager had selected only few individuals to participate in a prestigious, government-wide training, excluding her and instead nominating more junior employees. Nadia tried reasoning with him formally and informally before reaching out to HR who didn't do much to help her. Nadia eventually threatened to file a formal complaint at the Ministry of Labour on the grounds of discrimination. Her manager eventually allowed her to go to the training though Nadia describes

...he made a big show in front of everyone how he was allowing me to go out of the generosity of his heart not because I deserved it. Anyway I didn't care much I was happy that I got what I wanted...when the two-week training finished I was shocked when my cousin sent me a picture from a newspaper where the office had published a press release about the participation with a headline saying they are supporting development of people with disabilities.

My boss was quoted even saying something like that... the room was spinning for me... I am used to people being rude or saying insensitive thing but this was different... I'm a mohajjaba...not married...where's my respect? I don't wear the niqab but I'm not comfortable with my face exposed so publically...without asking ...I was so humiliated and my family were very angry...*I swear* I never felt so invisible in my whole life like that...They would have never done this to an able-bodied woman I'm sure of it...I felt I could study all I want...work all I want...win awards even but there is a limit...like a wall...and I've hit it...I'm not allowed to go past it no matter what...like another wheelchair except they tell me where it can go...thank God I can't complain...but I always felt I was a natural leader and people like me...I could be more and do more but...I've hit the wall.

For Noor there too was a wall, only she experienced it after quitting her job one month before her wedding. Noor asserts that she took the decision to quit unprompted reflecting on her inability to pinpoint why she made it. Noor recalls feeling as though it was what she had to do so that she can focus on her marriage and her husband "that's what everyone did... all my friends quit before marriage if they were working...I didn't know anyone else who didn't do that...I mean not in our social circle". Noor's daughter was born 11 months later and interestingly she recounts her birth as the pivotal moment in her career

...I had lots of fights and lots of ups and downs when I was working but it was normal like everyone else but really the first time I felt the impact of my work was a few months after I had the baby...everything changed...I was expected to have my whole world be about the baby.... My whole life changed while my husband didn't he was out all day at work and at night with his friends... I felt he no longer respected me the same way like when I was working. He used to consult with me on his business and even delegate important jobs to me I would deal with his staff all the time and then that was it! As if I became stupid I was the same like my uneducated sister in laws...really I became a child...

Noor explains that her husband had offered to start a business for her but she refused because she would not be allowed to run it independently from him. From her perspective, being employed comes with a certain

...prestige and respect that's just different it's not about the money but about the prestige that comes from having powerful and intelligent people telling you and the world that you are good at what you do.

Interestingly Noor explains that while she is adamant about returning to employment in the banking sector she will not return to the level of seniority she held before instead preferring a position that's "in the middle or slightly less because it's less stress and pressure I can't do the fighting like I did before I need to be able to keep my home and take care of my daughter".

I ask whether that's an issue in spite of having two housekeepers; Noora responds that having the housekeepers is added pressure for her to show that she is a good wife and mother

...it's more work...you have to pretend like you're doing all the work the maids are doing or else you're not a good wife or mother...I sometimes stand in the kitchen pretending to have cooked the meal when I see my husband's car approaching and he tells me he can feel the difference in the food ...when I go back to work he will be more sensitive about these things....how long I can pretend to do it all at once without getting caught only God knows ...do you know anyone who can teach me?...

Finding a teacher is at the heart of the powerful story Amal tells of a moment that proved pivotal in her career. It began with inspiration during a

...training for the whole bank with a team of foreign consultants...my friends and I walked in and just sat there like idiots...it was this Lebanese woman with two German men...and all so good looking Mashallah but she was their boss imagine! So elegant and she was walking back and forth talking and explaining

and you can tell the men were in love...but she knew what she was talking about and she was so confident in herself and serious...she was married too to a European maybe American I don't remember from where...she told us later...and my friends and I spent the rest of the day saying can we be like her? We know we can't but just for fun...I think for me though I wanted that confidence and that's how I feel when I train the new girls I feel the respect...I was lucky because when I was telling the story to my manager... she didn't laugh at me she just said 'Amal you can be like her why not?' And at first I laughed but then I thought...why not?...

Amal recalls walking into her manager's office a few weeks later and asking her what it would take for her to become

...like that Lebanese woman...the boss...and my manager took me very seriously and from then on gave me comments and even criticisms in everything from the way I walked to the way I talked and dealt with my colleagues...and she gave me so many opportunities to prove myself...and that's when I started finding my confidence at work...and I realized that confidence was made you're not really born with it...my hard work paid off because I was not only made supervisor I also became responsible for training...now when I do any training for our staff or others I think of the Lebanese woman as I walk around too...I took this lesson and I even brought it to my family at home.....

This boost in confidence fuelled by a supportive manager is echoed by Maryam, who found was particularly attracted to the atmosphere in the office when she first joined her current job. This was a family business run by an old couple and their young son who instantly made Maryam feel

...human...people were nice...my boss I remember the first thing he said was ok Maryam what would you like to learn by the end of the year? And I swear to God I had never thought of it...that...I would go to work and actually learn something instead of just suffer through the hours scared of your boss....

Maryam explains that she had first joined as an administrative assistant but was promoted less than a year later to her current position

...the title is really bigger than it is...I mean I'm still in a tiny cubicle and still don't make much more...but it's really amazing because I

felt worthy for the first time since I left university...my boss really cares and my colleagues are all amazing...it makes everything else easy really.

When I ask her what she means by that Maryam explains some of the challenges she faces at her job, including the awkwardness she feels having to sit close to her male colleagues, though she prefers these struggles to what she experienced before. Maryam remarks repeatedly on her relationship with her bosses

...see I think it's amazing how humble they are...the owners really treat me like family and make me feel welcome although there's very few of us among the foreigners they really make you feel important...they involve all of us in meetings and consult with us which is really strange for me because I used to think bosses just shout out orders at the speed of light and it's your job to just catch up ...my boss has an MBA and he talks to me as if I have one too taking my opinion and every now and then gives me areas for improvements so I can work on myself...I learned so much being here.....

Maryam's current experience has led her to believe that the way out of her parents' life and onto a future where she can make something of herself and

...maybe even meet someone better than me [implying marriage] I feel just couldn't happen if I...settle...I'm just one of many in a sea of people....but having a real career puts me in a smaller sea...I think that maybe one day I can be the manager of the marketing department in a place like this or even bigger for example...God willing of course...but if I stayed in my first job with my abusive boss I wouldn't have ever known this about myself and I think my ambition would have ended there...now there are very few things I consider impossible in terms of advancement...maybe next time you interview me I will be the boss of the whole place...

Cluster 3

The countries of Cluster 3 each hold a unique place in the Arab world. Whether playing a central role in regional politics in the last half-century or the birthplace of the Arab Spring in more recent years, these countries have experienced a considerable share of socio-political and economic change that has oftentimes made it difficult to predict their future directions. The diversity of the “African” side of the Arab world was reflected in the experiences of the 16 women interviewed an overview of whom is presented in the table below.

Table 6- Cluster 3 Overview

Name	Age	Nationality	Religion	Marital Status	Education	Employment Status
Marwa	32	Egypt	Sunni Muslim	Single	Masters	Unemployed
Bassant	38	Egypt	Sunni Muslim	Married (1 child)	PhD	Employed- Middle Management
Yasmee n	34	Egypt	Sunni Muslim	Married (2 children)	Bachelors	Employed- Administrati ve Staff
Hiba	40	Egypt	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (3 children)	Bachelors	Employed- Administrati ve Staff
Sherine J	39	Libya	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Junior Management
Maitha	24	Libya	Sunni	Single	Bachelors	Junior Management

			Muslim			
Mayada	30	Algeria	Sunni Muslim	Married (2 children)	Bachelor's	Unemployed
Nistrine	33	Algeria	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (1 child)	MBA	Administrative Staff
Rafi	39	Tunisia	Sunni Muslim	Married (2 children)	PhD	Top Management
Lina B	34	Tunisia	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Married (1 child)	Bachelors	Administrative Staff
Sarah R	29	Tunisia	Sunni Muslim	Married	Masters	Employed-Administrative Staff
Jihan	30	Morocco	Sunni Muslim	Married	Bachelors	Junior Management
Dima A	30	Morocco	Sunni Muslim	Single	Masters	Administrative Staff
Nafissa	38	Sudan	Sunni Muslim (Hijabi)	Divorced (2 children)	Masters	Top Management
Salma	37	Sudan	Sunni	Married	PhD	Entrepreneur

M.			Muslim			
Shima	26	Sudan	Sunni Muslim	Single	Bachelors	Unemployed

Cluster 3 Themes: An Overview

A hallmark of cluster 3 was the clear diversity among and within each country. This diversity was reflected in the many ways in which the women of this cluster spoke of their relationships with their management careers.

Similar to cluster 1 the idea of *wasta* features prominently in this cluster as part of a complex web of layers of identity that position women in advantageous or disadvantageous positions. How and when the intersection of particular layers put women in either position depended on several factors. Similar to cluster 2, a fundamental part of the participant's identity was their role within their family first as daughters and then as wives. Thus the family unit is a deeply powerful element first in women's education decisions and eventually their career decisions. Interestingly, religiousness and conservatism appeared more prominently in cluster 3 than clusters 1 and 2. The impact of this religiousness and conservatism was equally evident across the different social classes though expressed in different terms. It's interesting to note that the higher the status of the family (socially and financially) the more difficult it was for women to assert their desires for management careers unless encouraged by an authority figure within the family; upholding the family name via demonstration of conservatism was a key component for these women and their

families. Hence, women often felt the pressure of being representatives of their family name and status in society and the fear of appearing “outside” the expected norms. Oftentimes, these restrictions were in some areas loosened in the cases of women who come from more “humble” families for whom work was a financial necessity and a management career a potential source of social prestige that could elevate the family’s position and even improve marriage prospects for the women.

Thus a management career was a potential tool to navigate some of the strict social expectations of women at particular points in their lives; this is shared among clusters though it differs in form. As such the single woman from a humble background, the divorcee from an affluent background, and the married woman from a well-educated middle-class family shared the similar view of a management career as a potentially empowering tool in navigating social positioning. And their experiences were similar in their shared agreement that a management career can be successfully pursued only by observing a strict adherence to social expectations of femininity expressed in specific modes of dressing (including religious expression via hijab and/or modest clothes), speaking, and behaving particularly in settings where men are involved. This is accompanied by an acute awareness of the separation between the roles at work and the roles at home with the desire to fully maintain traditional roles in their private lives a priority for most women. The roles as wives and mothers overshadow all else regardless of how women choose to define themselves.

Thus even when women reached particular levels of seniority their ability and commitment to the job was often questioned in light of their other responsibilities at home even when it was a nonissue from the perspective of the women themselves. In many cases the only way to navigate this was by deliberately “hiding” the details of their private lives in order to be “given a fair chance to work and compete and be taken seriously just as myself and by myself” as Lina from Tunisia explains.

Much like in cluster 2, even when women share similar concerns and experiences they are adamant that social support networks are lacking, thereby intensifying feelings of loneliness and isolation as women experience increasing conflict between their public and private roles and “never feeling enough here or there”. Thus, balancing the public and private roles often requires elaborate performances in different settings and particularly around spouses which often creates feelings of “running a race with no end and with no idea how well you’re doing” as Dima from Morocco explains. This is a sentiment more intensely experienced by married women with children than others and one that intensifies at the middle and higher level of organizations- a key motivator for women to remain in the junior level of organizations.

It’s interesting to note that cluster 3 had some of the most educated participants with many holding multiple graduate degrees including PhDs. And yet, those same highly educated women viewed education as only marginally valuable in ensuring access to career opportunities and progress. This was

different in the case of women who obtained their degrees abroad, which oftentimes was viewed as a factor as powerful as belonging to an influential family “it forces some doors open even just for a little while...basically gives you a bigger chance”. Interestingly, while compared to cluster 2, the families of the participants in this cluster appear to be overall more educated, their view of education was one that saw “a degree is like an insurance...it can protect you and secure your future if God forbid you find yourself lost”. It’s important to note that the discussion thus far in no way implies that women in cluster 3 viewed education and careers only as tools to navigate social positions. On the contrary, and much like in cluster 2, most of the participants acknowledged having the ambition to succeed defined as “becoming the big boss” or “reaching the top management level”. However, from their experiences ambition was not a tool powerful enough in the face of the real obstacle to career progression; the manager-employee relationship.

Perhaps more than in other clusters, the manager appears to be a fear-inspiring and unmovable gatekeeper; regardless of whether this manager is a man or woman. Several of the early career decisions of the participants were heavily influenced by their interactions with their managers which appeared to be more negative in contexts in which the organizations lacked mechanisms that provided support and protection for women. With very few exceptions most of the critical incidents told of negative experiences either directly with managers or with colleagues in which women found themselves in situations

that pushed the boundaries of their ability to navigate social expectations with their roles as employees. More dangerously women found themselves in situations where they felt vulnerable and violated and felt the pressure to keep it a secret especially in organizations where there were no mechanisms to support women without finding themselves in even more vulnerable situations.

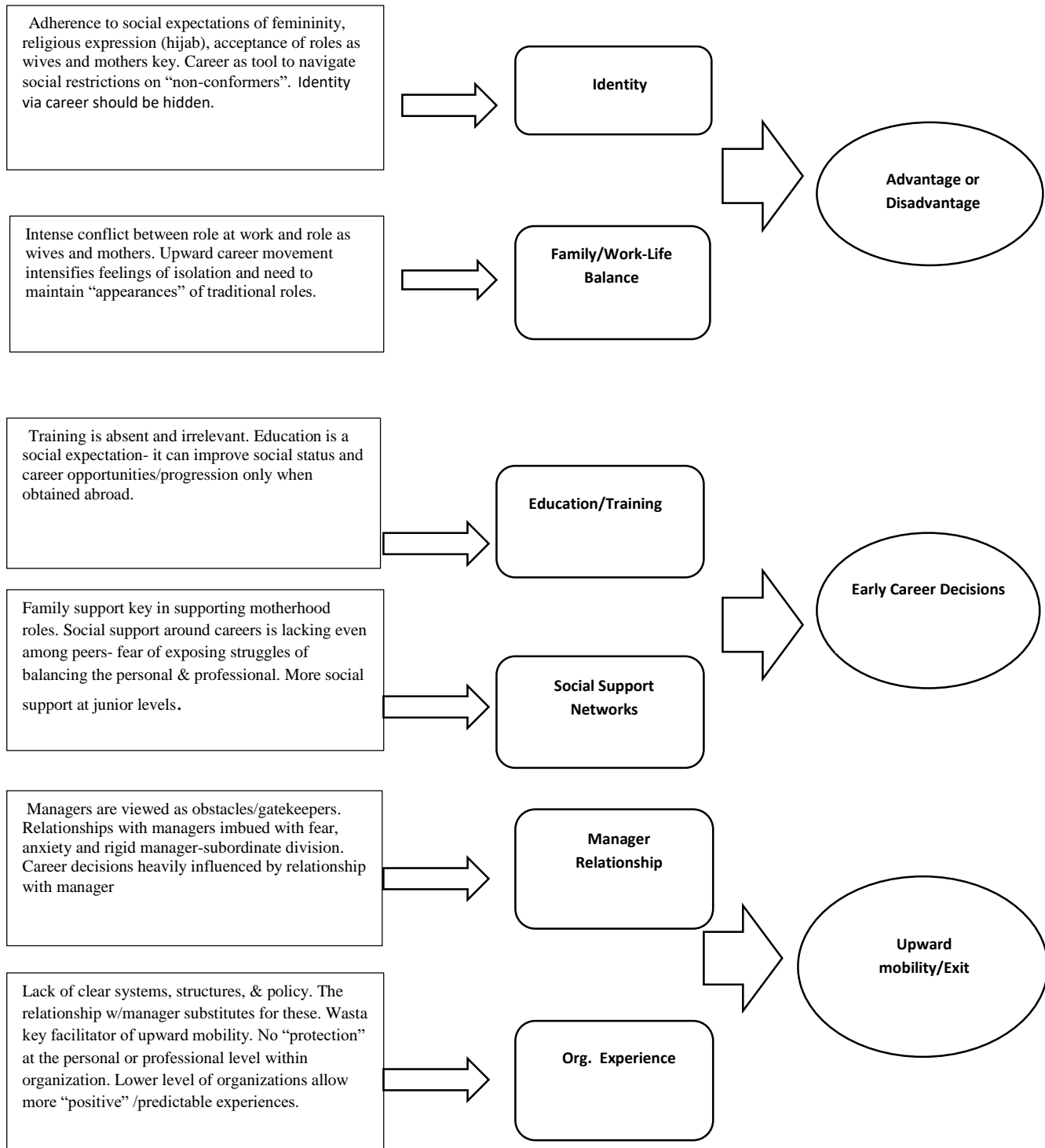
Exceptions to these were cases in which women found empowerment either at home or at work through mentors and role models or when a sudden change of circumstances freed them from particular expectations (such as divorce or grown children).

Interestingly, women experienced more positive relationships in the junior level of organizations where it appears to be “easier to figure out how to play the game” as Shima from Sudan expresses. The rules appear to be more straightforward and work expectations more clearly defined than in higher levels that require more people skills in general and leadership skills in particular which, even when women possessed these by virtue of their education, found it difficult to display in light of expectations of femininity and appropriate modes of behaviour. And much like the women in clusters 1 and 2 these women were oftentimes disheartened by the stark contrast between what they learned in university and what they discovered on the job. Simple things such as “working in groups closely with other men” or “sharing a cubicle with a male colleague” caused a noticeable level of anxiety for women especially at

the early stages of their careers. Pushing through these discomforts appeared to be the first of a long line of “sacrifices” that had to be made.

The idea of career progress requiring a “price to be paid” is a prominent theme; how women interpret and accept or reject that price largely impacts their management career decisions in the long run. Taken together, the above discussions sets the stage for women’s management careers in general and the extent to which that career can progress from their perspective in particular as is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 5 Cluster 3 Themes



The Stories

From Egypt, affectionately called “mother of the world” by Arabs (in reference to its influence on the Arab world), I meet Marwa a 32 year old single woman who is unemployed by choice. Marwa earned a Bachelor’s in Management in Cairo before travelling to the USA for an MBA. She lives between the UAE and Cairo though she spends almost every summer in New York. Marwa is the daughter of two senior executives at a global corporation (both from a well-known political family), who worked full time throughout Marwa’s life, which afforded her an incredibly privileged upbringing. Her parents appear to be central to her sense of self as she describes the enormous pressure she felt to excel; a natural consequence of growing up with highly educated and successful parents both of whom had PhDs and patented inventions at a young age. And while Marwa excelled at school, she wasn’t particularly passionate about any subject area. When asked why she chose to study management she described

...Look to be honest I chose my major because all my friends were choosing business to take over family businesses or start their own and I thought that’s what I would do as well. I wanted to start something for myself but was never sure of what I wanted. When I went to New York for my MBA I realized I couldn’t start a business until I had actual work experience. I don’t understand how people start companies without ever working in one even if just to try it...

With a similar background and upbringing I meet Rafi, a 39 year-old Tunisian PhD holder and married mother of two. She is the Vice President of a Tunisian marketing firm who recently returned to academia on a part-time

basis. Rafi was born and raised in Tunisia with an entrepreneur mother and a Professor/Lawyer father who had dreams for her to be an academic. In spite of her family's opposition Rafi insisted on getting married at the age of 19 to an academic 10 years her senior. Rafi describes

I was very close to my parents and they really encouraged me to study even after I got married...actually that was their condition to let me get married...they said 'Rafi you have to finish it's your only real insurance' but I was young when I got married and so by the time I finished my bachelors my father was pushing me to continue further I wanted to be fully dedicated to my home and my daughter and I didn't know how to do both perfectly so I resisted...but you know Shireen Subhan Allah* you never know how life pushes you...really... my husband got sick and everything felt like it was crashing on my head and that's when it...became real to me that only God knows what the future holds and I can't leave things to the future without something solid in my hand to help me stand on my own feet and take care of my kids... so I enrolled in the PhD in the middle of all that and... thank God... I graduated and he got better...but the lesson stayed with me...

Being influenced by family is particularly meaningful for Jihan, a 30 year old, married, woman from Morocco who is currently running a charitable organization with a group of close friends. Jihan was born in Morocco though she would grow up between Morocco, Egypt, and Yemen before finding herself in the UAE at the age of 17 when she entered university. Her father's job required that the family relocate often while her mother is a homemaker. Jihan has a positive relationship with her mother though she hints at a difficult relationship with her father whom she describes as a strict perfectionist. Jihan chose a major in management at the urging of her father who wanted to prepare her for a corporate career leveraging his strong network of connections. Jihan happily obliged having grown up with the story of her father

...making himself from nothing...in Morocco there are very limited opportunities for you if you miss out on the family lottery as my father says...he came from a poor family and worked hard for everything and graduated on government scholarship abroad and he didn't want us to go through the same thing...he wanted things to be easier for us even the girls...

Fuelled by this narrative, Jihan excelled in school and university and had several prestigious internships under her belt by the time she graduated after which her father arranged a job for her at a big PR agency in Dubai. And yet Jihan says she “still feels aimless about my future”.

Feeling a sense of uncertainty about the future is no stranger for Mayada, a 30-year old married, Algerian mother of twins. She holds a Bachelor's in Management and came to the UAE four years ago shortly after the birth of her twins to join her husband whose work brought him to the UAE. Mayada had worked for 5 years in the management department of a prestigious mall in Algeria before quitting when she became a mother. She doesn't say much about her family only that she was the first to earn a university degree. Mayada says she

...felt a different prestige going to work everyday I wasn't just a wife I was a partner paying bills with him it was good for us because I appreciated him and he appreciated me and would help around the house also...my family was proud of me also especially my mother when she saw I make my own money...I was very motivated by the certificates I got they really mean a lot to me...to anyone I mean who wouldn't want to advance themselves all the time...I learned that with hard work you can be successful...I was working with very important people and that's not easy but I showed myself to the management and to myself that I can always do more than just stay at home but when I had kids...I felt lost and I was scared so I quit...but I still feel lost without my job...I still don't know my place in a sense...

From neighbouring Libya I meet Maitha, a woman who is acutely aware of the importance of carving a place for her self both at work and at home.

Maitha is a single, 24 year-old who recently earned her Bachelors in Management, from a traditional and humble family that suffered a fair share of financial difficulties that only magnified the importance of education which she describes as “the first time I really felt my own personality and position after graduating because no one in my family had ever gone to university and I was now able to make more money than anyone there”. Maitha is currently employed as an administrative assistant in a public sector organization, her second job experience after working as a receptionist in another public sector organization. It’s clear that for Maitha, physical appearance is important and that her self-esteem is low as she describes herself as a “below average girl...what else can I do...there’s no husband knocking our door so it’s just work for me until God’s grace arrives”. For Maitha, her job is a tool that affords her the kind of freedom she wouldn’t have been given as an unmarried woman

I go to work everyday and I spend time with my friends at night...within reasonable limits of course...but my friends who don’t work don’t have that kind of freedom...my parents know I can stand on my own feet and I am contributing to the family also so they treat me like an adult even though I’m not married... I have peace of mind knowing that I can decide for myself a lot of things and experience things on my own... I don’t need any more than this...

But things are never enough for Nafissa, a 38 year old, Sudanese, hijabi, divorced mother of two teenage children, and a director in a prestigious conglomerate in the UAE. Nafissa earned two Masters degrees one in Project Management and another in Management though her journey has been anything

but easy. Nafissa's father was a diplomat and her mother a homemaker though she credits them both equally for encouraging her to pursue higher education, even sending her abroad for one of her Masters degrees. Nafissa remarks that she was married relatively "old" at the age of 25 to a man 15 years her senior whom she had not directly known prior to their wedding. Nafissa reveals that her husband

...went crazy with me...he couldn't understand why I couldn't be a perfect wife...why I couldn't be happy with just the few hours he spent at home and build my life around that...I wasn't that type...I tried...but my head was always somewhere else I wanted to do more...I felt like I was crazy sometimes that I couldn't be normal like everyone else so it took me years to hide it..

Nafissa eventually separated from her husband; though she is not legally divorced she has not had any contact with him for years. In exchange for this arrangement, however, Nafissa was forced to leave her children with her husband; an experience that motivated her to

...build myself one step at a time...I was never going to let myself be in a place where I did not control my circumstances or my future...I decided that if I was going to be judged a failure as a woman no one could say I was a failure as a professional...I studied the rules...anywhere I went I watched how things were from far and made sure that I followed the rules word by word...integrity to me was important...and I made sure I created a reputation that precedes me...that anyone who came in contact with me had something good to say about me this gave me a great advantage with my managers...thank God no one could say Nafissa is this or Nafissa is that... I was the first to come into the office and the last to leave and even now I'm still like that...I'm here before my secretary...there's nothing stopping me... No husband to nag and no kids to feed so I can do this 24 hours a day if I want...from day one this was me I know what I want and I do what's in my head I don't owe anyone anything anymore...

Career Journey

The kind of clarity and sense of purpose Nafissa speaks of is far from what Marwa describes returning to Egypt and working in a job she was given instantly thanks to her father's connections. Marwa began her career in a multinational company whose headquarters were in Cairo, which proved to be an experience she describes as being

...life changing but not in a good way... I thought it would give me more clarity about what I wanted instead it made me feel more lost and have much more questions...see I had an Egyptian manager (a woman) and I worked in a team with mostly Egyptians and a few foreigners. My manager was incredibly tough and very clearly she had no interest in me as an employee in the sense that I was there because of my dad and so basically she wanted me to sit at my desk silently watch others as they did the real work and... to be honest... I'm incredibly shy and sensitive and I think very innocent so I took this very hard... Working in teams was just as difficult... I don't think I was prepared for it.... I mean really all the experience I had was at school and there you didn't really have to work in groups. And so I struggled with the confusion... Who can assign tasks? Who will evaluate me? Based on what? And on top of all that my manager made it a habit to remind *me* and everyone that I didn't deserve my position... I couldn't confront her and I couldn't really not do well and disappoint my parents... No one seemed to care and there was nowhere to turn...

Marwa quit eventually and wouldn't return to paid employment until 3 years later. This time she insisted on going through the job search process by herself and without leveraging any connections. She landed a job in a non-profit organization but also quite a year later describing the difficulty of connecting with people who recognized her privileged background. Marwa described feeling

...unprepared. I was a great student. I know everything there is about companies and business and what not...and it's all my parents talked about at least and my uncles and everyone... But it

wasn't the same as when you're in the real world... Your social circle is exclusively your family and a few friends whose families are also connected to yours one way or another. And then you enter a company with so many different people and you're expected to simply get on...it just doesn't work...My parents wanted me to go to them for help or advice but you know Arab parents...you will never get real advice only condescending lectures. And for a lot of my friends work isn't really a priority it's something you do until you get married...another front I failed on...and no one is willing to help they just watch you fail...

Though successful today, Rafi also speaks of her difficult experience at work. Rafi began her career in a marketing firm in France where she worked for two years before returning to Tunisia, where she worked for the public sector briefly before returning to the private sector working for a large company. She came to the UAE when her husband found employment at a university while she found employment in her current company becoming a Vice President 3 years later. Describing her experience Rafi explains

Walla ya binti*²¹ it was hard, hard, hard!! I ask myself sometimes how I ever continued that's why I started teaching really just to get a break and peace of mind...where do I start?... Resistance... at every level and from absolutely everyone Tunisians...Arabs...French everyone really! Let me tell you the politics is unbearable especially if you're a woman and you're successful? Oh my God it's like poison for people they can't take it! They don't attack you on your work they attack you on your hair your clothes and the rumours they start about you...they don't fight professionally ...you get ahead by playing the game right and knowing who to keep close...of course this wasn't from the start when I was more junior things were different...not better really but different...there you had to deal with the flirting...the putting down...you reminded me of so much right now...

²¹ "I swear my daughter"

Rafi speaks of an uphill battle at work and at home. It's clear that her relationship went through a difficult phase when she reached a degree of success that afforded her a higher income than her husband's. She describes

See Tunisian women I think we are different...we're not easy...We didn't allow polygamy but still in the homes it's different like everywhere no two families are like each other...my husband you know is a very educated man... he didn't want someone to cook and clean only like his mom but still he is an Eastern man*²² ...that you can never erase even in a million years so you have to be smart...be whatever you want outside but when you're home with him and the kids you let him be si'sayyed*²³ more or less...it's the same at work the boss has to be si'sayyed or he will make your life miserable... ..I don't mean become weak but you sort of let them think they're in charge and do what you want from underneath you either play the game by those rules or you're out...simple as that.

Seeking different rules and a different environment, Jihan quit her Dubai-based job to move to Morocco to work where she was shocked to find that

...there were no jobs except for secretaries...and it's not the same like here...a secretary is expected to be in a way I wasn't prepared to be...but really whatever job I took...I didn't fit...as a woman regardless of education or position I had to be a woman...a normal woman...cute and quiet and something to look at not much more...that wasn't me...

Jihan would then return to the UAE and land a job in another PR agency where she worked for 2 years before being promoted to a manager overseeing a team of 9 employees; she describes this promotion as the beginning

...of my nightmare! I would say I really wish I can go back to where I was as an intern even... just not a manager...I felt lost...really lost in every way...I couldn't understand...I got promoted because I was good at the work but the promotion meant I

²² A phrase used in both standard and colloquial Arabic to refer to a stereotypically "traditional" Arab man.

²³ Originally an Egyptian term that denotes a particular stereotype of a tough man who rules over his household like a dictator. This is described in more detail later.

do less of that and more of managing people and I was not prepared for that... I don't know how to be someone's boss how to tell them what to do...you know we women are emotional not leaders...I was so desperate for someone to tell me what to do I even went to my father ...everyone told me I will learn how to be a boss but I couldn't do it. I even asked a former professor of mine for help...same thing...eventually I decided to just do what I know was best which was tell everyone I won't be a typical manager that we should just work as a family...it did not work...

Jihan describes frictions in the team; the team was 6 men to 3 women many of whom were older than her. Jihan's soft approach to leadership was misunderstood by the team, who interpreted it as

...[they] thought I was stupid...a kid who didn't know what she was doing and honestly the women were more mean than the men. The men were aggressive and competitive and they would try to just prove they are the boss not me but the women would openly try to destroy me *and* the work...it got to a point where even being in the office was giving me anxiety...for me there was no easy way to have power as a manager without giving up a lot of myself and my values...the higher you go the longer the list of sacrifices and I'm not the type that could have done it...too much to lose...

Added to that pressure were Jihan's struggles at home. While her father would outwardly encourage her to professionally succeed, Jihan found it impossible given his strict rules about interacting with men, being home at specific hours and making it difficult for her to cultivate personal relationships at work. This resistance was also intensified by Jihan's fiancée who would ask her to quit every time she would turn to him for support. Eventually Jihan would step down describing the increasingly difficult relationship with her family

...my father expected that I be home a certain time and would get angry when a male colleague would call me at night even if it was for work...my fiancée was the same...we fought a lot during that time every time I had to travel especially it was a disaster with him! I had no control at work and no control at home...and these

things affect your ability to do your best at work...I even turned to the internet for help imagine!...it didn't seem worth it anymore...stepping down was the only way and I learned my lesson to never even come close to management positions...I joke that I have less of prestige now but more peace of mind...

Echoing this sentiment is Maitha who describes her promotion from receptionist to administrative assistant after graduation as a very proud moment for her because "at first I felt I can put a goal for myself ...I can plan and try and work hard and go even higher than this... who knows". However, this feeling was short-lived as her promotion brought her face to face with a manager whom she describes as someone who

...couldn't see me as anything more than an uneducated receptionist...which I wasn't anymore...I had studied and worked hard and improved myself...but to her it didn't matter I was still the same lower level employee and she made life impossible...a lot of people have this mentality that if they are above you in rank....especially women then they enjoy using their power over people... especially all divorcees like my manager...they are like this they're angry at the world and take it out on everyone else around them and there's nothing we can do or say just pray everyday that you're not targeted until hopefully God's grace sets you free...

Maitha describes at length the way jealousy, gossip, rumor spreading, and day-to-day passive aggressiveness are common parts of her experience working with other women. Maitha was particularly hurt when her manager in a fit of anger mocked that "she couldn't afford nice clothes and bags because she knew I come from a humble family". I ask Maitha how she navigates her relationship with her manager and she explains

I think all managers are like this so there's nothing to do I don't want to lose my job she always threatens to transfer me to another department but I don't want to leave...I always say stay

away from evil and sing to it*²⁴ I know my work here I know what to do...it was so hard at first I didn't know anything at all but I learned and thank God some of the girls helped me ...it's hard for me to leave I know all the people there and I don't think I can learn to do anything else...there's no training no teaching...I barely use what I learned in university so I prefer to stay with her than go somewhere else and maybe face a worse manager without the support I have here...

Interestingly, and in spite of all this, Maitha explains that even in 10 years she prefers to remain in her same position even if with the same manager.

She asserts

I wanted to advance in my work and you know maybe become a manager but that was before... now I want to be promoted in grade but not position...maybe one position up...but not too far ...I doubt I can reach higher...a girl like me without wasta or looks...I mean...maybe if I had a masters but I can't afford it and I know that I won't be provided training opportunities....and my personality...I mean I can't be aggressive like a manager...so from where is the high position supposed to come from? It's not that I don't have ambition believe me if I didn't I wouldn't have finished studying but I have to decide for myself what's more important...having a job that thank God helps support me and my family and gives me even a little prestige compared to my cousins and friends...it's worth paying for all this with the headache from my manager...anywhere you go it's the same thing that's what all my friends say at least I know how to deal with this crazy woman...advancement is for other girls not me...

This willingness to pay a high price even at one's personal expense is interestingly also echoed by Nafissa whose experience is radically different from Maitha's. From Nafissa's perspective navigating a management career requires what she describes as a realistic expectation that it is much like "going to war" where fighting through obstacles and people means a willingness to

...sacrifice with everything you have...but it's doable...you need the right weapons...if you weren't born with them you have to get them from somewhere no matter what it costs you...see the two

²⁴ Arabic proverb implying that one must not knowingly walk into trouble on their own.

pieces of paper that hang on my wall...they give me power...really that's what I tell everyone...my degrees have been my prince on a white horse ...it's amazing because I'm the same Nafissa with my long tongue*²⁵ but because of the two pieces of paper on the wall suddenly I can be this Nafissa sitting in this office bossing around 40 men...that's the only way to get power...by force because no one will hand it to you even if you deserve it...not your parents not your husband and not your boss...they say there's nothing without a price*²⁶...

This tough approach to navigating one's management career emerged from a combination of personal and professional experience. Her difficult marriage marked her first experience with feeling weak and hungry for control over her decisions. Here I ask Nafissa how she navigates her determination to gain control and seek power and she describes how it was cemented from her experience with her first manager, an also divorced Sudanese woman in her forties. Nafissa describes

My first boss Sarah...was...how do I tell you...she was a school in her own right...I had a mixture of fear and admiration around her...she was never afraid and wherever she went she commanded respect...she stood like a wall in front of anyone who tried to make her feel less as a divorcee and she did it so elegantly...you could never say Sarah was impolite or hurtful...but she was incredibly honest and fair what was on her mind was on her tongue and if she didn't like something she said it no matter who was standing in front of her...I don't know if she just liked me or recognized herself in me but she invested so much time in teaching me and helping me...don't get me wrong she was not mothering me in any way...on the contrary she was tough and even tougher with me than the rest but she made it a point that I learned everything even how to handle divorce and separating that...and missing the children...with work...she showed me how to draw the borders between work and anything outside of it...to focus...

²⁵ Arabic expression referring to someone who is capable of using words to manipulate situations in one's favor.

²⁶ Arabic proverb.

In spite of the incredibly positive experience Nafissa described working with Sarah, she insists that working with women is more challenging particularly Sudanese women. Nafissa describes a lack of seriousness among women that makes them more likely to resort to gossip and forming alliances rather than competing through performance. Her experience with men, however, is different as she asserts that the key to being able to manage men is learning how to

...pacify them...you have to baby them like overgrown children and at the same time you have to earn their respect...I have to be their mother and their older brother at the same time...and you learn with experience...they'll try to push the line and that's when you have to show your muscle and remind them you're not the typical woman they're used to at home...maybe it's different for me because my ex husband took my kids away and my family shunned me after everything that happened and so basically I wasn't given a choice...but it's a good thing...if I stayed married I don't know how I would have dealt with the demands of that and with having two small kids...I know I would have never quit like women do but I don't think people at work would have seen me the same way...they don't question your commitment...they look at you differently when you don't have responsibilities at home...I mean they also make all sorts of judgments about you as a woman but I don't care...it's a price I am willing to pay to have the career that I do...I don't care...

For Mayada that price would be an impossible one to pay. While she admits that success requires sacrifices "...you have to sometimes let go of your arrogance... sometimes you have to know how to play behind the scenes to leave your impact a smile a nice gesture to the boss showing that you care about the company a lot really makes a difference" yet there are limits to the kinds of sacrifices that can be made. That limit for Mayada was when her children were born and she found herself incapable of reconciling the sacrifices she considered necessary to succeed at work with her new role as a mother.

I was so happy at my job but...I...look...how do I say it...I didn't know how to do both ... everything changed at home but the work stayed the same...it was what it was...I couldn't put in the same hours my mind wasn't with me it was at home with the kids and this was what was normal everyone said the same thing...everyday I went to work they made me feel like I wasn't a normal mother because I was leaving the kids even at work I felt my managers weren't the same way with me everything became so formal and cold...as if I wasn't wanted or needed because I couldn't act the part of the young, energetic girl...I was now a "mother"... I don't think I had a choice in the expectations *they* had of me as a mother...and the same thing happened at home the same people who were very supportive of my work like my husband...well it became this expectation that because we have kids that we needed to be different...even though financially my salary was a big help my husband was willing to let go of it for the sake of appearing like a normal family...and really everyone I talked to seemed to agree that I needed to quit...you become scared to be different...

The Brink & Pivotal Moment

For Mayada, returning to work after having children, proved to be an isolating experience. Mayada recalls an incident where this feeling was intensified when her manager with whom she had a positive relationship was inviting the team for dinner. When Mayada chimed in the conversation

...he made me feel that I wasn't included because they assumed I wouldn't be able to go joking that this was not an outing for moms! It's not like I was offended or anything I just found it a little upsetting...what like I'm not supposed to ever go out again? I was always out! I was the one making the plans and now it was as if I don't exist ...I just felt like it wasn't my place anymore it got to my head...

Mayada reveals that she tends to be sensitive about issues like this having suffered a mild form of Thalassemia for all her life a fact that she successfully hid from her co-workers and employers. Mayada is clear she does not like to go into much detail about this only saying

...if people know you're sick that's all they see and I didn't want that...it took away from my persona (laughs)...I knew how to

be Mayada the young woman but I didn't know how to be the mother, the patient, and the employee all at the same time...I felt like I used to hide so much about me...but now I had no choice in what I hide...the decision was made for me...and honestly I knew that I no longer had a chance at advancing because it's all about the right relationships...and these can only happen if you can control how people see you and the best way to do that is in the... background...how do I say it...in the outings and the lunches and the cigarette breaks you know what I mean? I was being excluded without a choice and so I left ...at least it was by my own choice because I know eventually I would have been left out of work things...promotions...so quitting at least was my choice ...

Grappling with isolation at work after having children is a familiar

experience for Rafi who quit her job after having her daughter

It was really a difficult time because until I had my daughter I would say I was really happy at work...it was hard yes like I said but I went through that difficulty with my colleagues who became like sisters to me...actually we were mostly women all young and starting out...but I was good at what I did I knew I was going to do anything to be promoted...maybe my own expectation from myself... maybe my father but I wanted to make it...but when I had the baby things were different...I know I looked the same I felt the same I thought the same but the office wasn't the same really to the point that my friends noticed even...the people I considered my champions were now acting like I was a first-timer like I didn't know my job...my husband thought it was my own insecurity but I knew something was going on...it was the first time people scrutinized my attendance hours or made comments about looking tired or depressed...I didn't feel like myself and I didn't know how to deal with it at work or at home because my mother was very opposed to me going back to work... it became too much and my husband was also putting pressure on me to quit and so I did...but not for long it took me less than 3 months to realize I would be destroyed even as a mother if I didn't go back...I lost my mind ...really....

Rafi says it wasn't long before she found another job, but though she

was offered a higher position she turned it down in exchange for a smaller role

at first

...I only began really fighting to reach the top when my kids were older and in a place where no one really knew much about my personal life...where I could be judged for my work and not assume anything based on private things...that's why I didn't even wear my

wedding ring and I had to hide it from my husband...but it was the only way I knew I had a chance to compete...it wasn't necessarily better by the way...if they don't know about your personal life...especially if your manager was a man it means they have other expectations of you especially if you are attractive and not willing to hide yourself...they assume you will make compromises of a different kind but those are easier to shut down if you learn how.

For Nafissa, competing also meant fighting to be seen through her work only. Something she fought for even through the way she dresses

...I make sure everyday that I dress in a way thathow do I say it...to not appear as the woman they would see at home you know what I mean...I dress in a way that says forget I'm a woman and focus on what I have to say and what I'm doing...

And yet in spite of these efforts Nafissa found herself in a situation in which two of her subordinates had gotten into a verbal altercation during a meeting

...I was telling them guys calm down let's talk about it calm and quiet and they ignored me...I raised my voice...and then this man...no this boy!...just screamed at me that I should leave the room because it was no place for a lady or else I would see something I won't like*²⁷...I couldn't believe I was actually in a meeting room instead of a living room I swear to God...I mean their friends interfered grabbing them and calming them down but as if I didn't exist...later he apologized not for what he did but because it happened in the presence of a woman ...I explained to him that it wasn't about it being in front of women and I proceeded to give him a lecture about professionalism... he just rudely said...we will agree to disagree because you are thinking emotional and you're a woman I can't blame you...I was ready to fire him on the spot but when I raised a complaint I was told that it was a harmless statement and that I was being sensitive...so much for HR and following process...I ended up firing him anyway because ...it's hard to change an Arab man let alone a Sudanese one...

²⁷ Arabic phrase implying a threat.

Vulnerability in the workplace is a prominent concern for Marwa who felt that there was no protection in the workplace even against basic disrespect.

Marwa recounts

...I'll never forget the time one of the directors berated this woman... She seemed... old enough to be my mothers' age and she had clearly done something he didn't like... He made it a point to walk over to her office with the doors open and call her stupid. I was in big shock...In my mind it was like a movie I swear. She was crying... and... apologizing and just let him scream at her without resisting until he left. If someone who had worked for so many years in a company and pretty senior could be treated that way so publicly then no matter how high I went up the treatment would be the same. It was like she was being yelled at by a husband or a father! I couldn't shake it off...there's no respect and no limits and any reaction would be blamed on saying 'well a girl has no place in an office'...in Egypt...companies don't have honesty or clarity maybe. I don't think you find that in here I tell my father all the time...things were different for my mom because she worked in the same place as my dad so there was that safety... if I could walk into a place and someone says Marwa this is how your job will work and this is how you will be evaluated and this is what you need to do to move up and here are your rights as an employee I would definitely feel more comfortable. In lots of places this is all ink on paper but not what really happens... All that actually happens in after-hour drinks and late night shisha* sessions. And... you're never ever going to those unless you're on your way to social suicide...a girl who never wants to get married and throws her reputation away...

Marwa acknowledges that her family name afforded her protection in many ways. But it was a double-edged sword as it also excluded her from having a fair chance and an honest evaluation. Maitha, however, only had herself to rely on as she experienced being on the receiving end of what she describes as

...torture....my manager knew I needed the job badly...and she knew I had no wasta to help...so she made me work for a month straight without a break...she threatened to give me a bad evaluation if I didn't or if I complained...I couldn't get a pay raise without the good evaluation...I mean it would have been my word against hers with the senior manager and she's been there for longer and beautiful

and from a good family who's going to listen to me?...anyway when I realized that this behaviour was going to become a permanent thing I went to the senior manager...my family were angry at being at work 7 days a week and were starting to wonder whether I was lying so I had to act... and...I remember...I never told anyone I don't know how I'm telling you but subhan Allah I feel comfortable with you...he offered to help me...even offered me a promotion but he made it very clear he would want...he would want me to return the favour in inappropriate ways...my face was burning...my whole body was burning...on the way out he made it a point to brush against me in a way that made me shiver with fear...I thought I will live with my crazy supervisor and not even ever want a promotion for fear of having to deal with someone like this again...if my family found out it would be the end of me!

Maitha revealed that after this incident she decided that a management career was not for her and that she would remain in her current position and even organization for as long as she could. Her experience made her determined to do her work in a way that allowed her to remain invisible until she can get married at which point she will quit work altogether.

Seeking security and protection away from politics and difficult situations is Jihan, for whom the pivotal moment of her career actually happened outside of work. At the time, Jihan was engaged to her fiancée whom she had met in university and who was very supportive of her work until

...things got serious and we are planning our wedding when him and his family...they hinted that I would be quitting work after marriage...I thought I was misunderstanding it until he told me that he was expecting me to quit! I was shocked to say the least because he was always very supportive and his family used to show off my work and position and he said 'that was then and this is now we don't have girls that stay out late*²⁸ and as a wife I should be focused on my home and our future kids...so basically the prestige of my position was only good enough so his family could say their daughter in law did such and such...that's it...I'm not sure really if I did the right thing...I liked working at a company even with all the

²⁸ Arabic phrase implying that "good girls" must not be seen alone, outside, late at night.

problems...but I know I couldn't have handled the pressure much longer...and I like helping like I do now but it doesn't really feel like my choice just something to do I don't feel like I really know what I want to do quite yet...

Jihan's now husband compensated her by funding her small charity that helps young children finish their education. I ask Jihan if she would ever go back to the corporate world and she asserts that it's possible she would but not for a few years and depending on whether she will have children by then or not. For Jihan a successful woman

...is someone who can have a perfect home and be a good employee in a good position if that's possible (laughs) but basically you can't be a big manager and do all those things...have you met one yet? You have to be half man as my best friend says...the closest I have come to one is watching the guests on the Oprah show but those women don't have our kind of parents and husbands am I right?

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETING ARAB WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SCRIPTS

Renowned Lebanese poet Jibran Khalil Jibran cautions: “Say not I have found *the* truth, but rather I have found *a* truth” and indeed with each interview a new truth emerged as women described their individual experiences. The chapter at hand explores the themes that emerged from those stories collectively, which vividly described the stage upon which Arab women’s management career experiences took place, the actors who took centre-stage in those experiences, the many scripts that were written and enacted, and the multiple outcomes that emerged from their interaction.

Theme 1: The Private Script

Much like players in a card game assess the “hand” they are dealt before deciding what is possible for their next move in the game, so too did the participants describe how they evaluate their “standing” in relation to their ability to navigate their management careers based on how the different elements of their identity combined to position them either in a place of strength or weakness. The starting point for women’s conception of their relative positions lies in the consequences of the “private script” produced from the complex interaction of the multiple layers of their identity; each layer is discussed separately in the coming sections.

God's Will: Family, Bodies, & Beauty

"This is reality...I have come to accept it...thank God for everything...everything is written by Him and this was my share" Nihal, 28, Kuwait

We begin our discussion with the family unit, which lies at the core of Arab society religiously, socially, legally, and even economically. The Arab family unit is patriarchal in which

...females are generally taught to respect and defer to their fathers, brothers, grandparents, uncles, and, at times, male cousins. Young people are taught to respect and defer to their older kin. In turn males are taught to take responsibility for their female kin, and elder kin are taught to protect and take responsibility for those younger than them (Joseph 1994, p. 196).

As such family belonging is at the core of one's self-conception including a prioritization of the family's needs; in exchange the family "takes care" of its members financially and socially. This is especially evident in the case of social positioning and prestige that is heavily linked to the concept of honour, which is particularly

...crucial in the Arab world. Family honor implies that one's sense of dignity, identity, status, and self, as well as public esteem are linked to the regard with which one's family is held in the community at large. The cultural assumption has been that a person's actions reflect on her or his family as a whole, and the reputation of the family as a whole is borne by each of its members (p. 197).

Maintaining the family honour is ensured by perpetuating a deeply held belief that sacrifice for the sake of the group is expected by individuals, who are

forever held accountable to the family (even after marriage in the case of women). Family honour is thus a double-edged sword; it offers protection, social and financial security while also controlling behaviour. The patriarchal nature of the Arab family has meant that this “duty” towards the family honour has fallen heavily on the shoulders of women. Given the added layer of the connection between the family honour and women’s chastity, the preservation of which is the central responsibility of the male kin and necessitates the “circumscribing of women’s sexuality, movement in social arena’s, and...economic opportunity [with financial responsibility for women being the responsibility of men]” (p. 197). Hence women are socialized such that they are “expected to put others before themselves and to see their interests imbedded in those of others, especially the family” (p. 198). And while this conception of the family and honour predominate the Arab world, it has not been static- rather it has dynamically varied across and within countries particularly with the socioeconomic, political, and legal circumstances in each.

It was no surprise then that, as diverse as the women interviewed were, they almost always began telling their stories, by describing, in varying degrees of detail, the families they grew up in. And while their descriptions revealed diverse family dynamics, there were some key commonalities in the elements they saw as fundamentally influential on their career choices. The starting point for these descriptions were often the label “traditional” or “open minded”. The “traditional”/“typical” family often implied a “traditional” role division in the

home with a stay-at-home mother and a working father (“I had a normal family...you know...my mother stayed home and took care of everything...my father worked until he retired”), or more “conservative” values, that may or may not be linked to a certain religiousness, which implied certain restrictions on the women’s pursuit of a career.

And, perhaps unsurprisingly given the earlier discussion about the patriarchal nature of the Arab family, whenever women described their source of support or inspiration to pursue education and/or a career they often referred to supportive and/or role model fathers or brothers (especially in Cluster 2); “MashAllah my father is very well-respected and trusted...I wanted to be like him even when I was a small kid in kindergarten I used to say when I grow up I want to be like baba”. In the few times women described their mothers as their supporters/sources of inspiration it usually involved a desire to avoid the same difficult circumstances the mother may have undergone due to divorce, widowhood, or a difficult marriage:

As my mother used to say...my degree is my biggest security...after what she saw from my father she was so scared the same would happen to us...she even turned down suitors who came for me and my sisters when we were in university...she only let me get married because my husband agreed to let me study and work after marriage...she would kill me if I quit!

Thus, the first and most important “card” women are dealt is the family; regardless of how they described their families women alluded to their feeling that, while they can not control the family they are “given” nor can they escape

it (even when they saw their families positively as is the case with wealthy families who saw their daughters work as an inappropriate reflection of the family's status), family belonging either gave them a head-start or set them back in terms of their careers via 3 separate yet deeply intertwined elements; wealth, wasta, and education.

Family wealth varied between those who, explicitly or implicitly, described their families as lower to upper middle-class or extremely affluent. The importance of a family's financial situation lay in its ability to provide women with choices; in all 3 clusters family wealth implied that women worked out of choice and not need, radically changing their willingness to tolerate what they saw as difficult or less than ideal circumstances in their jobs. This ability to "choose" to work was empowering for women as it not only gave them a sense of security in knowing they could leave should they need to, it also served as an important social signal to their colleagues and managers that

...I am not like the rest I won't die if I lose the job...on the contrary...they would suffer more...no one could twist my arm...I wasn't afraid of a pay cut or an evaluation I was there on my terms and would leave on my terms when and how I wanted...

And while this sense of "safety" was common across the clusters, women in the GCC described how a financially privileged background made convincing their families of their choices to pursue management careers a more difficult battle than for the women in clusters 1 and 2. Given that a core element of the Arab family is its obligation to financially secure its members

particularly the women, the relationship between women's careers and the family's public esteem is made more complicated by the possibility that a woman's dedication to a career (and the sacrifices this necessitates) implies that her family (father, brother, or husband) is incapable of supporting her financially.

Along with wealth comes the idea of "prestige" that implied a public esteem that was accompanied by an important social network that has the power to open what would otherwise be closed doors for women. While some women called it "prestige" or "status" others called it "wasta" to acknowledge how their family belonging afforded them a power advantage in multiple arenas. First it allowed them access to career opportunities either in terms of the positions they hold or the organizations they join that would otherwise be impossible; a theme that featured more prominently in clusters 1 and 3. Secondly, and much like wealth, this social network provided women with a sense of safety, security, and empowerment in their relationships with their colleagues and managers "she knew who I was and where I came from and that was enough to keep everyone careful about how they handled themselves with me" and "I had a backing that let me take my rights with my hands if I needed thank God...". The safety that came along with a powerful social network was not exclusive only to financially privileged families. In cluster 2 this came from a family's tribal origins, while in clusters 1 and 3 it also emerged from a family's history and the occupations of the male elders- grandfathers and

fathers whose “prestigious” occupations (with the exception of religious, military, and political positions) usually emanated from their educational backgrounds.

The family to which a woman belongs had a major impact on the kind of education she received and the role that education occupied in her self-conception as she navigated her management career decisions. Regardless of their socioeconomic status, pursuing a university degree was highly encouraged among the families of the participants (even by families in which the participants were the first to pursue higher education such as in many of the countries of cluster 2 and 3). However, how and why families prioritized education for their daughters, and by extension provided the resources needed for its attainment, varied considerably. While some viewed education as an enhancement to the family “prestige” as was the case with upper-middle class to affluent families particularly in clusters 1 and 3, others saw it as a tool to leverage in the face of a *lack* of family wealth and social network that could ensure access to a job

...my father bless his soul kept telling me Dima you have to study hard you have to finish with a strong degree you won't need anyone and you will even do better than those who have connections...connections only get you there but it won't keep you there and thank God I listened to him...

Women who described their families as highly-educated, and had encouraging fathers and/or highly educated mothers, were more likely to see education as a core part of their values

...growing up I wasn't like everyone else because my mother didn't want my head to be in typical girl things like marriage and house work...all she cared about was what I did in school and then university and I really never thought that I could choose differently...getting a Masters or more was what I naturally had to do.

It's interesting to note, however, that in spite of the diversity of the families, participants described how they were taught to view their degrees as "the best life insurance" and a powerful "weapon for fighting" their way through the challenges they may face in their personal lives first and professional lives second "even if I was married to the best husband and was very happy I know that if God forbid for whatever reason something goes wrong that I have my degree to keep me on my feet". The higher the status of the family the more likely they were to provide a "better" education; and the more "open minded" a family was the more likely it "allowed" its daughters to pursue their education "abroad" which was seen as the most powerful kind of education in allowing women access to personal and professional opportunities (as well as considerable "protection"/privileges in their jobs). Hence for many women, in addition to the professional opportunities a "good" education (high degrees and/or prestigious universities) gave women the leverage they needed to overcome any disadvantages they may have in securing a good marriage or boost their chances of "marrying up"

walla if I didn't meet my husband in my Masters I would have been a spinster because there was no way that I was going to marry one of my illiterate cousins!.

In addition to family belonging, another defining element of the

participants' self conception was how they viewed themselves in terms of their physical ability and beauty. Few participants had visible physical disabilities and acknowledged its impact on their self-view

...in a way it was a good thing...it was known that marriage was out of the question and...no one really cared what I did with my time...my parents didn't let my sisters travel for university but had no problems sending me thank God I wouldn't have reached where I did without it...

Others described living with hidden disabilities or chronic illnesses and doing "the impossible so no one finds out...that's it once it becomes known it becomes the only thing people focus on...nice people will feel sorry for you and people who want to hurt you will use it against you". Physical ability and/or illness in the Arab world, comes with a significant social stigma, particularly for women, where it is seen as an impediment to a woman's ability to marry someone of an equal social status *if* she is able to marry to at all; "this is God's will I can't complain". Interestingly, "beauty" is seen in similar terms as a tool that can be leveraged to gain access to opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable either personally or professionally

...it's not arrogance but...thank God I mean...I know that the way I look helps a lot...the degree is needed and experience but...I know how to be a woman when I need to be.

However, more often than not it was women who saw themselves as "average", "fat", or "ugly" described it in the context of how they anticipated people in general (and both potential suitors and male managers in particular) would view them and treat them accordingly and how they have to leverage

other “tools” to help them overcome this draw back “believe me if I looked like my sister I would not have studied as much as I did and I wouldn’t be burning my nerves working like this...who needs that kind of headache!”.

In the eyes of the participants, physical ability, beauty, and family belonging are all “written by God” and part of their “fate”. Much like a scoreboard these elements combined to position women in specific locations at the fundamental crossroads of their lives both personally and professionally and, while out of their control, these elements were at the heart of how women viewed their identities, expectations of themselves, and how they believed others saw them (i.e.: social identities). The significance of these elements is in their ability to enable or hinder women’s ability to attain and enact their fundamental, primary roles in the private sphere.

Great Expectations: Arab Daughters, Wives, & Mothers

The above discussion describes the foundation for the way one part of women’s social identities is constructed. This foundation in turn enables the construction of the other part of those social identities that are expressed in the central roles they are expected to hold. From the perspective of the participants those fundamental roles were as daughters, wives and mothers.

Earlier discussion of the centrality of the family in Arab society alluded to the importance of family membership particularly for women that comes with particular expectations of their roles as daughters which continues throughout their lives. Hence the family to which a woman belongs largely

determines its expectations of her and the limits of her ability to make particular choices. And participants told of a range of expectations regarding specific modes of behaviour, attire, and social interaction the combination of which largely determined for women what they described as a “script I had to follow...or at least pretend that I follow”. As such women made their decisions with an eye for how it affected their ability to fulfil the requirements of that role.

How these scripts were written and what they required of the “performers” was incredibly nuanced. For example, while in some cases belonging to a “powerful” family afforded a woman access to financial security and power via social networks it simultaneously limited the range of choices she could make about her education, career, or both

...my friends make fun of me...my parents let me go to UCLA...and get two masters but they won't let me work and build myself like everyone else...you know work somewhere and start a career from zero...that's 3eib*²⁹...because people will talk and say look at Nasser's daughter she's an employee!

On the other hand a “modest” family, who may, implicitly or explicitly, acknowledge their “disadvantaged” access to power encouraged its daughters to seek “alternative” sources of power such as a good education and/or a good position with the prestige that follows reflecting positively on the family as a whole

I made my family very proud really...just the way people looked at us was different...little Shamma became a big

²⁹ Shameful

manager...thank God...it made all the suffering worth it to see that I could do this for them.

Regardless of the range of expectations women felt their families demanded, it's important to note that the fulfilment of those expectations, or at least appearing to do so, was a non-negotiable. As Bassant from Egypt described

I learned very quickly that being in this society meant I had a scoreboard... and things outside my control like what happened with my father was a dark point on my scoreboard...I couldn't run away from it unless I was willing to give up everything...

Fulfilment of their roles as daughters is but one part of a complex social identity that stems from the centrality of adhering to family expectation. For as long as a woman remains an unmarried "girl" (a label that remains with her until her marriage regardless of her age) her role as a daughter is the fundamental "label" defining her identity even if she is pursuing a career and capable of financial independence; Sherine from Libya describes

I'm almost 40 and still my father is strict with me about being home at a certain time...I mean I've been working for so many years and still we have to have the same fight...my makeup my dress my hours as if I'm 16.

Sherine's experience is not uncommon as the passage from "child" to "adult" happens only when a woman gets married where her primary role then becomes that of a wife.

In the Arab world "marriage is both an individual and family matter. In Arab culture, marriage is a well defined turning point that bestows prestige, recognition, and societal approval on both partners particularly the bride" (Rashad et al 2005). Hence, marriage in the Arab world is a "family affair" and

a tool with which a family can solidify and/or uplift its power via social positioning. Given its importance, families are involved, to varying degrees, in the marriages of their children particularly daughters. Consequently marriages often took place within increasingly narrower circles within the same country, tribe, religion, sect, and similar social status (though this is slowly changing). However, the kind of family to which a woman belongs determines to a large extent her ability to attain a suitable marriage; a wealthy/powerful or highly educated or even modest family is more likely to enable a marriage of a similar, or slightly higher, status for its daughters. Thus family (and all that it brings with it from financial status, social positioning, and education) ultimately facilitates for women the fulfilment of their fundamental roles as wives.

A woman's role as a wife is the single most important role she holds legally, socially, and religiously which guarantees her financial security and social positioning. It's important to acknowledge that fulfilling the expectations of the role of "wife" was not only relevant to married women. In fact it was equally, if not more, important for unmarried women of all ages. This is unsurprising given that marriageability is a fundamental concern for women as it is directly related both to a family's public esteem (via securing a marriage that aligns with the that status) as well as a woman's individual status privately and publically. Without successfully attaining this status all other achievements are deemed "useless"

...walla I'm more educated than my siblings and much more successful...I even finance their lives with their wives and husbands

and kids...but still..when...things get serious I'm looked down on...pitied...belittled...I'm not a full person...no...I didn't achieve anything because I don't have this ring on my finger...but I wouldn't change anything I don't regret it... it wasn't in my hands and...at least I achieved in every other area that I wanted to...

Hence as women made decisions about their management education and subsequent careers they often did so with an eye for how this would impact their potential of getting married or sustaining their marriage. Thus many participants, particularly those in their mid to late twenties admitted turning down management career opportunities or promotions for fear of its impact on their marriageability

...don't get me wrong I really admire strong women like my boss but in the end if I had taken that position it would have made it intimidating for any guy to come forward you know what I mean? It would have looked like I'm this crazy career manly woman...which my mom was so scared about...but...and I know it's not true by the way...but I didn't want that to mean I'm going to be single forever I mean I could always get a job after I get married but...I didn't have forever to get married you know?...

Fulfilling the role of a married woman successfully requires navigating the expectations of multiple actors: the husband (first and foremost), the in-laws, the woman's own family, and then larger society. In order to fully appreciate women's experiences juggling those multiple expectations it's important that we first delve into the nature of those expectations and their origins. In most Arab countries religion and law are heavily intertwined, and recalling the discussion in Chapter 2, religion and Urf are woven together into the very fabric of society including the institution of marriage. And while fully exploring the complex history of marriage in the Arab world is beyond the scope of this thesis, it's sufficient to assert that the patriarchal nature of Arab

society is mirrored in the marriage institution with multiple implications for women. Given that becoming a “full person” can *not* be achieved without marriage and the social and financial security that comes with it makes the stakes of losing a marriage incredibly high. This is significantly furthered when considering that men are legally, religiously, and even socially empowered to marry multiple wives, divorce relatively easily (without the social stigma that befalls divorced women), and ensured custody of children. As such the heavier burden of ensuring the success of a marriage falls on women; failure to produce children, take care of the home, and fulfil the husband’s desires and expectations (privately and publically) could easily end a marriage and the privileges that come with it. A failed marriage is not only a dark point on the woman’s “scoreboard”; its repercussions reach her own family’s public esteem and honour as well as significantly impacts her children’s public esteem in a way that could adversely affect their own marriage opportunities. It is therefore unsurprising that women prioritized their roles as wives, whether married or hoping to be, which added to the challenge of pursuing their management careers.

How women saw their roles as wives significantly varied across countries and clusters though they all expressed their conception of that role as revolving around demonstrating competence at managing the household, raising the children, and “keeping the husband happy”. In clusters 1 and 3 the definitions of managing the household varied across social class. For women of

“modest” to upper-middle class status a similar description of the household management role emerged as “cooking everyday...making sure the house is neat...cleaning...and inviting friends and family...basically make sure I’m a good sit beitz³⁰...or at least pretend to!” without help. For the upper middle class in those clusters, and a majority of women in cluster 2, the same parameters existed though these responsibilities were executed by full or part-time domestic help rendering the woman’s role more supervisory

it’s not easy dealing with maids...you know how it is...if you’re not on top of their head 24 hours they won’t do things right...and if anything is not the way they [the spouse and children] like I have to deal with the non stop nagging....

And in cases where women had professional help in the household, rather than describing a sense of relief, they appeared to be even more anxious about appearing

...to do everything myself...everything *everything*...I have to pretend like I ...I made the sandwiches for the kids...or...especially when people come over I have to make the maid disappear somehow and take credit for her food...what can I do? I will never hear the end of it...if the smallest thing is out of place you know what he will tell me? Of course you don’t have time for your husband and kids! Your head is in your job! I try to avoid opening those doors as much as I can...I won’t give his mother the pleasure...no way!

It’s interesting to note that women were more comfortable with receiving help in raising their children from their extended family and defined their role in terms of being available to help the children in their education. However, they still described

³⁰ Literally translating to “lady of the house” this is a phrase used to refer to a woman who is a “perfect” housewife.

...constant feelings of guilt...I mean thank God they're doing wonderful in school...but when I come home and my daughter especially sticks to me and won't let me go...I feel that they notice my absence....

Particularly striking was the way in which many participants described their guilt at having not fulfilled their roles as wives and mothers for failing to

...be like other mothers...my kids say mama why can't you be like our friends mom?...you know...they're there when they come from school...they have lunch together...puts them to bed...bakes cookies and cake...I know what they mean though because that's how I grew up...

This guilt about fulfilling more traditional definitions of motherhood was often exacerbated by the pressure women faced from their mothers, mother in laws, sisters, friends, and husbands.

However, guilt is transformed into a mixture of fear and anxiety when it comes to fulfilling the husband's many needs as it requires a delicate balancing act between multiple elements. And perhaps the most striking similarity among all participants was the way in which they described the fundamental elements of navigating their relationship with their husbands. Women described the importance of "taking care of myself...even if I'm exhausted and don't have the energy to breathe I have to look perfect when he comes...he can't ever see me tired" and "if I don't look my best for him he will be upset...I look nice going to work so why not for him?". This emphasis on beauty is not only related to "mak[ing] sure he doesn't look elsewhere" but also an important tool for attaining power

...in the end all men are the same...simple...if you're smart you know they are weak in front of a beautiful woman...if I want to keep

him under my control... if I want him to listen to me and let me do what I want... I have to make sure he's scared to lose me...that's why I look like a bride even at home...

Resorting to this kind of power in the private sphere, although they are capable of drawing on other sources of power such as their education, career, and financial leverage (sometimes earning more than their husbands), is directly linked to the need to appease the Arab conception of masculinity. Thus many women spoke of having to “hide my success” or “keep my promotion and salary secret from him” not only to not appear to “be better than him in any way” but also to not appear “like a manly woman”. Women described having to deal with their roles at home in general (as daughters or mothers) and with their husbands in particular as elaborate performances

...walla I'm constantly running...constantly pretending that I'm this or that...that I'm in control of my house and kids...and I have to erase everything on my mind so I can pretend to be cheerful with my husband...walla my life feels like a movie and I'm playing every part...

Thus for women a rigid separation between who they are at work and who they are at home is fundamental to the survival of the marriage; any overlapping of the two roles contradicts with the feminine social identity of the woman and threatens the masculine social identity of the husband both privately and in public.

Interestingly, the more “traditional” or “conservative” or “difficult” a woman described her husband or marriage the stronger she felt the need to play exaggerated performances of the stereotypical Arab housewife (sit el beit); something that was described more frequently by women aged 35- 40 in

clusters 1 and 3 and most women in cluster 2 (unsurprising given the more “traditional” countries of the GCC). Younger married women (24 to 30) more frequently described more “relaxed” marriages; though they had the same concerns about fulfilling their roles it was within the context of more “supportive” and “forgiving” husbands who

...liked that I wasn't a typical housewife...I mean he likes that I understand what he goes through at work because I go through the same thing...he can talk to me and consult with me and this wouldn't have happened if I stayed home...maybe it will change when we have kids I don't know.

And interestingly the kind of marriages women described were more often than not aligned with the type of families they described belonging to (i.e.: the more “traditional” the family a woman grew up in the more likely she conceived of her role as a wife in a more traditional sense and experienced a magnified sense of “guilt” or “failure” when she is incapable of fulfilling it in light of her career). This distinction along age groups meant that early in their careers women felt more emboldened to “throw myself into work and progress” while the heavier the burden at home (probably with the added responsibility of children and the increased social expectation to conform to the “traditional” conception of the maternal role) the more difficult it was “to be in two places fully at the same time”.

It's important to acknowledge at this point that the discussion thus far about the significance of fulfilling the role expectations of family and society are not only roles to be performed for fear of consequence; they are directly related to how women saw themselves as being “real” women. Hence their

feminine core social identity emerged not only from their ability to fulfil those roles but also in ensuring that their decisions do not invite suspicion into their deviation from what they deemed (and were socialized into accepting) as the feminine ideal. This ideal emerges from the patriarchal nature of Arab society with a defined division of power between the genders that is not only a cultural artefact kept in place by human decision or custom only but rather made to appear natural and sanctioned by religion (Acker 1990; Syed 2010). The doing of gender in ways that reflect the feminine ideal thus mirrors patterns of subordination and dominance with defined modes of behaviour, locations in physical space, and symbols (including language and dress) (Charmes & Wieringa 2003 in Syed 2010, p. 291). The more their management careers stood in contrast to that ideal the more they struggled. As Nisrine 33, from Algeria asks “How can I be a woman and man at the same time? Maybe I should have split myself in two?”

Taken together, the discussion thus far outlines the ways in which the participants’ social identities were constructed from the fundamental building blocks of physical ability and family belonging that intersected in ways that determined the parameters of their performance of the primary roles women are expected to fulfil. These intersections were the site of production of the “private script” for each woman who saw her overall social identity and status in relation to that script as either empowering or disempowering in terms of the subsequent ability to make fundamental choices. How this private script

affected women's management career experiences and ultimately choices depends on how this script not only placed them in what they perceived to be a place of power or not but also how it intersected with the "public script" produced in organizations.

Theme 2: The Public Script

Theme 1 described the "private script" that outlines for women the tenets of their social identity in the private realm, which delineates specific role performances both privately and in public in terms of the projections of the private roles to the outside world. This private script is now the foundation upon which women stood as they looked to make decisions outside the private realm of the home. We now turn to how this private script stood in relation to the production of the "public script" as women experienced their management careers and made decisions about the direction of that career. The production site of that public script begins with the organizations in which those careers took place as will be discussed in the coming sections.

The Arab Organization

"The place where you work is either going to be a horror film or the place where your dreams can happen...which one you get only God knows" Dyala,

37, Jordan

There are many sites in which women's public scripts are produced; for the purpose of this dissertation organizations are the site of the production of the public scripts of women who pursued or aspired to pursue management

careers. As women shared their stories, they vividly described their organizations either directly, or, less frequently, indirectly by describing specific features of the organizations in which their career experiences took place. Interestingly, much like the above quote from one of the participants, the descriptions positioned organizations in one of two extremes: the “jail” or the “paradise”.

Most women referred to their first encounters with the world of organizations as incredibly shocking (regardless of whether their overall experiences ended up being positive or negative). A fundamental contributor to this feeling of shock and bewilderment is the stark contrast they cited between what “[they] thought [they] knew and reality...it was nothing like what...professors and books told you”. This is unsurprising given that women’s first experiences with the world of work occurred only after graduation, with the rare exceptions being in the cases of women whose degrees were obtained in “westernized” universities (such as American, British or European universities in Arab countries) in which internships were a core part of the requirements, or women whose financial situations forced them to work while studying (an infrequent occurrence even among women whose families were of modest means). As such women’s confidence in their preparedness by virtue of their academic degrees were often shattered early on in their experiences causing them to feel “fear” and “anxiety” and a constant sense of “being lost”. This disillusionment was exacerbated whenever they became aware that there is

rarely a place they could turn to without feeling further inadequate; neither a supportive social network nor an available role model nor a mentor. As such women reported feeling “handicapped”, “disadvantaged”, and “weak” in ways that oftentimes overshadowed their subsequent experiences and career decisions. How and when women worked through these initial experiences and feelings depended on the complex interaction of multiple elements within the organization.

Gendering in the Arab Organization

“It was a jungle and I felt lost...and everything around me confirmed that I was not in the right place...and the longer I stayed the more I questioned why I thought I would be right for this career in the first place...” Sherine, 31, Syria

We now return to the women’s conception of the organizations in which their management careers took (or would have taken) place. While women described a range of organizations, their descriptions revolved around the 3 core components of the nature of the culture, the role expectations that accompanied them, and the job requirements.

Recalling the earlier discussion, women’s initial job experiences were shocking as reality stood in contrast to the expectations they built in university. More often than not shock transformed to a “nagging feeling that [they] were out of [their] place” and “constantly in survival mode” in the face of an environment that lacked “clarity” and “there was no system” or “objectivity”.

And while these were described more frequently in clusters 1 and 3 they still occurred in cluster 2, and hence, women in all clusters described the difficulty of navigating environments in which “chaos” and “arbitrary systems” made it nearly impossible for them to “understand what I need to do...what is required of me? Who evaluates me? Who has power? Who can answer these questions? Only God knows!”. Women felt lost in between what organizations tell them about “how things work and how they actually work...even the job itself I mean my position says something but I do something completely different”. It’s interesting to note that while these feelings were more intense among younger women who are in the early stages of their career, they never fully disappear as older women describe coming to accept that they will never be fully resolved instead accepting it as a natural part of work life “it’s all the same...it might look different but once you’re in it you realize you’re in the same environment”. The only constant in this “jungle environment” is that there are “men everywhere...everywhere that matters of course...which is natural of course...but it’s the first thing you notice”. Perhaps the biggest struggle that is born from this lack of clarity lies in women’s inability to fully grasp “how to be” and “how to behave...talk...dress...do the right things [they] needed to be successful”. Thus in trying to determine the outlines of their social identity at work they turned to the organization culture for cues.

We begin the discussion with the most prevalent type of organization culture described by participants. As Wafa, 28, from Bahrain explains

...it doesn't take very long for you to figure out that behind the nice offices and modern arrangements and the professional suits that...the office is really one big majlis*³¹ and the women have to figure it out and make mini majlis harem*³² for themselves in the outer corners and if they can... listen in on all the conversations happening on the other side like we did when we were kids...

The sentiment behind this description was explicitly or implicitly touched on by most of the participants and it refers to the way in which they described learning that especially when “[they] want a management career not just any position” it was important to accept that it necessitated navigating a complex web of power that appeared exclusive to men (and only few women; outliers as will be discussed later).

Formal power in organizations comes with designated positions within the hierarchy and, more often than not, participants noted throughout their careers that, more often than not, men hold these positions. And yet, this “kind” of power was more easily acceptable for women because it was not only clear, it also appeared natural and to some extent mirrored the power distribution at home (in which elders and men are more powerful than any other member of the family). Where women struggled was the informal realm of power in which “alliances happened in the shisha place after work”, “deals happen in bars”, bonding that “was built during work trips” and the vital “information that’s exchanged in cigarette breaks”. These “typical male” activities and spaces were

³¹ More prominent in the GCC, the Majlis refers to a room for receiving guests in which men typically spend long hours socializing.

³² Majlis for women.

a core part of the organizational dynamic both within and outside its walls thereby creating a masculine culture in which women were on the receiving end of narrative-weaving and decision-making. As Nada S., 39, from Jordan describes

I almost took up smoking because of this...it drove me insane I swear to God...my colleague was an idiot...he didn't have my degrees or certificates...he didn't put in the hours I did I swear to God but because of the smoking in groups thing he always got ahead of me...he mingled with the bosses...especially our boss...he managed to always control the story about our work...no *my* work that he made it seem like he was managing it when in reality he wasn't doing anything other than pretend to be important...but by the time I realized it was too late...I mean everyone knew his name and his side of the story...and he moved up...at least it meant he was out of my face!

Thus power is retained within narrow circles of men; being a man was enough to grant access to circles of power that are at a higher level in the hierarchy than one's own position in it and sustained by maintaining a presence in these multiple "power spaces" that demanded heavy interaction with men both within and outside the organization. Hence, these "power spaces" were by nature prohibitive for women; at least those who didn't want to "destroy [their] reputation" thereby transforming organizations into "battlegrounds". But what did these "battlegrounds" look like in the everyday experiences of women?

It's interesting to note that while women acknowledged the way in which this unequal access to power meant more protection and privileges for men, none of the participants addressed the possibility that these men may or may not be receiving higher salaries for the same work. This is perhaps

unsurprising given earlier discussion of the ways in which women are not expected to be financially independent (even if they are supporting their families financially) and hence may not be, at least explicitly, concerned about salary equality. However, arrangements of space seemed to be one of the first things women struggled with; being seated in narrow spaces alongside men was an uncomfortable experience (at least initially) for many women though particularly for those from more “conservative” backgrounds and/or cultures such as cluster 2 in which segregated schools and living space within the same home are the norm. Their discomfort was less about the “physical” proximity and more about their feelings of weakness and vulnerability in an environment that made it clear “ [they] don’t belong”. As men outnumbered women they dominated the space and women felt “caught in the middle of their inappropriate joking” their “constant fighting and cursing” or worse the ways in which they made women to feel “exposed”. It’s worth noting that “special” space arrangements were among the reasons women “worried” about reaching higher levels; seniority means corner offices that make “remaining invisible” almost impossible and potentially forcing daily interaction with other senior managers (usually men). Even worse, these arrangements symbolically further isolate them from other women and hence they often described feeling more comfortable in the lower levels of the organization where they can be part of larger groups of women in arrangements that mirror what they are familiar with in the private sphere.

Women often described being referred to as “girls” or “pretty ladies” by men who appeared free to address their women colleagues and superiors in terms of endearment. Often women described how more junior male colleagues would take on the role of an “older brother” or even father and command the women to behave in certain ways in situations deemed by them to be “not right for ladies” even when this contradicts with what professional conduct entails. Even more critical, women described the frequency with which they were subject to comments about their appearances by colleagues and superiors, and finding themselves in situations where “lines are being crossed but it’s so subtle it makes you doubt yourself”. In fact, most of the negative incidents described by women were ones in which what should have been professional relationships cross the lines into “inappropriate” interactions laden with sexualized innuendos and/or encounters

...those 8 months felt like torture...I felt uneasy about how he looked at me and talked to me...you just know sometimes...and the stronger my feelings the guiltier I felt...I wondered if I was doing something to invite him to cross the lines with me? I was too embarrassed to do anything about it or tell anyone...but I couldn’t take working with him anymore...towards the end I was scared...I transferred and took a pay cut but it was the only way I could have kept working...

Hence not only does masculinity dominate organization cultures but so does a culture of “silence” in which women fear voicing their concerns feeling threatened by consequences both within the organization and outside its walls “the first thing my boss told me when I told him about what happened was ask yourself what did you do to invite him to act that way...if you didn’t allow him

to talk to you like that he wouldn't have dared". The higher up in the hierarchy the more frequently these incidents occurred because men outnumbered women; this is reversed in the lower levels where "we were all girls and it's just so much easier to deal with...we're like sisters here and it makes you feel comfortable and safe away from problems". Thus, pursuing management careers beyond a certain point on the ladder turns into a personal matter as it jeopardizes the expectations that are dictated by the women's private scripts.

As was discussed earlier, the Arab culture holds reputation and family honour sacred, especially for women; without a "good" reputation both individual and public esteem is threatened in ways that could compromise access to power and opportunities including the ability to attain a suitable marriage. What this implies for women, among other things, is a specific definition of modes of being including behaviour, dress, and interactions with men. As such the "public role" expected of a woman necessitates, much like her private role, that she be "soft spoken", "willing to sacrifice", not be seen as "aggressive" or "fighting all the time", "modest", "keeps to [her]self", maintains "her respect", and appear to be "kind", "helpful" and "likable" and behave in a way that "everyone at work said nice things" about them. Fulfilling this role secured women a place in the periphery of the majlis (the centres of power) achieved when women mirrored the arrangements that happen in the private realm where "women stick together" and the "men are left alone" and the interaction between the two is only called for by the men when the "help" of

women is needed. Thus women constructed their social identity at work by mimicking aspects of the role expectations at home categorizing themselves either into “the mom in the office” or the “supportive sister” (roles that will be discussed in more details later). Interestingly, with the exception of the few older women who had reached the top levels of their organizations, women infrequently described themselves as competent professionals or capable managers (even when they asserted their belief that they are skilled enough to be both).

Thus, Arab organizations appear to be gendered as the construction of women’s social identities emerged from role expectations from the private realm that crossed over into the public realm of organizations. This created a peculiar power dynamic whereby men had power that exceeded that which would be appropriate for their positions in the organization while women, even the more senior ones, had less. This became increasingly difficult to reconcile for women who were adamant about moving up where they expected

...to be out of the stupid games from when I first started but I was shocked...what’s a better word than shocked...it was the same situation if not worse...here I was finally a manager...a boss with a big office and my own team...and still my own staff treated me the same way my bosses had treated me when I started...they didn’t take me seriously or they tried to act like super heroes supposedly protecting me...or they just ignored my authority and went straight to my boss...and to be honest I had to fight a lot with him to not entertain them when they try to skip me and go straight to him and he always used to say it’s okay men understand each other...what do you want with men talk? I took care of things for you ...so there was no point...who do I fight with? My boss or my staff?...

Thus, for women who described themselves as “having ambition” and

strongly motivated to “reach the highest level”, as they made their choices, they experienced significant tensions between the performances they were expected to demonstrate as they tried to balance their desire to conform to the feminine roles expected of them with what they saw as the requirements of the management career in masculine organization cultures. As women described themselves, or, more frequently, other women whom they viewed to have successful management careers they often described them as “aggressive”, “tough”, “have a big mouth” (in a reference to their outspokenness), “hate women”, “mean”, “unpopular”, “stubborn”, “constantly fighting”, “and “manly” or “a sister of men” (a term used to refer to women who are considered more like men than women). These women either were, or assumed to be, failures in their personal lives incapable of “finding a husband” or successfully “keeping [one] happy” which partially fuels their “aggressive” nature and supposed jealousy of women different from them. And it is because these women fall outside the “norm” of expectations of women they are granted access to the narrow circles of power controlled by men. As one participant described “you can’t be a woman and a manager...unless you can be a man and woman at the same time you can’t do it”.

One way of dealing with these “realities” was women’s insistence on a rigid separation between who they were at work and who they were outside “there I’m not Leila...I’m an employee...who I am outside is the opposite of who I am at work...I don’t want to be seen as a woman...just as an employee”.

The focus on the “work itself” in the context of management careers was shared across clusters and in spite of the wide diversity of women’s experiences

...the only way to get ahead was to force my way into everything until they forget I’m a woman and treat me like one of them...just focus on the work...I feel that the actual work is above all this s***...yes there will always be the politics...but the work...that speaks for itself...if I was the best then it didn’t matter if I was a woman or an alien...good work meant more money for the company and trust me money is more important than any of that...I had to become the best at this and then they would respect me whether they liked it or not...

Most women acknowledged that at some point in their careers they firmly believed that their ability to be “star performer[s]” was a way to both protection “from all the problems in the office...all the talking...the lying...the fighting” as well as a guaranteed road towards “success” that will take them to the “top” level of the organization. And much like their earlier confidence in their preparedness for management careers by virtue of their university degrees, women also acknowledged being faced, at some point in their career, with the realization that the nature of the work itself was far from being a clear-cut path. For women, the requirements of the job had two sides: one in theory and another in practice. In theory, the requirements of the job at each level in the management career ladder should be easily understood and manageable within the confines of the “average” workday and the walls of the organization. If a woman fulfils the requirements of her job well then she will be rewarded in ways that will enable her to progressively move up. However, this was far from what took place in practice.

Hence, returning to their description of masculine organization cultures, women saw that because power was confined in narrow circles, work requirements and task arrangements were also determined within those circles producing configurations that were not always favourable to women. Thus women, particularly in the private sectors, described how they “had to do what [they] were asked. It didn’t matter that this wasn’t [their] job or even appropriate for [their] level the pressure to do it made it impossible not to do as told”. Women described being snubbed for taking the lead on projects and being asked to “do the real work but let *him* [a male colleague] be the face of the whole thing...because seeing him gave more credibility to the work... how am I supposed to react to that?”. Women described feeling “angry” and “frustrated” at not being able to participate in the conversations that matter because of the way

...business is treated like their own personal matters...they don’t do the professional thing...they don’t communicate properly through email or whatever...it’s in cafes and argile lounges...actually even meeting rooms feel like an ahwa*³³ sometimes...

As such long hours well beyond the official workday and the heavy social component of the job that requires extensive interaction outside of the organization makes it incredibly difficult for women who want to fulfil their private roles, after all, women had fathers, husbands, and children to answer to and “there was no way to do the job perfectly and have a life...it needed a robot

³³ Translates to “coffee place” which are typically only for men.

I swear to God”.

Thus, unlike the private script in which much of its content is predetermined by family belonging (and all that it entails) the public script was much more subtle and open to women’s decisions on how they wanted to write themselves given their organizational realities. And as they undertook those decisions women experienced a continuous sense of being “torn” and “pulled” between the competing demands of their private lives and their management careers. This feeling was particularly intensified when they experienced significant shifts in their private lives when they got married and when they became pregnant. Women expressed feeling “incapable” of navigating a new marriage with the demands of the job, due not only to the nature of the marriage itself (as discussed previously) but also to the way in which they felt the change in their marital status changed the dynamic they established at work

...suddenly people started assuming that I would quit after marriage so I wasn’t included anymore...work that I could do with my eyes closed now I was being questioned about ...I wasn’t invited anywhere anymore...it was as if I had sinned by getting married...I felt strange that’s for sure I didn’t know how to act.

More intense feelings of alienation were described by women, who experienced pregnancy while on the job

...it was so embarrassing...I tried to hide it as much as I could because I had fought hard for them to respect me as a manager I didn’t want to be seen as this pregnant lady who needed help...but the bigger my belly the more they treated me as incapable...I lost my authority as if it suddenly hit them that I was just a mom and they don’t have to listen to me anymore.

In many cases, and particularly for younger women, pregnancy was an embarrassing situation as they felt people around them

...wanted to hide me...I don't know how to describe it...it was like it wasn't my place to be there...this one lady actually we got into an argument and she just said why don't you go home where you belong? This isn't a place for a housewife...the way she said it was so disgusting...I was numb!

And as women tried to seek comfort and advice they rarely found support, as more often than not they were encouraged to “quit and stay home”. And indeed one way of dealing with the experiences described so far was either to “stay in place with the rest of the girls” (i.e.: the junior level of organizations) thereby turning down promotions (or not pursuing them at all) or, if their financial situation allows it, to simply quit- these fundamental decisions were usually undertaken by women were between the ages of 24 to 30 (who were also more likely to be highly educated).

It is important to note that the discussion thus far depicts the organizations women likened to a “jail” because of their feelings that they were trapped. These types of organizations appeared to be more widespread in all levels in the private sector in clusters 1 and 3 (though still prevalent in the public sector) while women in cluster 2 reported these to be more frequent in the junior levels of the public sector. And the less “advantaged” or “empowered” women felt by their social identity emerging from their private script the more hopeless their situation appeared. However, women also described another type of organization; the “paradise” in which their career

aspirations could come true. Descriptions of these organizations were sparse, though they appeared to feature more heavily in some countries of cluster 2 like the public sector in the UAE and Bahrain and the private sector in countries like Tunisia and Egypt. These organizations were marked by a “comfortable” and “encouraging” environment in which there was a “clear system that gave everyone rights and privileges that were protected” that created a culture in which “it didn’t matter who you were...who your father was or anything else...all that mattered was the work...if you did good work you would get ahead if you didn’t then you would stay in your place...no games only work”. In these organizations rules and systems forced “everyone to be the same” and thus, while there were still evidence of politics and informal circles of power, it was more difficult for women to be excluded from decision-making.

Most importantly work arrangements were sensitive to the space and relational arrangements at work “we sat in this big open space where everyone was with everyone but at the same time you’re not awkwardly sitting between three men like what happened in my other job”. Women described seeing it possible

...to manage work and do well and not let anything slip away from me at home...you feel there’s support you know what I mean? Like you don’t get punished if you have to leave for an hour because your kid is sick...it motivates you to do more than you’re asked...

Still, even in these more “positive” environments, women still described their acknowledgement that

...there's still a limit to how far I can go...there are still positions that you know you can't reach...even some projects...I mean it's ok because you manage your expectations...I might not become president but I can become a vice president...why not? It's still good...

Thus a significant part of women's organizational experiences was determined by the degree to which these organizations were not only gendered but also how this favoured a masculine culture. The degree to which this "gendering" mirrors the gender subtext of society in general and each woman's private script varied considerably. However, women rarely viewed their experiences in light of the totality of the organization. A fundamental factor in whether or not they viewed themselves to be in "jail" or "paradise" (even if this was only in their own division or department as opposed to the organization as a whole) was largely determined by what they saw as the single most important relationship they had at work; the relationship with their managers.

The Arab Manager: The Monster, the Witch, & the Saviour

It's interesting to note that while the Arabic language boasts of the richness evident in the multiple synonyms it has for any given word, however, the word "manager" has few synonyms all of which conjure up an authoritarian spirit (to varying degrees). In fact, most women conceived of the "boss"/manager as a "fear-inspiring" figure who had the power to control their entire experience, whether the tangible (evaluations and promotions) or intangible side of their job (behaviour and interaction with the manager and colleagues). Thus most women entered their management careers anticipating a

potentially challenging relationship with their managers whom they perceived to have considerable power though the exact extent of which is often a mystery that reveals itself with time.

As women described their experiences there emerged 3 different yet equally powerful conceptions of the Arab manager; the “monster”, the “witch”, and the “saviour”. The “monster” is typically an older man who is at the centre of power and authority within his realm (whether a division, department, or organization as a whole). This manager has control over women’s physical space (their offices and whom they share it with), the limits of their interaction with their colleagues within and outside the organization, their right to mobility whether lateral or upward, access to training and other opportunities, and even their physical appearance. This manager’s power stems from two sources: the organizationally-sanctioned power that comes with his position/title and the socially-sanctioned power that comes with his age, gender, and the “myth” surrounding his own access to power whether by virtue of education or social networks within and outside the organization (such as *wasta*) as described by himself and/or other members of the organization. Together these factors intensified the manager’s ability to exercise power that appeared progressively more tyrannical whenever a vacuum of power was present in organizations in which there was a noticeable absence of clear structures and transparent processes (that outline and enforce a specific sphere of authority that comes with each position as well as the rights and responsibilities of both managers

and subordinates). These kinds of organizations were described as fertile ground for the tyranny of the managers who took advantage of the lack of accountability, transparency, and systems of checks and balances to become the “monster who can say and do what he wants when he wants and you can’t do anything about it...if you want to stay you need to make a choice...and pray you don’t get too damaged in the process until God intervenes and you find something else”. These choices Yasmien from Egypt describes, as most women did, involve deciding how to deal with the monster, who is perceived as an unmovable gatekeeper in the women’s own effort to access power. In making this decision women often referred to the only experiences they are familiar with; their relationships with men in the private realm.

Thus emerged the two versions of the “monster” manager; the “Si’Sayyed” and “Al Waled Al Azeem”. While the origins of the phrase “Si’Sayyed” is Egyptian, it is commonly understood in the slang of most Arab countries conjuring the image of the macho husband at the centre of a household, which he rules with an iron fist, often surrounded by doting women who fear him enough to know not to defy him in any way. However, “Si’Sayyed’s” women are in no way silently resigned to their destinies, rather, they are notorious for resorting to “kaid”; a term used to describe the plotting, planning, and manipulating typically ascribed to women in a negative connotation. With “Si’Sayyed” the only way to navigate the iron fist is to use indirect sources of power the most important of which is seduction. As such

women who likened the tyranny of their managers to that of a “Si’Sayyed” resorted to many tactics including “knowing how to smile and say the right words”, acknowledging that “degrees and experience are not enough...at the end of the day he is a man...and so without knowing how to take care of yourself...how to dress...how to move...I don’t mean do anything wrong God forbid but...it’s part of the game”, and making sure that “everything you do you do it quietly...let him think it’s his idea or that he gave you permission to do something...or that you’re scared to do anything without his approval...the more he thinks he’s in control the more like he is to leave you alone”. Thus much like wives navigating difficult husbands, women resorted to informal sources of power to “manage” the relationship with their managers such that they assured them of their loyalty (by at least appearing to follow their command) and fed their sense of control by letting them believe that their every move within the organization, including success and progress, happened only when *they* permitted it and solely under their protective wing.

Alternatively, women had a different approach to dealing with the managers they described as the “Glorified Father” (“Al Waled Al Azeem” in Arabic). Much like the previous conception, women likened these managers to the powerful patriarchs of a family, who act like benevolent dictators. Thus much like an authoritarian father, these managers also expect to rule their realm (division, department or entire organization) unquestioned by their employees who are, much like children, expected to show unwavering loyalty or else face

wrath and/or “disownment” by him and the rest of the “family”. And much like daughters at home, women described that dealing with this type of manager necessitates a constant, delicate manoeuvring act rooted in ensuring that “your manager should never feel that you know more than him...or that you think he’s wrong...” and that “[you] consult with him in everything big or small even if you know the answer...” and “magnify his sense that he is misunderstood and unappreciated by people when he is being harsh with them because he wants you to believe it’s for their own good...he believes it too”. For these women the only way to remain “safe” and within the good favour of their manager (without whose blessings they can never hope to succeed) is to fulfil the role of a “good” daughter whereby they accept a one-way relationship with their manager who is given a carte blanche to “give orders” and “opinions about everything...from the way [they] dress...the way [they] behaved...the way [they] did their job even though [they might be] more qualified”. A key factor in navigating this relationship is shrinking oneself much like a child in the presence of adults “you have to wait...you don’t ask for things you wait to be given them”, “you don’t express opinions unless asked...and if he wants then you remain invisible and if he wants you can show yourself”, “you don’t ever complain or show emotions or talk about home or your life you can’t show there’s anything more important than him and the work he wants”, “...the manager leads and you follow and you will hopefully be rewarded...even if there’s no reward there’s punishment so there isn’t any option ...you will do what you need to do”.

Interestingly, while women's experiences with the "monster" managers were far from easy, they found it far less intimidating, unpredictable, and unmanageable than their experiences with the female version of the monster; the "witch". It is interesting to note that while most women who spoke of the "monster" manager had direct experience with one, women who described their conception of the scary female manager didn't always have that direct experience. Thus the "myth" surrounding the "witch" manager typically conjures the image of a middle-aged/older woman, who is a merciless tyrant specifically with other women, with much of this tyrannical behaviour attributed to an abnormality in her private life (spinsterhood, divorce, childlessness, physically unattractive). Whether this abnormality is a reality or an assumption appears to be irrelevant; women seemed confident that it is precisely these abnormalities that simultaneously explain their access to their positions and power and why they are particularly dangerous to work with; "[they are] angry at the world" and "full of complexes...jealous of anyone who has what [they] don't". The "witch" manager is unpredictable, ruthless, and fiercely dictatorial who creates and encourages a politically toxic environment in which conspiracies, gossip, and cliques are widespread. Because of this environment the "witch" manager is often perceived as "paranoid" and "mistrusting" especially of women whom she sees as potential threats to her power and position; "she never want[ed] good for others...she hated us...[the women]" and "if you showed yourself...and did a good job and people noticed...you know if a buzz is created around you being good...she would go

crazy and do everything to destroy you”. Interestingly none of the women’s experiences with the “witch” manager involved descriptions of challenges related to the work itself; “it’s not about who’s better...qualifications...or the degree or...even experience...the issue is always personal and the fighting is always personal and hidden”.

In determining how to best manage this relationship, women also resorted to their experiences in the private realm describing the tactics they employ in dealing with their manager similarly to those they employ with a “mother in law”. In popular culture in the Arab world, the “mother in law” is depicted as an angry, irrational woman determined to crush her daughter in laws (for supposedly taking her son away and potentially turning him against her). And while the mother in law can certainly be ruthless, she rarely fights the daughter in law openly in the presence of the men in the family, rather masterfully resorting to “kaid”; the daughters in law are then forced to decide to either cower or fight. Similarly women described having to make a choice about manoeuvring their manager by

...it’s better if she forgets you exist...if she allows it I mean...staying away from evil and singing to it*...[by doing] everything possible to stay away from her and doing what she says without questions and never do anything that will make her think you are trying to take the spotlight from her and pretend to like her and that you’re on her side...even if you’re not but you can’t show you are too close to others...

Alternatively, for women who decide to “fight” their way, they did so by leveraging their own political power either within the organization through

the risky act of building relationships with other sources of power in the organization, rallying support among the “other victims” (akin to a mini revolution), or resorting to their social network outside the organization capable of influencing the situation (wasta). It’s interesting to note, that while experiences with women managers were less frequent throughout the sample, the most positive experiences took place in contexts where there is more frequent gender separation socially (at home) or institutionally (all girls schools, universities, and companies). Thus, for example, more women in the UAE and Bahrain reported more positive experiences with women managers than women in Jordan and Lebanon.

Unlike the previous descriptions, the “saviour” is not confined to an age or gender; some were younger men others were older women. However, a defining feature of the “saviour” manager is a “willingness to help” a “quiet confidence that doesn’t see everyone a threat” and an “inspiring personality”/“inspiring story” that makes them willing/capable of “bring[ing] people around [them] up”. These positive “qualities” were often attributed to a uniqueness in these managers’ own lives and experiences; whether they were exceptionally highly educated, of mixed background, lived and/or worked in different settings, or overcame difficult personal and/or professional circumstances to reach their positions. Women who were “lucky to have experienced that kind of manager” saw them in one of two ways either as “protectors” or “mentors”.

The “protectors” were often described as managers who understood the ways in which particular aspects of the organization were “unhelpful”, “unfair”, and even “harmful” to women’s day-to-day jobs, their choices within the organization or outside, and even their personal lives. This sentiment was sometimes made explicit by openly acknowledging it or implicitly through behaviour that gave women a sense that they “know things weren’t right”. In trying to deal with this situation, the “protector” manager endeavoured to try and create within his or her realm of power a “safe zone” for women in which the “system in the rest of the company didn’t apply...as much as possible...” and in which managers were willing to

...break the rules for [us]...never let anyone even the CEO talk to us [negatively]... and would take the blame in times of failure and let us take all the credit when there’s success....it’s amazing because managers usually do the opposite...

This protective manager works within existing structures and systems in the organizations trying to create a shielding buffer for the women disadvantaged by them.

However, taking this further is the “mentor” manager, who is very much like the “saviour” manager in that he/she empathizes with women’s experiences in the organization and endeavours to protect them. However, he/she does so by empowering the women to do so themselves by “teaching them”, “showing them what to do and how to behave in...situations whether good or bad...”, and how to navigate their careers during pivotal moments especially when women

were making fundamental decisions about marriage, children, or education where women often described how the “mentor” manager encouraged them to “not quit when things became so difficult...even when everyone was telling me to quit...”. This isn’t to suggest that women’s experiences with the “mentor” manager were “easy”, on the contrary, women described constantly feeling “challenged in a good way” where the manager would “set high standards” and even “be tough when [the women] didn’t do their best”. However, a key characteristic of the “mentor” is the way they provide a positive, stable, and enabling environment for women to feel empowered by “developing themselves” and acquiring “everything they need” until they reach a point where they not only know how to “stand up for themselves” but also arrive at a stage where they can potentially change “the rules of the game” themselves. Unfortunately experiences with the “mentor” manager appear to be a rare occurrence for Arab women.

When, where, and how do women’s experiences with managers prove to be most profound? Younger women (aged 24-30) in their first management career experiences appeared to be more traumatized by their encounter with the “monster” manager in general, and more so with the “Si’Sayyed” conception in particular compared to the “Al Waled Al Azeem” conception. This is partially due to the fact that the tactics required to navigate the relationship with the latter as it closely mirrored the more familiar role of “daughter” at home. The expected performances when navigating a relationship with the “Si’Sayyed”

and the “Witch” were acquired with time and more comfortably navigated by women in their mid to upper levels of their careers. And the rare occurrences with the “saviour” manager appeared to happen more frequently in the early stages of women’s careers, however, anytime they occurred they had a positive impact on women’s experiences including their career decisions (even years after moving onto working with a different manager and/or organization).

The impact of the nature of women’s experiences with their managers and organizations is multi-fold. As women entered the “world of work”, even when they described themselves as “being ambitious” and “wanting to be successful” they did not have a clear picture of what *they* wanted their career journey to look like. This, coupled with the overwhelming feelings of “shock” and unpreparedness as they experience their first jobs intensifies their impression that the manager, regardless of where they fit in the above descriptions, is their only door onto the next part of their journey. Whether this door is made of iron blocking their vision entirely (as would be the case with the “monster” and “witch” manager) or made of tinted glass (as is the case with the “saviour” manager) there is much that remains ambiguous about what lies behind. Women use their experiences to try and predict this; the more negative their experiences are with their managers the more likely they are to assume that “it will get worse and harder” at every stage. Thus, from the women’s perspective, the relationship with their managers, determined how far the ladder went and how high the ceiling at every level of the organization. A key element

in their “evaluation” of that relationship in particular, and the relationship with the wider organizational culture in general, is how women saw the types of roles they were expected to perform in navigating both.

Who am I? Arab Womanhood Between Expected Performances & Intersecting Stages

“...Sometimes you’re forced to be someone you’re not but it’s not in your hands... you have to do it” Maha, 25, Syria

Whether women saw their managers as a tyrannical husband, dictatorial father, menacing witch, or heroic saviour, they saw that navigating that relationship required elaborate, often exaggerated, performances of specific roles they thought they were expected to play. These performances were needed in order for women to carve for themselves a space in which they can regain some of the control and power they are denied both within their relationships with managers and the intimidatingly ambiguous masculine organization cultures. The better their performances the “larger” the space they can carve, the less “mysterious” the career ladder appears, and in turn the higher the ceiling of their management career expectations. And as diverse as the women’s experiences were, they similarly described specific types of roles that they were expected to perform.

The most frequently described performance was that of the “loving mother/caring sister”. While the labelling of this role may have differed, women’s descriptions of both appeared to converge on a few key elements. A

key feature of the “loving mother/caring sister” role involved doing whatever it takes to ensure that “everyone liked me...from the tea boy all the way up to my boss’s boss I made sure that everyone liked me thank God”. Achieving this “popularity” took on different forms; older women who wanted to appear as loving mothers often did so by

...taking care of everyone even when I didn’t have to...I was always the first to order everyone lunch or take care of colleagues when they were sick...I would volunteer to help in anything and everything even if it was outside of work...everyone used to call me the mama of the office and really sometimes I felt like I was...

Similarly, younger women were more likely to see themselves as the “caring sister” who

...is always there for others even when things were difficult for me I still did everything to support others...my colleagues would come to me and tell me about their fights with their girlfriends or wives and I would give them advice...so eventually everyone was like a brother to me and so I always felt protected...

Interestingly, whether women were at the lower levels of their organizations or higher up the ladder, they described this role performance as one way of ensuring that they don’t appear “aggressive” or “threatening” and a safer

...quieter way of getting ahead...if my family saw how I was at work they would be shocked because I’m actually an introvert...I don’t feel comfortable socializing or even talking to people...if it was up to me I would stay in a corner all day and do my work and not have to talk to anyone but that doesn’t work because people won’t like you...so I force myself to smile all the time and say hello and I made friends with everyone...I’m like the therapist of my own staff... it drains me sometimes but I know people like me so I won’t be hurt and they will respect me...

This role performance appeared the most “natural” to women as it closely mirrored the roles they were familiar with from their private scripts. Interestingly both required relinquishing a degree of control or appearing to by trying to

...not make anyone feel I’m better than them...I wouldn’t talk much in meetings...I wouldn’t show myself in front of my colleagues...I was always worried that someone would think I’m being arrogant because of my degrees so I preferred to blend in with everyone and do what I needed to do quietly...that’s why my promotion shocked everyone I was the last person they expected...

More often than not, however, women who saw performing the role of “loving mother/caring sister” as a “good way to be known in the office” also acknowledged that while it afforded them a degree of protection and popularity it would not get them very far on the hierarchy. For the role of the “loving mother/caring sister” wielding power through popularity meant both men and women saw the “performers” of this role as non-threatening, which implies a degree of powerlessness that’s not suited for management careers higher up in the hierarchy as the participants themselves acknowledged. This stands in contrast with the performance associated with the role women described as the “seductress”.

It’s important to note that while women explicitly acknowledged playing the role of “loving mother/caring sister” few were as direct in acknowledging their performance of the role of “seductress” who was often described as someone who was comfortable “being a real woman” at work and

who, through “the way she dressed” and “acted around the men”, appeared comfortable being seen as a woman who “understood the power of being a beautiful woman”. These women were more likely to “smile all the time”, “spend lots of time socializing with the men” even “smoking with them and going out after work everywhere”. These women appeared uninterested in forming positive relationships with other women and were described as “subtly aggressive”, “hiding their real intentions” and “doing what it takes to get what they want even if it’s not right”. The “seductress” was someone who was not only comfortable with her own “femininity” but also inviting of the male attention and even using it “in the right way and the right time” to not only get ahead but also secure protection in the organization especially from other “jealous women”.

Closely related to the “seductress” is the role of “Shahrazad” in reference to the central storyteller in the famous “One Thousand and One Nights” tales. Shahrazad is a talented woman who uses a mixture of her beauty, femininity, and political prowess to “trick” the king not only into abandoning his own plans but also doing everything Shahrazad wants. The “Shahrazad” of the office was also a woman who recognized “it’s important to look a certain way that attracts attention” but equally recognizes the importance of “playing the right cards with everyone” including women. These women acknowledged that a big part of the “game” is the “plotting” and “planning” and “pretending to be friends with everyone only when she needs something”. While this role does

not involve appearing openly aggressive it does involve a degree of manipulation that makes the “performers” appear less trustworthy among other women. The seductress and Shahrazad both share a strong, openly acknowledged “big ambition at any cost”.

Away from the “traditionally” feminine roles of the above discussion stood the woman described as the “mostarjela”; the Arabic word for Tomboy. The Tomboy is described as a tough woman whose strength makes her appear to be “ikht rjal” a phrase that literally translates to “sister of men” in a reference to women whose demeanour (and occasionally appearance) seem masculine. This masculinity appears in different ways as women described someone who is “not shy at all” and “was tough...very tough...tough personality and spoke aggressively I swear to God you would think she’s always mad” and who wasn’t “afraid to have a fight to get what I want”. This woman was someone who “was loud” and “made sure everyone hears me when I speak...” and “I don’t let anyone think for even a minute that I’m going to tolerate their s**t like a daloo’a*³⁴ women...no way I work with a different system...they will take me seriously there’s no choice...I don’t care who it is but I won’t play games”. This is a woman who is more likely to be “just like men” in that she “is always out with them...in the fire exit smoking with them” or “the first one waiting at the shisha lounge...actually she makes the plans with the guys” and is comfortable “travelling alone with them” and “spending the whole night at the

³⁴ Overly “girly” childlike woman.

office...the only woman there...but still it's so normal". More often than not, women described the Tomboy's physical appearance in significant detail referring to her "never wearing makeup", having "short hair" or "pulled back always" and dressing "a pantsuit and button-down shirts" in such a way that signals a deliberate effort "to make them forget I'm a woman...just concentrate on work". And while descriptions of the previous roles ("seductress" and "Shahrazad") were often described with an air of mistrust and dislike by other women, the Tomboy was viewed with a mixture of fear and admiration; fear of being like her (or being seen by others to be "manly") while admiring her ability to "get what she wants" and make sure "no one can cross [her] lines". Both women who described themselves as performing this specific role or described others often associated this role as enabling "becoming the top manager"/ "the big boss".

As different as the above roles appear they share several key aspects. To begin with, as women described these roles they characterized it as a taxing, exhausting, and sometimes painful process associated with having to "fake", "pretend", and "put on a show" displaying overly exaggerated interpretations of a role that didn't always correspond with who they were in their private lives

...at work I'm a totally different personality...I'm always chatting and being friendly with everyone...I even go out with some people in the office not because I like to but because I feel I have to...I swear...I think it takes so much energy from me to be that way at work that when I leave I feel crushed...so tired...but I feel I have to act that way at work ...you know to have a good reputation...if my colleagues like me and my boss likes me then everything else would

be easy... there won't be problems with anyone...

The more different the performance was from their "true personality"
the more alienation women experienced

...sometimes I don't know myself...I'm not comfortable with who I am in the office...everyone thinks I'm just this serious difficult woman...just direct...no jokes nothing...that I fight a lot...but that's not who I am...it's one side of me yes but I don't have a choice...if I show the other sides it will affect the work...

This role-playing continues in the private sphere

...now I go home and it's the same issue but a different way....my friend says I deserve an Oscar for the show I do at home...I plan parties with my husband and go crazy with my kids...I can only be comfortable when I'm completely alone and no one expects anything from me.

This intensifies feelings of alienation "I can't be too close to people at work and I can't talk to anyone at home about my problems in the office...and I can't tell anyone that I'm going crazy with the kids...my husband is a whole other issue...". And a fundamental priority for all participants was to ensure a rigid separation between their public and private scripts

...if you want to be successful you have to make sure that you don't bring anything from home with you to the office...I had worked in my last company for 7 years before anyone...my own staff...colleagues...my boss realized that I had 3 kids and was married...

It's interesting to note that while women described being conscious of how they "decided to show that face at work" and that they did not always perform only one role at a time "from the beginning I decided for myself that this is how I'm going to be at work with my manager in one way and how I was

going to be with my colleagues was a different way”. Women described how they often switched between roles depending on the situation (both at home and at work), the organization culture, the particular individuals surrounding them at any given moment (in terms of gender, age, education), and their own goals at any particular moment in their careers. How do women choose these roles? And more importantly, why?

CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETING ARAB WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF MANAGEMENT CAREERS

"I ask myself sometimes why am I driving myself crazy like this? Then I remind myself...I do it because it gives me power and then I'm willing to sacrifice anything for it" Rana I, 27, Lebanon

Organizations are the sites in which the public scripts for each woman is produced. The nature of this script, as the previous discussion illustrated, depended on the complex interplay of several interrelated elements that together created the unique fabric of each organization and how women saw the organization as a whole. And, much like the private script, women understood that the public script places before them specific role expectations at every level in the organizational ladder. The performance of the role expectations contributed to the creation of women's social identities at work that included how they viewed themselves, how they perceived others to see them, and the interaction of both projections. However, the public and private scripts are not separate as they intersect with one another in complex ways.

The most fundamental point of intersection between the two scripts was the way in which "womanhood" and the roles ascribed to it were a central priority. With much of the private script, (and by extension the associated role expectations) predetermined, women came to organizations with the concern for positioning their management careers in ways that accommodate (or at least do not inhibit) their ability to fulfil the expectations of the private script. And

indeed, organization systems and structures mirrored, at least implicitly, the same gendered expectations women faced in the private sphere with significant impact (noteworthy here is the work of Tlaiss (2014) who in exploring the careers of Lebanese women illustrated the impact of “hegemonic masculinity” on women’s career experiences and the extent to which “gendered working conditions [steer] women to rely heavily on individual agency to survive hegemonic masculinity” (p. 525) . However, as earlier discussions explored, the nature of those expectations related to “womanhood” were far from uniform as they varied depending on the specific combination of attributes and circumstances of each woman. Thus, while they may have shared the same concerns about their accountability for their role performance as *women*, the nature of each performance varied. This variation in turn influenced how they saw their own ability to perform the roles that came with the added layer of management career *professional* to their social identity.

As women made their decisions they saw two ladders; the social ladder and the management career ladder. And while progression in one ladder was capable of dynamically influencing progression in the other it was essential that progress in the career ladder did not hinder the positioning on the social ladder. Ensuring this balance requires that the intersection of the public and private scripts do not create significant tensions between expected performances in each. Women’s perception of their ability to weather the tensions between performances was the most important factor in their management career

decisions. At the heart of this perception is women's assessment of their ability to "pay the price" of resolving those tensions that seems to rise with every step on the career ladder and with each layer added to their private script (such as marriage and children which significantly increase performance tension). How women viewed the severity of the price of resolving tensions as well as their ability to do so emanated from their conception of their own "empowerment".

Participants referred to power both implicitly and explicitly in their descriptions often referring to it as the ability to both have and make choices in ways that enable them to have a degree of control over outcomes in their personal and professional lives. Descriptions of this "ability" varied as women saw power as a pre-emptive tool that

...gave me a halo...people knew who I was and where I came from...even my boss...she hated me but knew what I was capable of...so I was free from headaches and just able to do my job without having to worry about the usual nonsense at work...

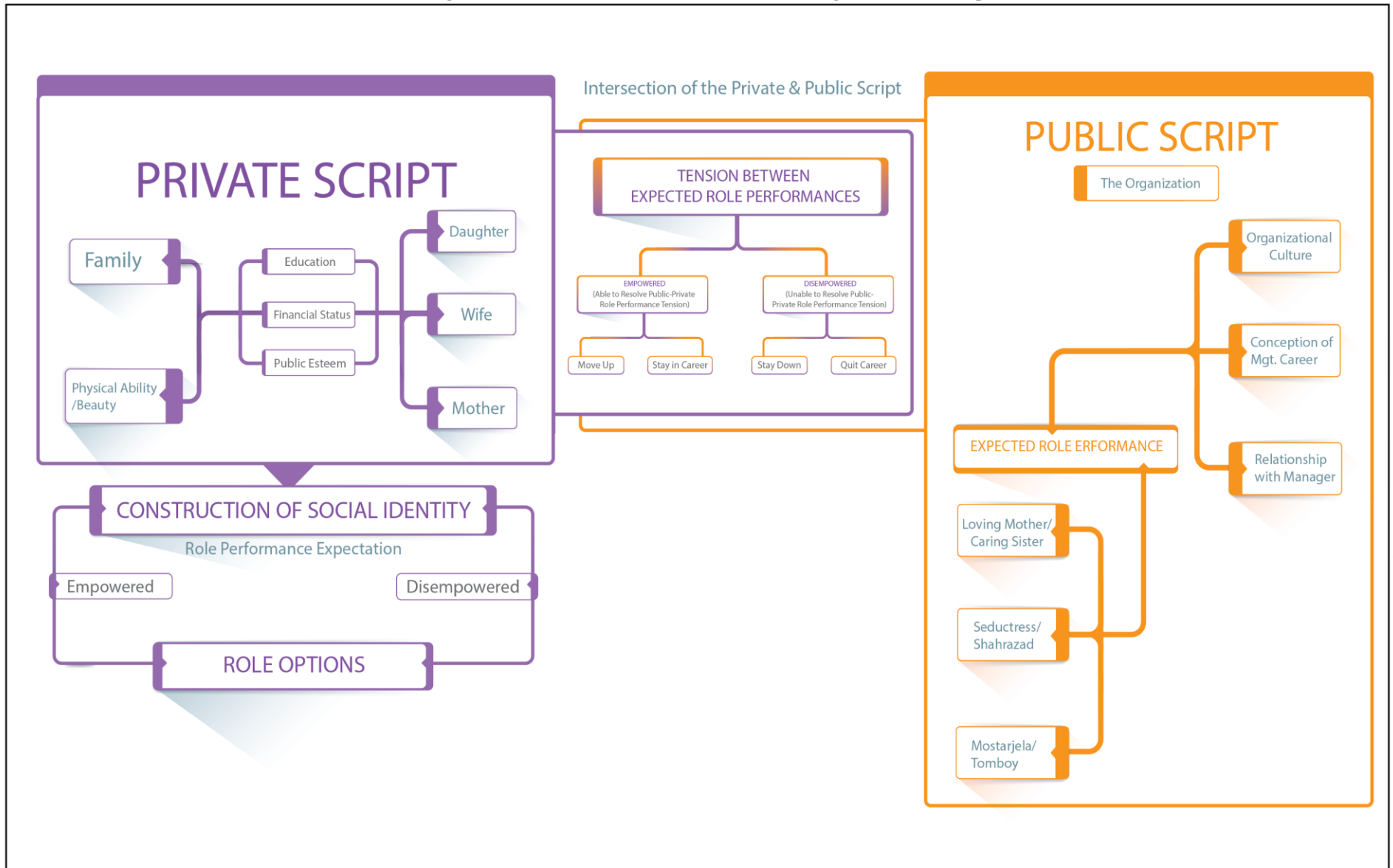
Women also saw this ability "it's like an assurance...I knew I was protected...even if I didn't use it but it's different knowing that no one can be unfair to me and get away with it like with others". Power was also a retaliatory tool for women who saw it as a way

...to take my rights...when it happened I knew that no one would do anything about it so I made the phone call and it was solved in a day and after it no one dared to pull anything like that again...even though based on my hard work I shouldn't have been in that position but unfortunately this is how things work and thank God I have support to depend on...

Thus for women, this sense of control over outcome and protection from

“danger” came from the combination of factors in both their private scripts (family, wealth, education, public esteem and social networks) and the public scripts (their positions and relationships with managers and colleagues) and how they could leverage specific combinations of both in ways that enabled them to create the kind of power that would help them achieve their goals in either script (whatever that may be). For example, a highly educated woman from a prominent family felt empowered at work in the same way that a senior manager divorcee felt empowered at home *because* of her position. Hence the Power Framework of Arab Women’s Management Careers emerges as illustrated below.

Figure 6 Power Framework of Arab Women Management Career Experience



The first layer in the above figure is the Private Script. We now return to the earlier analogy of players in a card game; prior to entering their management careers women assessed their preparedness equipped with a set of cards from their private script that partially determines for them their initial expectations about the nature and duration of their time in organizations. Hence, the kind of family to which a woman belonged, along with her conception of her physical appearance or ability, determined the parameters of the potential positioning of a management career in her life via the extent to which education was valued as part of a core self-conception, the kind of education she is able to acquire, the financial support that determines her range of options (to work or not and for what purpose), and the degree of power that emerges from a public esteem by virtue of a specific positioning on the social ladder. Taken together these specify the parameters of the specific role-performance expectations of the private sphere as daughters, wives, and mothers and women's accountability of fulfilling their roles (particularly with the concern for appearing to conform to specific gender roles as well as accountability for the family's public esteem). Based on these specific combinations, women have specific expectations and concerns about their management careers and the consequences of specific choices even prior to entering organizations.

At the level of the public script in the figure above, once women enter organizations they reassess their preparedness by looking to see whether the

cards they possess can help them navigate the parameters of their job positions in a way that enables them to achieve their management career goals.

Specifically, women looked to see whether their cards from the private script enabled them to accumulate “more” cards in the public script by enabling them to either freely select the role performance within the organization that more closely aligns with their values and private role expectations or to reject the imposition of any roles that may contradict with those. When these cards allow neither of these possibilities, women are forced to accept the fulfilment of the organizationally imposed role performances; the more these performances contradicted with the private role performance expectations, the more significant the role tensions experienced by women and the higher the price of resolving them appeared. Hence, in a sense the performance of the expected role performances in organizations can be conceived of us as strategies/tactics for navigating certain circumstances with a view to acquiring particular outcomes.

At the intersection of the public and private scripts is a concern for resolving tensions. This often required that women adjust their initial expectations of their management careers, which, more often than not, meant choosing to stay in the more comfortable lower levels of organizations (where the tensions are less or the price of reducing any tension is smaller) or, when this is not possible (or needed), simply leave. *Extreme points of tension* are those in which women could *only* fulfil the expectations of either the private *or*

public arenas but not both, and in this case, women, more often than not, chose the former.

Among the participants, two groups seemed to “suffer” from the most severe role-tensions; women aged 24-30 and women aged 30-35, which is unsurprising. When it comes to the first group, women saw the “requirements” of a management career (particularly in terms of behaviour and fulfilling the aforementioned roles) as difficult to reconcile with the role-requirements that would make them “suitable” for marriage or for navigating a marriage in its early stages. And while this concern was also present for the latter group, it was not as intense, as the “bigger” concern for navigating those same organizational role-requirements was with having and raising children (especially pregnancy on the job and becoming first-time mothers) and still being able to “be a powerful manager”. And while these groups were also some of the most qualified in terms of education and explicit about their “ambitions” they were also more likely to “decide it was too much to handle” and turn down opportunities for progression or quit. And in that way, organizations are the battlegrounds for the multiple power struggles experienced in the many areas of women’s lives.

How often did women experience power struggles, assess their positions along lines of power, and take management career decisions? On a daily basis, even several times daily, women experienced “episodes” of empowerment and disempowerment in their interactions not only as they tried to fulfil the

expected role performances in the private or public realms but also as they tried to acquire more “cards” that would enhance their ability to *create* the kind of power they needed to etch closer to their own expectations of their management careers. And because of this (as was alluded to earlier), oftentimes, women did not view their careers as a clearly mapped ladder, rather seeing only one step at a time with the next step covered in fog that only gradually clears with the outcome of every power episode and every card accumulated or taken away in the private or public scripts. Much like a maze, sometimes the next step leads up, other times it remains on the same level, and at other times it is a downward step. Hence, a dynamic relationship exists between the outcomes of power episodes in the private and public realms; sometimes enforcing one another and at other times contradicting it, in ways that were either encouraging or discouraging of women’s outlooks of their management careers. Whether they were belittled by a colleague or a spouse, bullied by a manager or a parent, harassed by either, placed in threatening or uncomfortable situations, or were encouraged by a manager, supported by a colleague or spouse, or validated by the organization or the home, a majority of women’s descriptions of critical incidents often related specific power episodes that ultimately influenced women’s conception of their empowerment or disempowerment and changing them for the better or worse. It’s important to note that it is in fact this “empowerment” that the women seek that often accounts for why women wanted to pursue careers in general and management careers in particular.

A Note on Culture & Religion

Where do “culture” and “religion”, as often described in the literature, fit into this discussion? It’s important to acknowledge that, given the previous discussion of Urf and how the cultural fabric of Arab countries is influenced by both pre-Islamic tradition and post-Islamic practices, placing “culture” or “religion” in separate boxes within the participants’ individual experiences (and away from other parts of their identity) is far from an easy task. Both these elements permeate the various parts of both the private and public scripts of women in multiple, nuanced ways that are often expressed in ways unique in each individual’s experience. However, depending on their own conception of the role of culture and religion in their scripts, women conceived of their role-performance tensions and the price of resolving those differently. To illustrate this consider the example of Suha, 32, from Iraq who describes herself as being “open minded” having grown up with considerable freedoms in a religiously non-conservative family who finds herself working first in a Iraqi and then an Emirati company in which she acknowledges that “I am different from everyone always” and because of this difference feels that “all eyes are on me and things that I may say or do are interpreted differently in really unexpected ways” and as such decides that she will “wear the hijab at work and take it off in the car made things so much easier...I fit in better and I didn’t have to spend so much time being careful about how I behave or making sure people know the real me” such that she ensures that her private identity is not interpreted in

ways that could be used to exclude her from circles of power at work.

Similarly consider the example of Shamma 39, from the UAE, whose first experience in a multinational private sector organization made it clear for her that “I had to use pretty loud signals about where my red lines were” and hence chose to wear the traditional Abaya and hijab to signal a certain conservatism to her managers and colleagues though she wears neither in her private life and does not wear the hijab in her current public sector organization where majority of her colleagues are Emirati. Thus, we see a “similar” tool being used to project two very different messages and for different reasons. At the heart of both cases was the fear of exclusion, and consequently, disempowerment as a result of the assumptions made about how the “outside world” will perceive these women and dictate certain role performance expectations accordingly (it’s interesting to note the work of Afiouni (2014) who also pointed to the lack of discourse’s acknowledgement of the interplay between institutional context and women’s career experiences). .

Additionally, expressions of religion in language are also noteworthy. The more religious a woman was, and/or the more conservative her culture, the more likely she was to view the totality of her experience with a degree of acceptance of “predestination”. Expressions like “God’s will”, “God’s given share”, “only God knows what will happen”, and “Thank God for everything it’s wrong to object to His will”, “I leave it to God’s hands”, and “maybe God didn’t want this for me” suggest a particular conception over the degree of

control a woman has over situations and/or outcomes as they relate to her ability to navigate her management career and position it within the roles expected in the private sphere. However, the nuances in how culture and religion feature in women's lives and consequently decisions are too numerous to be placed into a single box. What's certain is that they are imbedded in ways such that women experienced an added layer of struggle as they conceived of their own empowerment and their ability to take "radical" action to pursue their goals.

Empowerment & Resolving Tensions

"Have you heard the saying I suffered, I learned, I changed? It's my favourite because it's as if it came from my experience...when I compare how I started with where I am now I'm surprised at how things turned out for my career"

Neda B, 30, Oman

The intersection points and intensity of role-performance tensions experienced by each woman largely depended on a variety of factors including the multiple elements that constituted both her private script and public scripts. As was discussed earlier, across countries women, both implicitly and explicitly, acknowledged the prioritization of the private role-performance expectations over the public one particularly when it came to their personal lives. Thus, for example, younger women who are yet to be married made their decisions with an eye for its impact on their marriageability, while women who were already married but childless made their decisions factoring in their

decisions to have children, and then depending on their children's ages women saw their ability to make choices radically different. The intersection of multiple layers of identity were as numerous and unique as the women themselves. However, what is certainly common is that the stories of Arab women's experiences of management careers revolved around power, experienced in daily episodes, the accumulation of which created an overall impression of their empowerment within the parameters of a public and private script that intersected in multiple ways. At each point, women constantly engaged in a "dynamic, emergent, and on-going process of becoming" as they sought to not only navigate power episodes but also increase their access to power in ways that enabled them to position their management careers within the context of the multiple role expectations that they faced whether in the public or private spheres by choosing their "next move" at every role intersection (Charmes & Wieringa 2003 in Syed 2010, p. 29).

It then follows that Arab women are not passive spectators, rather, they are acutely aware of the "game" with all it entails of rules of behaviour, the "agenda", and the meaning of both formal and informal behaviour that together influence the decisions women make as they pursue management careers (Clegg 1989). The question thus becomes which parts of the decision-making process in this "game" can be influenced such that women feel like they are able to play a better game and for a longer period of time.

The answer to this question lies in women's descriptions of incidents, people, systems, and structures that reduced their role tensions and inspired/fuelled an ambition to pursue management career progression. We begin at the level of individuals, where women described feeling unprepared in spite of their education and intimidated even without prior experience that may warrant this "fear". And while family support in the form of encouragement, often by an authority figure that provides mentorship or a role model whose example is then used as a point of reference, is valuable, its impact on enabling women to push through the difficulties of navigating their early experiences appears less powerful than the impact of organizational support in the form of formal and informal "learning" opportunities. Thus, women described the strong impact of incidents in which a manager (especially), colleague, or even HR department

...took the time to teach me everything I don't mean the basics I could find in the contract but really the important things about how everything really works...what are the things to do and what to avoid...the right and wrong way to deal with things because you know what's on paper doesn't always match what happens and you don't want to be the one who learns it the hard way!...basically someone who held my hand when I didn't know anything and pushed me to stay when I was ready to give up...

Particularly early in their careers (aged 24 to 30) women more often explicitly acknowledged the impact of having a mentor, especially a woman

...who has been through it and can tell you realistically...not give you lectures about how things should be but we all know isn't possible like in school am I right?...someone who can really open your eyes honestly so that you know what to expect and make a decision with my eyes open...you don't want to be shocked later...

These were especially meaningful when women found themselves at crossroads whenever a change in their scripts (public or private as when they got married, had children, or were offered/took promotions) placed them before new role expectations and tensions

...if my manager accepted my resignation that day I don't know how I would be today...it was my first baby and I wasn't sure if I could keep up this daily routine of crying in the bathroom and pretending I'm fine in a meeting then go home and also cry in the bathroom and walk out like there's nothing...if he hadn't told me that this was normal and that it would pass and I would miss my job I would have been miserable right now...my career would not have recovered I would have had to start over...imagine!

As women progressed in their careers they didn't seek mentors as much as they sought support systems that appeared increasingly small the higher up the hierarchy they went

I can't believe I'm telling you this but believe me Shireen to this day every time I'm in a meeting I suddenly have this moment where I realize there's no one in this room who would understand what I'm going through...who would understand you know...the small things you go through everyday and then the big decisions...I really had to work hard to find a small group from outside the company of women like me and now I can't live without their advice and companionship really...

Away from the "informal learning" provided by mentors and/or support networks most women saw that training, both within and outside the organization, was an essential requirement for management career progression. Organizations and/or managers that enabled women access to training opportunities were more likely to be viewed positively by participants who saw it as an indication that "I'm not just a dispensable worker...I'm an investment

the company is willing to make and because of that I'm willing to give it what I can" as well as a tool for

...making sure that I am working on myself to get better and better so that I never find myself in a situation where they think I can't find jobs anywhere else...no no way not me...I will spend out of my own pocket and my leave days to go to trainings...walla you should come to my office and see my walls and my desk are full of certificates and it's a reminder to me to do more and to others that I am more qualified than all of them...

And in spite of most participants' acknowledgement that training is an important tool for their personal and professional growth they also described how gaining access to these is often another "battle" frequently feeling a deliberate exclusion as a way of "keeping you weak...of course I mean it's the best excuse for why they didn't give you the promotion and instead gave it to some newcomer [man]". It's interesting to note that women had a very clear idea of the kind of training they found was most valuable. While they found training on specific job-related technical skills important they felt strongly about training that deals with the "soft" side of navigating management careers including things like "negotiation", "leadership", conflict resolution and "how to deal with problems with people in the office", "how to behave in meetings or gatherings especially with different people", and how to "be a manager but in reality...how do you really deal with people? How do you reward the good staff member? How do you handle the crazy ones? How do you separate the personal from professional?".

Training or workshops on things that may be taken for granted such as

...really how do you talk to people especially emails I mean...I feel there's a whole world I had missed in university...when I went back this one professor I'm close to...I told her instead of teaching me motivation theories why didn't you ever cover what do you do when someone keeps interrupting you? How do you act on those stupid dinners people want you to go to...like what do you even wear to that so you aren't sending the wrong message...I swear to God this whole networking thing also I'm at a zero in that area...so many things were more useful than all the things exams were on that were torture to study for!

At the institutional level, women's experiences varied as they described "positive" systems and practices that reduced their role tensions and "changed my mind about my future in the company". However, these descriptions revolved around several key elements. Organizational clarity in terms of task, role, and evaluation/progression is an important indicator for women about the "possibility of really achieving my target" as it helps ease some of the anxiety women experience given their awareness of the way in which information is shared and controlled within informal circles of power as previously described. Knowing "what is mine and what I owe"³⁵ appears to be a powerful tool for women to be able to clearly establish the boundaries of their interactions as well as leverage these boundaries in a way that provides them with more freedom to carve for themselves the parameters of the role performance they want to exhibit as well as "protest" when they are "forced" to play a different role from what they choose. More importantly this clarity provides women with a better view of what their progression in their management careers can and should look like given that it significantly reduces the informal power of their interaction

³⁵ Arabic proverb indicating clarity of one's rights and responsibilities.

with certain manager “types” as was discussed in earlier sections. It also provides the kind of information that enables women to anticipate the adjustments needed to be made in order to accommodate any changes in their public-private life intersection.

Organizational protection was also a key factor in women feeling “the kind of security that makes you able to do your best everyday”. Women described the difference in their desire to pursue management careers when they felt they were in an environment in which they felt that they didn’t have to be “bullied” into “becoming someone [they] were not” by managers or colleagues partially by ensuring clarity in systems and partially by ensuring a healthy organizational culture in which there was no tolerance for

...conspiracies...gossip...playing dirty under the table...and people openly taking credit for work done by others or even taking a spot that should be given to someone deserving because of things that have nothing to do with the job...

Most significantly, women felt “safe” in organizations in which women are protected from vulnerable situations/incidents (especially those of a sexual nature) and in which they could safely report it without having to involve any family members

...if my husband found out I swear he would have made me quit that day and then would have gone there and probably ended up in jail fighting with everyone...thank God I was able to take care of it within the confines of the small HR office...no one saw and no one heard outside it...

Feelings of protection were also related to feelings of comfort with the environment that varied from particular space arrangements (whether those that

were open in a way that made sure “nothing was hidden” to those that are segregated “so we can feel comfortable together without the guys in the middle”) to modes of dress (from those who welcomed a dress code “the Abaya helps makes things much easier” to those who rejected “being told to wear certain things...what does it have to do with the job? God knows”), to specific ways of informal interaction on the job through conscious team-building exercises.

Where does the macro environment fit into these experiences? While separating the personal, social, cultural, political, and legal from the everyday experiences is no easy task it’s interesting to note that many participants alluded to the way they felt empowered by political and legal practices that “shows people we are strong”. Thus, Emirati participants acknowledged that

...having so many young [women] ministers definitely inspires you...if such young women...I mean younger than me even can handle entire ministries then it’s embarrassing for me to not want to become the leader in my own company because of some of the problems...even the hard ones it’s no excuse...

They also spoke of their feelings of security knowing that there is a Ministry of Labour (or similar) that allows them to file complaints and even prosecute employers who violate their rights (though the fear of the impact of this on family reputation is sometimes prohibitive as participants described knowing that it would still deter “others” from causing them “harm”).

Similarly, Tunisian participants asserted that “in Tunisia we aren’t like everybody else...we stopped our men and showed them the limits...we aren’t

easy” referencing the legislation banning polygamy even humorously to imply an “inner power” that not only made them “different” but also permeated into their interactions on the job. By this same token, the organizational “oppression” women felt in Lebanon was no different than what Omani women felt in organizations in which

...you either eat or are eaten...or you just take yourself back home because without basically killing yourself for your manager nothing is going to happen in your career...not even after 20 years of perfect performance...

The discussion thus far describes some features of women’s “positive” experiences. And as diverse as these may be, they share a key component; whether at the individual, organizational, or institutional level, by allowing women access to power, these “features” were viewed as tools that compensated, to various degrees, some of the disadvantages they felt given exclusion from power circles within their organizations as well as the role tensions this disadvantage created in the private script. The more women felt empowered in some of these areas (or provided opportunities for empowerment) the less they perceived the intensity of the role-performance tensions and/or the more they felt capable of paying the price of resolving them

...it looks like something small but it wasn’t to me it was more than a certificate it was proof to my family that I was good at what I do and it made me feel like now my sacrifices are leading somewhere that’s good not just for me but for all of us as a family and that made me more confident in my team because I felt like I am on the right track to achieving bigger things than I had thought...

How can this emboldened spirit become a core part of Arab women's management career experiences? In answering this we now return to the research questions at the core of this thesis.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION & CONTRIBUTIONS

From Empowerment to Action

“I don’t know what your research is going to tell you but I will tell you from my experience things are going to change just from watching the younger ones on the job” Rafi, 39, Tunisia

What are the key themes shaping Arab women’s management careers?

The research questions sought to determine the key themes shaping Arab women’s management careers. These are contextualized in terms of a private script and a public script; within each script is a set of elements that largely determine the shape of women’s management careers.

Hence, we saw how the private script is composed of the interaction of two key elements: family and physical ability/beauty. The significance of the role of family is unsurprising given past exploration of this in literature on the region (Alajmi, 2001; McElwee & Al-Riyami 2003; Omair 2008; Abdalla 2015). However, whereas previous research looked at the role of family as a homogenous, dictator-like, presence in women’s lives, the stories presented in this thesis illuminated the nuanced ways in which families impact women’s experiences and ultimately decisions. Thus, the type of family to which a woman belonged dictated the kind of education she received as well as a particular attitude towards education, provided her with a particular financial status (that may encourage a career for financial reasons or self-fulfilment or

discourage one altogether), and enabled a particular public social positioning via a certain social network and the access to power that comes with that (such as *wasta* among many others). The kind of family to which a woman belongs is a “given”, over which she has no control and as such gives women their initial position in their decision-making arena (whether in their private lives or professional ones).

Similarly, this thesis contributed an understanding of the ways in which woman’s physical ability, including illness and/or known physical or mental challenges, were powerful determinants of a woman’s initial “standing” relative to the range of choices she can make. Hence, rather than being implied or assumed, this thesis facilitated an understanding of how these two elements enabled women access to opportunities to fulfil their primary roles as daughters, wives and mothers and the parameters of the corresponding role expectations for each- it is from here that women built their social identities. Thus, gender was indeed a performance and a “dynamic act of doing” with Arab women acutely aware of their accountability for their performances (recalling the discussion of honour and public esteem earlier) (West and Zimmerman 1987). And for every role, there were many possible versions of each expected performance women were supposed to exhibit in the private realm and as such role performance expectations were incredibly nuanced even among women in the same country. Taken together these components produced for each woman a unique private script that put them in a place of

empowerment or disempowerment as they entered organizations.

Empowerment in this context is the ability to freely choose the roles they want to perform as opposed to being dictated these in the private script (Clegg 1989).

The public script is then the foundation upon which an important theme of Arab women's management careers takes shape that is also at the core of how women perceived their organizations.

How do Arab women perceive their experiences in organizations as they pursue management careers?

This thesis contributed an understanding of Arab women prior to entering organizations, their initial experiences and the ways in which these shaped their decision-making. Thus, we saw how Arab women entered organizations similarly to players entering a game of cards in which they first assess the "hand" they are dealt in order to determine their possible *expected* moves in a game. Women therefore have particular assumptions and expectations about what their private script enables for them in terms of their management careers; this is the first point of intersection between the private and public scripts (that are produced in organizations). As women begin to "play" they become aware of the key components of the game and the other players as they experience particular organizational cultures, understood the organization's conception of the job itself, and determined the nature of the relationship possible with their managers (whom they saw in multiple ways and various conceptions). Taken together, women once again found themselves

standing before particular role performance expectations many of which mirrored their private experiences; as such this thesis contributed a view of how Arab organizations appear heavily gendered mirroring much of the social arrangements of power in the private arena (Acker 1990).

Hence, we now have a picture of Arab organizations themselves as experienced by women at various stages of their management career decision-making. Thus, a picture emerges of an organizational setting that is ambiguous at best or toxic at worst where power is acquired and exercised in increasingly narrowing circles that are, by virtue of specific role performance expectations, prohibitive for women. Women perceived their organizations as battlegrounds for multiple power struggles experienced in daily episodes (for the acquisition of power and the consequent ability to make choices) the most important of which was in their relationship with their managers which they perceived to be the most significant influence on their management career experiences and subsequent decisions. Thus, women told of specific conceptions of their managers; whether they saw them as tyrannical monsters, benevolent dictators, heroic protectors or wise mentors. For each conception of this relationship women saw specific choices for their role performance expectations with each affording them a degree of power that corresponds to a specific 'destination' in their management careers and their organizational ladders.

What are the influential elements affecting Arab women's perception of upward mobility in their management careers? What are the key elements that cause Arab women to drop out of their careers and those that encourage them to stay?

The thesis contributes a view for how each role conception appears to be accompanied by specific consequences for women's management careers; in particular, how high the ceiling was at each level in the organization and how long the ladder stretches towards the upper levels of the organization thereby contributing a nuanced view of women's perceptions of careers and the shape of progress along its ladders. Hence, we saw how performing the expected role enabled women to acquire more "cards" as they gained access to particular power arenas that would otherwise remain closed to them. As women make the decision to pursue their goal for this game (in whatever way they defined "winning" in it) they look to see how these role expectations intersected with the role expectations of their private scripts. These intersections then created tensions between expected role performances; the price of resolving this tension varied, as did the ability to pay the price whatever it may be. Whenever women's cards (be they from the private realm or the public) enabled them to resolve these tensions, women felt empowered in their ability to remain in their management careers and/or move up, and whenever this resolving of tensions appeared to necessitate a high price (particularly if this price affected private script role expectations) women found it easier to stay in the more comfortable

lower levels of organizations or leave altogether. This view of the “backstage” components’ interaction with the “main stage” (that alters depending on the context) of women’s management career decisions is a unique contribution of this thesis.

Descriptions of decisions to pursue upward mobility or leave altogether is rooted in the question of “clarity” and “structures” as women acknowledged having, more often than not, directly or indirectly experienced working in an environment they described as chaotic and lacking in clarity. This begins with the job descriptions themselves; while women may have signed employment contracts, rarely have they seen or been explained in sufficient detail the requirements of their job including the positioning of their roles within the organizational hierarchy and in relation to other roles and departments. As such they are unsure of the appropriate levels of access to power that both theirs and others’ roles entail. And in these situations, women looked for clues in the ways others interacted with them, which given previous discussion, often meant both deliberate and subtle exclusion which women often internalized. As they tried to navigate this ambiguity women found themselves forced to make a variety of assumptions that were not always positive/encouraging particularly about their futures.

Thus, women were not only unsure about the parameters of their current roles they were also unsure about the trajectory of those roles, and for the reasons previously described particularly the manager-employee relationship,

women were unable to see the next step in their management careers and the requirements of moving further along the hierarchy should they wish to do so. Hence, at every position, women saw the ceilings of their role considerably low, while the career ladder appeared unreasonably long (and not necessarily straight) making their management career journey (considering the previous discussion of the private-public intersection and the price of resolving tensions) appear costlier and more painful than it may be in reality. This impression is then reinforced whenever an organization appears to lack clear systems of evaluations, opportunities for personal and professional development, outlets for raising concerns or proposing changes, and objective mechanisms for resolving grievances and conflicts that gives rise to an environment in which women feel vulnerable to the whims of individuals particularly managers. So severe is this that women will remain in the lower levels of organizations but with a “good” manager and colleagues and forego opportunities in other organizations or higher positions for fear of the risk that comes with the unknown.

In terms of elements that encourage women to stay in their careers and pursue upward mobility women’s descriptions of extremely positive organizational environments were often built on impressions that emerged from seemingly “small” things. Whether it was a manager who involved an entire team in decision-making regardless of rank, or an organization that rewarded innovative proposals, or one that did not impose particularly uncomfortable

space arrangements (such as in close proximity to men) or attire restrictions, or one in which everyone was addressed by first name regardless of position, or one in which work was organized in projects that not only encouraged collaboration but also meant information was freely and openly shared, examples of empowering practices abounded. Additionally, common description of a positive organization is one in which women found themselves being mentored both formally and informally. Women were often willing to endure less than ideal conditions (including lower salaries and positions) to remain in close proximity to a mentor who has demonstrated a commitment to helping them develop personally and professionally. This is unsurprising given that research on the region has often highlighted mentors as a career facilitator for women, however, a big part of the power of mentorship is in giving women the tools they need to gain access to power in organizations including that which comes with increased information and sharpened skills.

But before we try to put together a “silver bullet” for empowering organizations in the Arab world it’s important to note that the same (or similar) “positive” experience described by a woman in one country can be seen negatively in another. As such there is an incredible opportunity for Arab organizations to not only look internally and ask their employees, both men and women, about their experiences but also to speak to one another across cities and countries to try and learn from one another and build a solid, contextualized foundation for organizational learning in the Arab world. At the heart of this

should be an appreciation of the nuanced ways women make their management career decisions based on the multiple layers of identity.

How does the overlapping of multiple layers of identity at particular points qualitatively change their management career experiences?

Exploring the experiences of Arab women in management careers in a way that sees their identities as multi-layered and multidimensional is a rare occurrence. Through the methodology and research design this thesis enabled a nuanced approach to Arab women who have often been viewed as a homogenous, static category of being. By understanding of the ways in which Arab women's identities intersect with one another producing two scripts; one private and the other public we begin to see how their experiences are better understood as a dynamic act of doing. The contextualization of women's experiences within a public-private sphere divide and a corresponding public and private scripts that intersect in nuanced ways is a unique contribution of this thesis.

Thus, and perhaps for the first time in the context of women's management careers particularly in the region, we now see a more nuanced view of women's experiences in general and how previously-seen as one-dimensional categories (such as family or work-life conflict) are in fact multi-dimensional elements whose impact on each woman's management career stems from the way in which these elements interact with one another. And hence rather than being viewed as "passive" agents who are "subjected" to the influence of certain elements (like culture and religion) we find that women are

in fact proactive decision-makers with an acute awareness of their decision-making parameters and the ways in which these are complicated by the intersection of specific social relations and the resulting power “struggles” that ensue on a daily basis. Hence, this thesis contributes a glimpse into the multiple metaphorical stages upon which Arab women perform their roles, how they perceive the scripts they are expected to perform, and how they assess that performance as well as that of other actors in relation to their ability to navigate the multiple performances expected of them both in the present and the future. More specifically this thesis contributes an understanding of the production of both private and public scripts in the context of management career decisions.

Thus, the power framework of Arab women’s management careers presented in this thesis paints a different picture of Arab women’s experiences. Rather than a single, static story of isolated elements dictating Arab women’s careers in strictly defined directions we find multiple vibrant stories and daily decisions with several possible outcomes. Arab women are not passive agents but rather active players who are acutely aware of their power and sources of empowerment, highly sensitive to the rules of the game and the related behaviours both in the private and public realms, and internalize this knowledge in multiple ways based on which they actively choose their moves along a path to a destination of their choice given how they interpret this knowledge (and their relative position in the game given this knowledge). Thus, we add deep and nuanced dimensions to the common lines of argument dominating

discussions of Arab women in management including career barriers and facilitators, attitudes towards working women, work-life balance, the role of culture and role models (see Alajmi 2001; McElwee & Al-Riyami 2003; Al-Lamki 1999; Omair 2008; Metle 2002; Wilkinson 1996; Jamali et al. 2005; Metcalfe 2006; Abdalla 1996; Mensch et al. 2003; Mostafa 2003; Mostafa 2005; Tlaiss 2013; Kausar 1995; Khattab 1996). Rather than being ingredients that can be presumably thrown in to achieve a certain goal (such as encouraging women's participation), the present thesis shows how women's experiences take place on a stage composed of a complex web of intersections of social identities and corresponding role performances along lines of empowerment and disempowerment, experienced in daily episodes, in which these aforementioned elements are part of a set of tools and strategies that women use to move themselves in particular directions in this game with the aim of gaining as much as possible in the public realm without damaging anything in the private. How each woman sees the same game and its components will be different and what each woman sees as empowering or disempowering is also inherently different; this is the kind of nuance that supports the need for a new view on the region.

It therefore becomes imperative that rather than searching for more of these "ingredients" expressed in the six themes commonly explored in the literature it's important that we turn to the parameters of the game itself such that it becomes more "equitable" in terms of allowing women a broader range

of possible moves, as well as how women perceive this game such that they can be better equipped to see the full potential of each of their “cards”. And indeed, the present thesis identified particular areas in which the “game” appears more equitable and/or more open to the participation of women in which resolving the role-performance tensions does not place them in difficult positions.

Understanding this interaction between Arab women and their organizations enables an understanding of the ways in which this interaction can and should enable sustainability goals (Kurucz 2005). Thus, women told stories of how particular elements at the individual, institutional, and legal/political levels had a qualitative impact on women’s management career experiences. Hence opportunities for learning (whether formal or informal) via mentors, networks, and training, organizational clarity in terms of task and role definition, and evaluations/job progression, and organizational protection in the form of safe outlets for women to raise concerns and make suggestions, and government encouragement of women’s work were all part of women’s ability to feel emboldened in navigating the intersections of their multiple social identities in ways that allow them to gain increased access to power at the sites of production of both the private and public scripts. And while these are telling of the broad areas of reform needed for achieving sustainability goals at the organizational level, they are only the first clues on what is certainly larger, more comprehensive roadmap towards “new cultural priorities” vis-à-vis a persistent “challenge of the dominant discourse” (Piccolomini, 1996; Melucci,

1994; Kurucz 2005 p. 63). This thesis contributes one voice in that direction by offering a fuller understanding of previously taken for granted elements of women's management career experiences (e.g. how and why mentors are important beyond an encouraging presence).

Recalling earlier description of how research on Arab women in management discourse is similar to the outlines of a portrait, the present thesis is but a brush stroke of a vibrant colour that invites many more on the way towards a more complete portrait yet can potentially inform the direction of the next brush strokes.

CHAPTER 8: THE WAY FORWARD

Earlier sections described how the most intense role-tensions and consequently “radical” management career decisions to remain in the lower level of organizations or leave altogether were experienced by younger women who would have had close to four decades, if not more, of building a management career that would not only see them develop professionally but also actively contribute to their organizations (and by extension economies) in ways that would more fully utilize their potential. We now return to Ehrenfeld’s call for a “central vision of flourishing for time immemorial” in which sustainability is “the possibility that humans and other life forms will flourish on the earth forever (Ehrenfeld 2000, p.36). Flourishing means not only survival, but also the realization of whatever we as humans declare makes life good and meaningful, including notions like justice, freedom, and dignity. It is a future vision from which we can construct our present way of being” (Ehrenfeld 2000, p.36). And given this thesis’s positioning within the transformationist perspective of sustainability, what does the totality of Arab women’s experiences as described thus far tell us about the steps needed for a sustainable future in the Arab world?

Management Education: Why Arab Universities Need to Look Outwards

We begin where the women themselves also began: education. Universities are, more often than not, the first places women begin to think of

their future careers in more concrete terms. This is unsurprising given that management education provides women their first exposure to the world of work and organizations from a perspective other than that which they may have heard from their parents (and particularly fathers) or husbands. As was discussed in earlier sections women described their shock at discovering that what they learned in the classroom and what happened in practice once they began their management careers appeared worlds apart. Women's confidence in their knowledge and the ability of their degrees to empower them in their organizations appears to falter early on in their careers and damaging them in ways, both tangible and intangible, from which they recover very slowly if at all. The exceptions to these were in cases in which women's education involved a "practical" component in the form of an internship or work-placement program that provided them with exposure to management careers in a way that allowed them to return to the safety of the classroom and discuss their experiences such that they can put it into their proper context, link it to theory, and understand that their initial feelings of anxiety and discouragement are common. It's also important to note that in many cases, women's confidence in the theory side of their management education also suffered when they became aware that while they may have been exposed to text-book case studies these rarely, if at all, addressed local cases

...I swear to God I can tell you everything about IBM and Starbucks but can I tell you that I studied anything about a company in Bahrain? No! I can tell you about... about Steve Jobs management style but...I can't say the same about Abdul Lateef Jameel or Waleed bin Talal...so what was the point of all that studying?

Women also described the many ways in which universities were the place where they would eventually come to change whatever preconceptions they may have had about their management careers. Thus, some women acknowledged that they were encouraged to pursue a management career through professors who were also inspiring role models

...when I was in my first year I was like every girl just worried about my friends and having fun and I was just ready to get married and have kids anytime so I can stop studying...anything to get out of studying right?...but I had this one professor who kept on telling me that I could still do all those things but also have a really successful career...she would share articles with us and videos about really successful women and because of her my mind and even my friend also we started becoming adventurous and applying for things and then I found myself by my fourth year laughing at how I ever thought I was going to be a housewife and stay at home...I am still in touch with her and joke with her every time I'm having an issue at work or even a promotion I tell her doctor I blame you for this!

Others, however, described how an experience with a Professor who

...convinced me that I wouldn't survive a job as a manager because he always made it a point to say that leading people meant having to behave in ways that aren't right for normal women...now that I remember it I realize that he was crazy but because we liked him so much it was hard not to look up to him and when I was slowly realizing that this career wasn't going to be easy in all the chaos of my job at the beginning it was like it was confirming everything he said and I would say come on woman what are you doing here just forget this...

Thus, women left the walls of their universities armed with a set of beliefs about themselves and the world that awaited them that largely affected the way they saw their initial management career experiences.

What does this mean for Arab universities? Acknowledging the incredible nuance in experiences necessitates that there cannot and should not be a "one size fits all" approach. From the participants descriptions it appears

that there is a significant need for inculcating in management education curricula and programs a serious focus on equipping students with “real life” practical experience, an emphasis on local contexts, and a conscious focus on the “soft side” of jobs in general and management careers in particular. And while the specifics of these endeavours will surely be unique to each country (and possibly industries in different contexts) there is considerable value in higher education institutions engaging in dialogue with one another both within and across countries. This dialogue should not only revolve around developing programs and curricula but also include a concentrated effort to engage graduates, much like the participants, in these processes by using their experiences to better gauge the areas of development needed in management education. This, however, will better prepare women for entering management careers by enhancing one of the “cards” they hold (especially as they make the fundamental decisions about entering organizations and their imagining of what their careers may look like). The next area of focus is then the organization itself.

Arab Organizations: Structures, Ceilings, & Dialogue

Organizations are the stages upon which women underwent daily power episodes that emerged from the intersection of their private and public role expectations which together qualitatively determined their overall experiences and ultimately career decisions. Noteworthy is the way in which empowering organizations not only encouraged women to not only pursue management

careers for longer periods of time but also reach for higher levels in the organization because this empowerment also crossed over into the private sphere. Disempowering organizations, however, often led to radical decisions to stay at the bottom of organizations or leave altogether even in situations where women felt empowered by their private script (as empowerment in these instances meant the ability to leave). Thus ensuring that organizations are set up in ways that empower women is fundamental.

Are the changes needed to address this so radical that organizations need to tear down their current structures and start over? Not necessarily. This, however, can *not* be done in isolation from dialogue among the Arab countries themselves.

As was previously alluded to in many cases women themselves acknowledged the impact of legislation and government policy had on changing the quality of their experiences as well as the parameters of their decision-making either positively or negatively. And while describing these in detail based on the participants descriptions alone is not possible it's sufficient to assert that in countries in which governments had an explicit policy, and in turn legislation and entities, that not only ensure women's access to protection at work but also provides opportunities for work and encourages professional development, women described feeling emboldened in their choices. Again, which legislation and framework works and which do not, can only be determined from dialogue with women and about women in Arab governments.

Thus it's apparent that the Arab world needs to open itself to dialogue, with universities, organizations, and governments at the centre, such that its countries can learn not only about themselves but also the experiences of their neighbours with fresh eyes. The question now becomes, where and how to start these conversations? This thesis calls for further research on the region to be the starting point of such dialogue as will be discussed in the coming section.

Future Research

The first steps on the roadmap towards change have been outlined in previous sections. While the discussion certainly pointed to the areas of potential reform in universities, organizations, and governments, the specifics of the how, what, where, and why of reforms that would be meaningful to the countries and the region should be born out of extensive, rich, and nuanced dialogue among themselves first (and hopefully eventually "others" outside the region). In guiding this dialogue it's important that more research in this direction is undertaken. From this thesis and the insights generated from it several key recommendations can be made.

Firstly, I firmly believe that there is much value in doing further research on the same topic and with the same methodology on a larger scale. If hundreds, and possibly thousands of women, are given the opportunity to share their management career experiences it's likely that we will gain better, country-specific insights and together these can greatly contribute to various areas of discourse as well as practice in the region and beyond.

More specifically, research that looks at young Arab women even before entering university and which follows them through different parts of their journey in both university and their careers holds the potential to better tell us of the specifics of the impact of certain elements of the private and public scripts in affecting their management-career decisions. Additionally, it's worth exploring specific segments of women with particular identity-component intersections. This not only allows more insights into these segments but also allows for comparison across particular elements of social identity (i.e. education, social class, religion, etc.). Moreover, within each country there's significant potential in exploring the same research questions across different sectors and organizational characteristics, as well as experiences with particular structures, systems, and people (including managers). Additionally, future research could further explore the power framework through the lens of the various power theories in the literature given that power, empowerment, and disempowerment appeared to be influential elements of women's experiences. It's important at this point to also acknowledge that the present thesis told the story of a "game" from the perspective of only one set of players. However, it's important, particularly from the perspective of sustainability as a social movement, to explore the experiences of the men (the other set of players) as well as observe their interaction with one another on the game (using other research methodologies within the qualitative research domain). It is also worth noting that while this thesis focused on the Arab region, the stories told and the

emergent power framework make exploring the same questions in other contexts a compelling foundation for similar research in other regions.

Secondly, and equally essential, is the importance of coordinating research efforts via a research agenda that aims to advance understanding on the region in general and Arab women's careers in particular with a view for developing a nuanced and inclusive view of the region as well as furthering its sustainability efforts. Hence, there is much value in providing a space for dialogue among researchers on the region (whether they are from the Arab world or outside of it) in a way that enables collaboration and cooperation as well as open the doors for dialogue with Arab governments in ways that will encourage the sharing of information, data, and the means of obtaining these in all Arab countries particularly those who have been hesitant to do so.

Research Limitations

We begin discussion of the thesis's limitations by revisiting the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology itself. If we recall the acknowledgement that one's understanding is "always on the way, partial and particular to the experiences from which the interpretations were formed" and that Gadamer cautions that time and life events "cannot be viewed as fixed because horizons are forever changing" then we can understand why the stories presented in this thesis, as vivid as they may be, together tell of a partial and continuously emerging understanding (Kafle 2011, p. 190; Jones 2001, p. 73). And hence this thesis presents a time-specific, historically located window into the experiences of

young Arab women pursuing or aspiring to a management career; it is not the *only* story to be told but one of many that *should be*.

The sample at the heart of this dissertation possibly brings with it a set of questions about its appropriateness. The decision to narrow the sample to women of age 24 to 40, while appropriate, in light of the results and interpretation, there is reason to wonder that if further dimensions of this story would have been told by women in both younger (20 to 24) and older age groups (40 to 50) given that their experiences could tell more about the “beginning” of the journey even prior to entering organizations and management careers and the “end” where women have had enough experience to be able to reflect on a “fuller” career journey. This will enable a deeper understanding not only of the role of scripts but also how these are acquired and transformed through experience with every decision made. It’s also important at this point to acknowledge that, while the sample satisfied the criteria in terms of nationality and descent, the fact that all participants were currently residing in the UAE where these interviews take place brings with it some questions about the influence this may have on their experiences (particularly working in culturally diverse organizations) and the diversity of the sample in terms of socioeconomic status and other circumstances (such as nearness to family and other support networks). Fully appreciating the extent of the impact of all the interviews taking place in the UAE necessitates a comparison to a similar sample in which participants have no experience outside of their ‘home’

countries. However, it is unlikely that this has significantly impacted the results given that in most cases subjects had extensive experiences in their ‘home’ countries prior to living or working in the UAE (that exceeded their experience of working or living in the UAE) while in the remainder of the cases the interviews took place in the UAE though the women were not residing in the UAE but rather visiting for varying periods of time.

The life-world interview itself and the interviewer-interviewee dynamic also pose some limitations. Particularly in the Arab world, in which hierarchies and public esteem are prioritized, I was acutely aware of the way in which participants would perceive me as a researcher and PhD candidate with a certain aura and an assumption about my “authority” and “status” (in fact several of them would call me Doctor prior to/early on in the interviews). As such I often found myself having to exaggerate some parts of my interaction with them (especially in the beginning of interviews) to ensure that the “distance” between us would be reduced such that they reach a level of comfort in their dialogue and openness to sharing what may be intimate parts of their experiences whether in their private or public lives. And while I was often surprised at the level of intimacy of some of the stories and experiences participants shared, it is impossible to fully assess the degree to which I was able to successfully navigate the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee. This now brings us to the role of this dynamic’s impact on interpretation.

Recalling that the interpreter has neither a subjectivist or objectivist positioning, each dialogic encounter with a participant not only forms a subjective reality in of itself, it also asks questions of the interpreter who also participates as a player in a game of shared historical experiences with the participants (Palmer 1969; Vis 2008). Thus emerges the question of dialoging with the text and the fusion of horizons; even as I write these words I find myself reflecting on the texts and the experiences from which these emerged; as such there is no point at which I can claim that the emergent understanding is in any way complete. And while the issue of data saturation does not present itself in this research, it's important to acknowledge that with each interview the story that emerged also told part of my own story. I saw my own private script, my expectations of my careers going into my first job, my moments of weakness and my victories in the many critical incidents that shook me to my core in both positive and negative ways, and how I too came to make decisions on a daily basis. Hence, in the participants experiences I too relived some of my own and I also saw reflections of the experiences of women I know. And while extensive journaling, dialoging with the text, and resorting to my group of critical friends were certainly key components of my research, I, like any researcher, am not fully absolved of questions of reliability and trustworthiness.

Taken together, given both the aforementioned limitations, and the insights this thesis has contributed, what are some possible ways forward?

Conclusion

“Even now I don’t think that I am done... that I reached a destination...I want to learn more... I still feel like it’s just the beginning and there’s a long road ahead” Bassant, 38, Egypt

The thesis aimed to explore the experiences of young Arab women pursuing, or hoping to pursue, management careers. In this endeavour, the thesis was motivated by several key questions about the themes shaping Arab women’s management careers, how they perceive their experiences in organizations as they pursue those careers, the key elements shaping their movement in that career whether lateral, upward, or out altogether, and the way in which these experiences are qualitatively changed with the overlapping of multiple layers of identity at particular points of intersection.

The thesis anchors itself in the argument that the importance of its aim and central questions is in moving the conversation about Arab women in particular, and the region in general, away from grand narratives that have limited the conversation to gender binaries and cultural legacies, by adopting a point of departure that has sustainability at its core. By turning the conversation towards Arab women as vital human resources who have not fully contributed to their organizations (and by extension economies) it becomes possible to see the significance of exploring this “absence” in the spirit of undertaking “actions that will achieve [the] central vision of flourishing for time immemorial...a future vision from which we can construct our present way of being”. This

notion is vitally needed in a region brimming with potential as it looks to move on from a legacy of turmoil- an effort that necessitates the mobilization of every resource possible (Ehrenfeld 2000, p.36).

In that pursuit, it became important to look at the “woman question” from the multiple viewpoints in academic discourse beginning with sustainability in general before moving to the role of the individual in the perpetuation of an institutional mind-set that enables organizational sustainability (particularly with the view of institutional structures and arrangements that create a more “equitable” environment). This focus on the individual gave way to a discussion of the determinants of the “public” and “private” spheres of life as it relates to the way individuals construct social, and by extension, power relations as expressed in the production and reproduction of particular “scripts” that are telling of the way individuals perceive and act in particular settings such as organizations. This then moved the discussion towards the question of women’s work in organizations and the tenets of their experiences as described in academic discourse particularly their exclusion along the lines of advantage and disadvantage and the multiple approaches to address these as offered by the many feminist schools of thought. And in spite of the contribution of these lines of argument to the understanding of the “woman question” the thesis addressed how these illuminated the need for a more nuanced view of gender as a category in of itself. Thus, exploration of “gender” beyond a static state of being was the foundation for a view of gender as a dynamic act of doing, discussion of which necessitated that the experiences of

“all” women be taken into consideration. Hence the thesis moved onto a discussion of intersectionality that positions gender as one element of a complex web of multiple areas of identity that intersect in ways that, among others, qualitatively impact women’s organizational experiences.

The position of Arab women in this discourse was then critically examined beginning with an exploration of the contributors to the narrow view of Arab women as a single homogenous category. Touching on the socio-political history of this, the thesis then moves onto visiting the research that specifically explored Arab women’s careers with an emphasis on both the themes these produced and also some of the limitations of this research’s ability to produce a more nuanced description of Arab women’s experiences, especially issues of methodology and the assumptions made about the generalizability of results. From this emerged the thesis’ commitment to contributing another voice to discourse on Arab women’s careers at the heart of which is the need to hear from Arab women themselves as they told their stories- this necessitated specific philosophical and methodological considerations.

Hence it became important to explore the thesis’s journey of “epistemological becoming” beginning with a discussion of the postcolonial roots of some of the discourse on the region that emphasized differences between the “west” and the “others” which included the Arab region among others. For the aims of this dissertation it was important to move away from

these binaries towards a space in which Arab women's experiences were viewed in their totality not only because they are supposedly different (i.e. the mysterious Orient) but because they can and should actively contribute to academic discourse both in general and in relation to the region in particular. Thus from a "third space" in which "cultures overlap and create "hybrid" spaces in which there is no dominant or dominated...zones of overlap and displacement of domains of differences...that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" this thesis positioned its contribution in an epistemological third space that enables open and rich dialogue about the region that acknowledges its history but looks to the present and future with eyes that are unburdened by an imposed commitment to search for differences only" (Bhaba 1994; Frenkel & Shenhav 2006 in Seremani & Clegg 2015). As such the thesis placed itself within the realm of subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemology that together saw "facts as culturally and historically located, and therefore subject to the variable behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and interpretations...of both the observer and the observed" and "seeks to 'understand' social phenomena in terms of 'meaningful' categories of human experience" (O'Gorman & MacIntosh 2015, p. 57).

In light of this, hermeneutic phenomenology was the methodological foundation upon which the research design was built in which the semi-structured life world interview was used to allow women to describe their experiences navigating management careers as *they* lived it. The selection

criteria narrowed the focus of the research's sample to women aged 24 to 40, business management graduates, of Arab descent in which both Arab parents were from an Arab country and who have lived in an Arab country for at least 10 years where they obtained at least one degree and worked for a minimum of 3 years. With a commitment to a rich, nuanced, and inclusive range of diversity across the region it was important to ensure that the sample included as many Arab countries as possible. Thus 56 stories of management careers across different levels and multiple sectors in the Arab world were told with the themes of each together telling more stories emerging from rich dialoging with the text and an ever-expanding fusion of horizons. What did these stories tell us in relation to the central aim and research questions of this thesis?

The present thesis looked for the experiences of Arab women in management careers motivated by the conviction that behind this seemingly "simple" question lay multiple complex areas that emerged from several convoluted histories both from within the region and outside. And from the outset it was important to outline the ways in which some of these histories have meant that the stories that have been told about Arab women in general and their careers in particular provided the *outlines* of a story but not the full one though, perhaps for lack of alternatives, more often than not these outlines were narrated as though they sufficiently told full stories.

The contribution of this thesis is multi-fold. First it contributes towards discourse on women in management careers in general, and Arab women in

particular. And perhaps for the first time, this exploration undertook women's management career experiences specifically from the perspective of their social identities the combination of which produce private and public scripts and the role of the multiple intersections of these in qualitatively changing their experiences. This thesis also contributed an understanding of the multiple stages upon which these experiences take place and how ultimately these define the parameters for women to make the fundamental decisions that shape their careers at multiple points in time. Thus, the power framework of Arab women's management careers tells of an active participant and a knowledgeable agent aware of the importance of balancing multiple arenas of power- this is in of itself a contribution to discourse on Arab women in management. And while this is telling of the many nuanced dimensions of Arab women's experiences, it also tells us that these experiences are not unique to Arab women alone.

Thus, while discourse on the region paints Arab women as an exotic "other" confined to specific, known, unmovable factors, this thesis contributes the message that Arab women are in fact not a "distant" other. Rather, they are one part of a largely underexplored fertile ground for research with the potential of generating meaningful insights beyond the geographic confines of a region. Thus, this thesis is but one step in what should be a long road of exploration. And perhaps there is no better way to express this than the words of participant Mona M. who describes

...I look at my own experience and I look at my mother's and I'm amazed at how different our worlds are and then I realize looking at

my daughter that if her world will be as different as mine and her grandmother's then I can only imagine the things she will be able to do...hopefully God willing it will be an easier road...

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