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## WHEN ARAB WOMEN (AND MEN) SPEAK

### Struggles of women journalists in a gendered news industry

*Jad Melki and Sarah Mallat*

Having already documented the continued marginalization of women journalists in Arab countries in our previous research (Melki & Mallat, 2013), this chapter investigates the specific challenges Lebanese journalists face in climbing the corporate ladder. We examine the role of institutionalized prejudice and implicit bias against women leaders in perpetuating a masculine newsroom culture that reinforces a glass ceiling. Lebanese newsrooms are a “boyzone” with a “bloke’s club” mentality – a men-centric workplace culture that prioritizes men’s values, preferences, and management styles over women’s (North, 2014; Ross, 2005). This affects the implementation of official policies on such things as parental leave and childcare assistance, which disproportionately impact on women journalists. We also highlight women’s attempts to navigate between the socially divergent roles of professional versus wife/mother and to overcome a double-bind situation. They compete in an androcentric industry while simultaneously confronting patriarchal norms (Walby, 1990) that trivialize women’s extradomestic work and tether them disproportionately to household duties (Hitti & Moreno-Walton, 2017).

We build on several years of data collection, including three separate surveys, focus groups and qualitative interviews with Arab journalists and news managers across the news media landscape (Melki & Mallat, 2013, 2014; Palmer & Melki, 2018). The latest study, conducted in 2016–2017 provides the main data for this chapter. We surveyed 308 journalists and undertook in-depth interviews with 25 news managers from major broadcast, print, and online news operations in Lebanon. The survey used a random stratified sampling technique that ensured representation of participants from various levels of the news institutions’ hierarchies. It gauged different perceptions and attitudes about career trajectory, workplace practices, newsroom culture, and the challenges of balancing work and personal/familial responsibilities. The qualitative interviews sought news managers’ accounts about the circumstances, reactions, and repercussions of professional advancement in the news industry and how this differs between men and women.

Although the empirical data focuses on Lebanon, many findings apply more generally to the Arab region, especially since many participants work at multiple Arab news outlets. Lebanon differs significantly from most Arab countries, particularly in its free press, pluralistic political culture, and liberal employment regulations. Nevertheless, the country's diverse socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural mix intersects with most Arab societies. In addition, Lebanon offers a best-case scenario for women journalists in the Arab news industry given its comparatively advanced state of social and political liberties and civil rights. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the theories used in our research. Although they are grounded Western concepts, we find them to be largely applicable to Lebanon and some Arab societies, albeit differing in degree from one Arab state to another.

### Journalism, gender, and glass ceilings

Lebanon's media landscape remains the most open, free, and diverse in the Arab region, with a wide variety of local, regional, and international news outlets and journalists (Al-Najjar, 2011; Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015; Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015). It is a complex, pluralistic society and, uniquely in the region, it has no official religion. Instead, it has 18 officially recognized religious sects (known as "confessions"), each of which has corresponding ethno-sectarian political representatives in Parliament who govern the country and control affiliated and mostly partisan media outlets (El-Richani, 2016). Gendered social norms and employment opportunities are also liberal relative to the rest of the region; women's workforce participation is higher than most neighboring Arab countries, except oil-rich Gulf states, where the higher percentage comes mainly from women who are migrants (World Bank, 2017; Young, 2016). In addition, Lebanon's robust women's rights movement has achieved significant gains in the past two decades, especially in the area of domestic and gender-based violence (Salameh, 2014). Nevertheless, deep-seated patriarchal attitudes impede women from reaching high-level posts, and men outnumber women by a three-to-one ratio in the labor force (World Economic Forum, 2015). Women's political representation has consistently remained low despite the enfranchisement of women in 1953. Women represent 9 percent of legislators and senior officials in government. They occupy 3.2 percent of Parliament (the legislative branch) and 4.5 percent of the cabinet of ministers (executive branch) ("Patriarchy and Sectarianism," 2017). No legal framework or professional code of conduct exists that addresses gendered practices in the workplace (Khalaf, 2010).

Within this paradoxical environment women journalists struggle against a 2:1 gender gap, pay inequity, and other discriminatory practices in the workplace – including rampant sexual harassment and gender discrimination – that prove hostile to their professional advancement (Melki & Mallat, 2014). Yet, since women are largely excluded from the highest positions within the media, they have little influence on policymaking that could lead to greater gender equality. Lebanese media continue to echo "patriarchal discourse" (Civil Society Knowledge Center,

2017, para. 38), reflecting the global status quo. The agenda-setting influence of news media created by men, for men, further exacerbates the situation; the persistent privileging of men's voices over women's contributes to the ongoing secondary status of women as citizens (Ross & Carter, 2011, p. 1148). Around the world, women lack proportional representation in the majority of newsrooms and are severely underrepresented at the levels of senior management and ownership (Byerly, 2011; Lennon, 2013). Based on research in 114 countries, including Lebanon, the Global Media Monitoring Project's most recent report (2015) concluded that progress towards gender equality in the news media has effectively ground to a halt worldwide.

The Lebanese news media landscape is no exception. While women comprise more than three-quarters of journalism students in the country, they account for less than one-third of the workforce, with the greatest disparity at top-level management (Byerly, 2011; Melki, 2009). A vast majority of women experience gender discrimination and sexual harassment at some point in their journalism careers; one in ten have considered quitting their jobs due to gender discrimination or sexual harassment (Melki & Mallat, 2014). Such conditions persist now, particularly given that newsroom's gender policies do not show support for gender equality and few organizations have policies on sexual harassment. There are no explicit stipulations on gender equality in the Lebanese Press Syndicate's code of professional conduct nor in Lebanese labor laws and the constitution (Gatten, 2012). These deficiencies compound the overall neglect of the journalism industry in fostering gender-neutral newsrooms and empowering women to climb the corporate ladder.

The stubborn persistence of the glass ceiling across various industries in the corporate world defies country borders, political systems, and cultural contexts. Particularly salient in the news industry, it segregates women into low-paying, entry level jobs and discourages them from advancing up the corporate hierarchy (Byerly, 2011; Steiner, 2014). With a few exceptions, women remain confined to low-level positions, trapped by "sticky floors beneath glass ceilings that bar their access to higher status and higher paying positions" (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Haslam, & Peters, 2013; Cohen, 2001, p. 278). Across all levels of the corporate news hierarchy they have not achieved pay parity and are more likely to leave journalism to pursue other careers or to become primary caregivers.

### ***Promotions and pay and family connections***

Given the legally disabling climate, laissez-faire corporate culture, rampant gender discrimination and sexual harassment, and stubbornly patriarchal social norms, it is not surprising that women journalists in Lebanon experience these obstacles on a more magnified scale. Our 2016–2017 survey confirmed this notion: 95 percent of women occupied low to middle-range ranks in the corporate news hierarchy compared to 88 percent of men, while men (12%) significantly outpaced women (5%) at the higher ranks. Similarly, men were more likely to manage other journalists: 22 percent of men and 12 percent of women managed between one and five

employees, and 24 percent of men and 15 percent of women managed six or more employees. A parallel gap in income emerged: 32 percent of men and 48 percent of women made \$1,000 or less per month, while 56 percent of men and 47 percent of women made \$1,001 to \$3,000 per month, and 12 percent of men compared to 6 percent of women made more than \$3,000 per month.

Moreover, on every level, men's income correlated more strongly than women's with other variables, including age, education, experience, seniority, and number of employees managed. In other words, women do not experience equal benefits as men in proportion to their professional investment. Correlation tests between these variables and the seniority variable also reveal the same trend. These results point to two mechanisms working in tandem. On one hand, despite having higher qualifications, educational attainment, and managerial experience, a significant number of women are denied the seniority and pay levels they deserve. On the other hand, this also implies that women who occupy senior positions with high incomes may have achieved such status through nepotism and *wasta* (Arabic for connections). Interviews corroborate our previous finding that the few women in the highest echelons of corporate news are there due to familial relationship with men owners (Melki & Mallat, p. 2014); their positions ultimately uphold the industry's patriarchal interests, rather than challenging them.

Describing the start of her career trajectory in the early 1990s, the head of operations at a major Lebanese TV station laments: "Knowing Lebanon, you know that you have to know someone to support you to get into the journalism business." Many women journalists we interviewed matter-of-factly echoed this view, categorizing nepotism and *wasta* as quintessential characteristics of the Lebanese news industry. Referring more specifically to the gendered aspect of promotion, an editor-in-chief of an online news outlet emphasizes: "I don't know any woman who got a managerial or chief position in the media in Lebanon without a family connection." According to her, part of the problem lies with persistent implicit gender biases: "Being a woman is always stigmatized. You have to prove yourself, make double or triple the effort to show your higher ups that you have the same capabilities or deserve the same salaries [as men]." She describes how being both a woman and Lebanese (as opposed to a foreigner) adds another layer to the underestimation of her capabilities:

The managers back then [in 2008] didn't take me seriously; the fact that I had more experience [than the foreign reporters] or could speak Arabic didn't really matter to them. I had to fight to get political stories. The 20-year-old American [guy] who had no experience in journalism or the Middle East would get the more complicated political stories solely because of his white male privilege. It took them two years to notice that I was actually qualified to do more.

The glass ceiling for Lebanese women journalists rests at the senior professional level (e.g., senior writers, directors, producers), where women occupy approximately

43 percent of positions (Byerly, 2011). A token number of women occupy senior management, governance, or ownership positions, but even those are largely nepotistic appointments based on family ties (Melki & Mallat, 2014). Many appointments are used to circumvent Lebanese media laws, which prevent one individual from owning more than 10 percent of any television or radio station. Prominent men politicians cum media owners allocate company stocks to their women relatives, effectively maintaining majority control of the company.

This situation makes it more challenging for young women to climb journalism's career ladder, particularly in the face of a macho newsroom culture and aggressive competition, compounded by the uncertainty and fluctuation in the mainstream news industry. One woman, who had worked at several regional news outlets since 2006, describes her experience as the head online editor of a Lebanese television station: management did not give her adequate support; her supervisors and editorial team constantly dismissed her as being too outspoken and pushy. She attributes this treatment to being both a woman and young. She was eventually let go, allegedly because of political pressure in response to her investigative reporting on the country's garbage crisis in mid-2015. She feels that her "ruffling of political feathers was a convenient scapegoat" and it was merely a matter of time before her employer found an excuse to dismiss her. Her executive producer and head of operations, a woman, did little to help her case. In her opinion, this was due to the *Queen Bee* effect. That is, women in positions of authority treat women subordinates more critically, and prevent senior women from supporting other women (Ellemers, 2014). The roots of this effect stem from discriminatory experiences that successful women encounter on their way to the top. In a separate interview, the same executive producer whom the junior journalist accuses of harsh and unfair treatment reports facing sexual harassment and gender discrimination during her own career. This may point to an unconscious attitude among senior women journalists along the lines of: *if I had to struggle to get here, so should you.*

Another interviewee's experiences with multiple women managers at various Arab news outlets corroborates this Queen Bee phenomenon:

When I started at *The Daily Star*, we had a [woman] editor that we used to call 'flavor of the week.' [We would ask each other]: who is she going to make cry this week? And it was only the girls she would pick on. We were much younger [than her]. [Then, at] Dubai TV, the reason I resigned was a woman who would insist on calling me on [my day off]. At al-Arabiya TV, I also left the news and moved to current affairs [because of] a woman. After that, she became a sweetheart! It was a personal thing; she just didn't want me in the news.

This vicious cycle of women holding other women back is another effect of patriarchal work cultures. According to Ellemers (2014, p. 50), "Queen Bee responses emerge as a strategy to cope with gender bias in organizations." Such unsupportive attitudes are not unique to women, but pervade the competitive corporate environment, especially when jobs are scarce and senior positions are limited.

Nevertheless, as the experiences of these women illustrate, the demographic disparities in the Lebanese news industry point to a local manifestation of both sticky floors (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2003) and glass ceilings.

Many organizational decision-makers, particularly older men, cling to the view that women are unsuited for leadership and do not make good managers. Our survey shows that although the vast majority of men and women (71% versus 76%) believe both genders are equally effective decision-makers, significantly more men than women (26% versus 14%) believe men are more effective decision-makers. Additionally, more women than men (49% versus 35%) believe men can advance into positions of authority more easily; 60 percent of men versus 47 percent of women believe both genders have equal opportunity to advance into such positions. Very few men (5%) and women (4%) believe it is easier for women to do this. Similar trends emerge in relation to promotion and pay raise.

The woman directing Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) explained that when her appointment as director was announced, "one very senior male colleague expressed his disagreement . . . [because] 'this position needs a man.'" The Minister of Information defended his decision, replying that he was informing, not asking for permission. The NNA director scoffs that such attitudes remain prevalent and counters that "women actually make better managers than men, because they are used to juggling multiple tasks, switching gears at a moment's notice, and managing crises big and small." A man manager at another news station agrees that women "are easier to work with. They are more diplomatic and not so quick to get angry or frustrated." Yet, he would prefer more men in the newsroom because he feels they can handle more pressure: "They can travel at any moment and don't have the demands of home to keep up with."

### ***Leaky pipelines***

Such contradictory attitudes hint at another prevalent trend: Women are often pushed out of the news industry via *leaky pipelines* (Henningsen & Højgaard, 2006), particularly if they decide to marry and have children – the paramount goal for many women in the Middle East (Karam & Afiouni, 2016). Although these attitudes stem from deeply engrained socio-cultural norms, they are exacerbated by organizational structures that do not support or encourage women who attempt to engage simultaneously in professional advancement and marriage/motherhood.

Many Lebanese women journalists leave the profession early or opt for career tracks that effectively remove them from the competition and preclude them from advancing into higher managerial positions. Most women journalists are predominantly young, unmarried, and childless; the majority have worked for less than a decade as journalists (Melki & Mallat, 2014). In contrast, men, particularly at the managerial level, are older, more likely to be married with children, and report greater career longevity. Our recent survey shows that 65 percent of women compared to 52 percent of men have never been married. In addition, more men (39%) than women (32%) have children. The gap widens further up the managerial

hierarchy, and this data does not account for the increased likelihood of married women to drop out of the news industry when they have children.

Because men have historically dominated the journalism industry, the global newsroom culture can be disproportionately hostile to women with family responsibilities (Ross, 2001). Media scholars also argue that journalistic values coincide with and derive from masculine values, and women are socialized into accepting these values (Beam & Di Cicco, 2010). The ideal journalist “is always available” (Robinson, 2005, p. 102). Such dedication, particularly the irregular hours and always being on-call, fundamentally contradicts the idea of work-life balance.

What’s more, women entering the news industry are often prevented from advancement from the start, as superiors assume they will scale back their ambitions or quit once they get married and have children. Many journalists note the anxiety surrounding this issue (Melki & Mallat, 2014), especially considering that the current 70-day maternity leave stipulated by Lebanese labor law falls short of the 14-week international standard (Alabaster, 2012). Questions also arise about how many women utilize available maternity leave out of concern that they will be “mommy tracked” (Williams, 2004).

### ***Domestic tethers***

Research on *domestic tethers* (Hitti & Moreno-Walton, 2017) highlights the impact of unequal domestic gendered division of labor in perpetuating inequality at work. Women worldwide continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid domestic work, with the Middle East having the highest gender disparity (Gates, 2016). Because work-life balance generally comes at the expense of career advancement, a significant proportion of women opt for part-time employment, reduced work schedules, or extended leave from work. Even women who work full-time, however, feel the impact of domestic tethers on career advancement (Hitti & Moreno-Walton, 2017). When men’s and women’s home responsibilities compete with their work responsibilities, it is invariably the women’s work duties that suffer. They are more likely to sacrifice work and advancement opportunities in favor of household duties. When conflict emerges between spouses due to domestic pressures, women typically prioritize home over work. Men do the opposite, disproportionately advancing men’s career advancement.

Our survey corroborates these domestic tethers to extreme extents. Overwhelmingly more women say they are primarily responsible for housework and childcare, while more men relegate such duties to their spouses: 47 percent of women compared to 7 percent of men say they are the primary childcare giver; 40 percent of men compared to 6 percent of women say their spouse is primarily responsible for childcare; 39 percent of women compared to 2 percent of men say they are primarily responsible for housework; and while 43 percent of men say their spouse primarily takes care of household chores, no woman said this.

A few men (9%) and almost one-third of women (31%) say they outsource household duties. This means a significant proportion of women rely on themselves

or outside help for housework, while almost all men delegate this work – and the *organization* of outsourcing it – to their spouses. Globally, organizing household management remains overwhelmingly women’s purview (Schulte, 2014) and requires significant time and mental energy, regardless of whether the male spouse ends up implementing these chores. These demands distract from other professional and personal tasks and create “mental clutter” (Schulte, 2014), the invisible yet mentally taxing domestic work that women continue to handle alone, even in households where men shoulder significant domestic duties.

### ***Motherhood penalty and fatherhood bonus***

Marriage and children have a detrimental effect on women’s careers and significantly contribute to the wage gap. In contrast to this *motherhood penalty*, marriage and children have a positive impact on men’s careers and income. Our survey confirms this *fatherhood bonus*: married men journalists are more likely than those who are unmarried to be in the higher income brackets. More importantly, married men (45%) are five times more likely than unmarried men (9%) to be in the highest income category; married women (25%) are only 2.5 times more likely than unmarried women (10%) to be so. The opposite is also true: unmarried men (45%) are 2.8 times more likely to be in the lowest income category than married men (16%), while unmarried women (53%) are only 1.4 times more likely than married women (37%) to be so. Although married men and women are more likely than those who are unmarried to occupy senior positions, this is only statistically significant for men ( $p = 0.01$ ), not for women ( $p = 0.35$ ).

Again, these numbers should take into consideration higher attrition by women, especially for married journalists with children. Our interviews included questions about the pressures of domestic life. In comparison to men, more unmarried women in managerial or senior positions say that journalism’s career demands prohibit marriage and having a family. One woman who worked at multiple Arab news outlets before becoming the director of Orbit TV, a regional Arab television network, stated:

I am not married because no man would accept my work[ing]. Maybe I should have gotten married. Maybe I will regret it in the future, but not now. I am free and happy

and able to fully focus on my career. My personality is too strong, and Lebanese men are too weak mentally to accept ambitious and opinionated women.

Another single woman who recently retired elaborates on her 30-year career:

There was no time for a personal life. Very few men put up with my career. I had to choose between job security or being under someone else’s thumb. I had men walk out on me because I was getting too much



attention professionally, or because I needed to work. [In the 1980s], men weren't in the habit of being subservient to women. So, it was a combination of that mentality, and also the fact that I simply didn't have time for relationships.

The married women journalists we interviewed also pointed to the lack of corporate policies and progressive thinking supporting working mothers as a way of prohibiting women journalists from having a work-life balance. In particular, married women in upper-management positions feel greater pressure than men to juggle professional duties and family commitments. The majority of surveyed men and women agree it is easier for men to return to work after the birth of a child and to balance family life and work. Furthermore, the majority of men and most women (52% versus 47%) believe it is easier for men to have a family and climb the corporate ladder. While a significant proportion of men and women (44% vs 41%) feel it is equally easy for both men and women to do so, only 12 percent of women and 4 percent of men believe it is easier for women. The editor-in-chief of a leading French-language business magazine refers to this discrepancy as the "culpabilization of the working mother":

When you have to think about your children, you can't be fully dedicated to your job, and vice versa. I constantly have to restrain myself because I could work non-stop, but then I would get negative backlash about how I'm neglecting my children and my family.

Another veteran journalist with over 20 years of experience at local and regional print, television, and online news outlets highlights the gendered divide in relation to work-life balance, one that men do not necessarily have to grapple with on a daily basis:

The phrase: 'the problem is that you're a mom' has been repeated to me so many times, and it wasn't fair. A few years later, one of the guys who told me this was telling me how he couldn't show up to the office for weeks because his mother was sick. And I told him: you know the beauty of it, nobody tells you the problem is that you're a son. You're made to feel that it's a problem to have children, and it shouldn't be. But for men, it's: oh, he's so supportive of his wife, he takes care of his family.

Rather than seeing marriage and childrearing as obstacles to professional development, men news managers emphasize the positive and supportive role of their spouses as domestic caretakers and primary caregivers. They acknowledge this traditionally gendered division of roles gives them greater leeway to focus on their careers. However, many men news managers concomitantly admit their commitment to their careers took a toll on their personal lives. Several lament they are not as present in their children's lives as they would like to be. Others allude to marital

tension as a result of working weekends and odd hours. The general manager of a local news radio station explains:

It made a huge difference that my wife is a teacher because her work hours meant that she was able to take care of the kids. I wasn't able to spend enough time with them when they were growing up, not nearly as much as I wanted.

The CEO of Lebanon's public television station agrees:

My career success kept me away from my daughters. The feeling of guilt at being away so often, missing out on so much of my daughters' childhoods, is so strong that I [compensate by giving] them whatever they need or want [financially].

Echoing similar sentiments, the director of news and political programming at a competing, private television station admits that he feels guilty for missing out so much of his kids' childhood: "My wife raised our daughter mostly on her own. I'm trying to make up for it now, but I didn't really have any other choice at the time. I had to support my family." Likewise, the regional photography manager for the leading French newswire in the region and a veteran conflict photojournalist, recounts how the demands of journalism – particularly magnified for war reporters – have taken their toll on his personal life:

My first marriage didn't affect my career choices or development; on the contrary, my career choices affected the marriage. [My ex-wife] wanted to [expand] her career in Cyprus, but she couldn't, and that affected the whole relationship because my career was overshadowing hers. My work also affected my daughter. My absence [in her life] was mainly due to the divorce, but my work did affect her. Once she told me: 'I don't want you to go there. I don't want you to get killed.' She was nine. . . . It was like a huge slap in the face.

Even married men news managers who do not have any children feel the strain of trying to maintain work-life balance. The managing editor of one of the leading Lebanese dailies notes:

[My wife and I] don't spend much time together. I leave for work early in the morning and by the time I get home she is already asleep. I only take Saturdays off but even then, I find myself working when I should be spending downtime with her. . . . My life now is totally dedicated to my work. We don't have kids yet. We don't have time.

Clearly, Lebanese journalists of both genders recognize that the inherent demands of the industry lead to discord between their professional and personal

lives. While the effects are more significant for women's careers, men's testimonies also highlight how hyper-masculine newsroom norms resulting from internalized patriarchal structures negatively affect men and women. Contrary to assumptions that men-dominated newsrooms benefit men by prioritizing men's needs (Stelter, 2002), recent studies suggest that men increasingly value greater work-life balance, particularly in collectivist Arab cultures that place a high value on the family. According to a recent survey, the overwhelming majority of Lebanese men (83%) and women (84%) support parental leave for fathers (El Feki, Heilman, & Barker, 2017). This points to a growing societal shift in perceptions: work-life balance continues to evolve from solely a women's issue into an increasingly broader corporate and social issue relevant to all. Perhaps it could be in Lebanese and Arab news outlets' best interest to adopt a more "feminized" organizational culture, one that places increased value on teamwork, collaboration, and work-life balance (Everbach, 2006). Admittedly, such realizations, even by upper management, may not necessarily translate into greater pay parity or equitable career mobility for women without broader legal reform.

The literature on work-life balance and family-friendly workplace policies suggests that as long as women are the only ones taking parental leave, both job discrimination and pressure on women to opt out of careers will only increase (Bewley, Ebel, & Forth, 2016). While seemingly contrary to corporate interests, policies that promote parental leave for all employees may actually help companies' bottom lines by preventing attrition and lowering turnover rates. Replacing an employee costs up to 20 percent more than instituting flexible and family-friendly workplace policies (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). This is especially true for the news industry, which increasingly requires advanced degrees and specialized training.

### **Varying impact of cultural norms on women journalists in Lebanese, Arab, and Western newsrooms**

Our study draws on gender theories rooted in Western societies – such as the glass ceiling, leaky pipelines, sticky floors, and the queen bee. In our view, they are useful for examining the largely Lebanese news industry, albeit with varying degrees of significance. Lebanese women journalists echo the experiences of their Western counterparts, despite differences in political, economic, legal, and particularly cultural contexts. Partial explanation for these similarities lies in the parallel structures of modern corporate news institutions and standard processes and demands of the news industry worldwide. Such consistencies also stem from certain shared characteristics among professional journalists regardless of nationality: they are ambitious, passionate, idealistic, and dedicated to the profession's underlying ethos. Similarly, research on the dynamics of business entrepreneurship, which attracts comparably ambitious personalities, confirms the notion that women entrepreneurs in Western societies and the Arab region share many traits and face similar obstacles (Schroeder, 2013). Yet it is imperative to consider the degrees to which socio-cultural obstacles differ across nations and social milieus.

Our interviews confirm that Lebanese women journalists are fiercely passionate about their profession and ready to make personal sacrifices to advance their careers. However, such attitudes represent both defiance and a culture clash that many bulwarks of the rigid Arab patriarchy are not ready to reckon with and even consider a threat to the moral (i.e., highly gender normative) fabric of society. Even in 2018, social norms dictate that if a Lebanese woman *must* work outside of the home, she should opt for flexible and less demanding employment that will not distract from her primary domestic roles. As such, many segments of society do not consider journalism a suitable or appropriate profession for women. Reflecting this reality, many women studying journalism repeatedly struggle against their parents' strong objections to this college major. What sets the journalism profession in Lebanon apart from its Western counterparts is that it tends to disproportionately attract empowered, independent women with strong career ambitions whom have already overcome many cultural obstacles and defied traditional gender roles and restrictions.

As such, the main differences between what Western and Lebanese women journalists face lies squarely in the cultural sphere, particularly around issues of domestic tethers and patriarchal newsroom culture. Many Western societies have made major progress toward closing the gender gap in the workplace, but have failed at balancing unpaid domestic work, which continues to disproportionately fall on women. This remains an even more daunting problem in Lebanon. Although the majority of Lebanese society assumes that women share the burden of bread-winning and have a professional career of their own, significant conservative sectors continue to frown upon women entering historically men-dominant professions – journalism being one of them. This discourages many women from entering the profession, curtails ambitions of career development, and limits access to particularly challenging journalistic specialties or advancement into demanding managerial positions. More importantly, most Lebanese men continue to see themselves as the main financial providers in the family. A woman's potential to professionally outperform her spouse, either financially or in terms of success, is considered a sign of emasculation and remains a potent stigma in most conservative (and even some liberal) families. While the idea of men as primary caregivers has become increasingly popular in some Western cultures, it remains alien to Lebanon. This reflects the persistent view of women as primary – if not sole – caregivers and consequently works against the idea of the equal division of domestic burdens.

When comparing Lebanon to the Arab region, we should read these concepts within the context of shifting social norms and ideologies that continue to ebb and flow. We cannot overgeneralize our conclusions. Moreover, to offer solutions requires conducting more localized research that accounts for variations in Arab media systems and national specificities, as well as high unemployment rates, fragile economies, unstable politics, rise of fundamentalist groups, and widespread corruption and nepotism that plague the region. What we *can* argue is that our findings apply to many parts of the Arab region, but with varying degrees.

Certain structural factors make Lebanon different from many Arab countries, including its democratic system, pluralistic political culture, liberal employment

regulations, free press, and comparatively advanced state of political liberties and civil rights. These cultural factors have even greater impacts in other Arab countries, with nation-specific structural factors offering localized explanations for differences. The patriarchal norms, family pressures, and domestic tethers, for instance, might play a more significant role in conservative Arab societies, while presenting less of a challenge for Arab women working outside their countries, especially in the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain, where expatriates enjoy more personal freedoms and operate far away from the peering eyes of their families and societies (Mellor, 2013). The masculine newsroom culture and rampant gender discrimination, we suspect, would have greater significance in many Arab outlets compared to Lebanese newsrooms. For example, Saudi Arabia's ultra-conservative employment policies forbid women from most occupations and impose a strict gender segregation system; these eliminate any chance for women journalists to compete with men (Kurdi, 2014). Nonetheless, women working in pan-Arab newsrooms, particularly satellite TV news, may find relative advantages over men in certain on-camera roles, especially given the high demand for "pretty" women reporters and anchors (Mellor, 2013).

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This does not transfer to other news specialisms, such as war correspondents, where the patriarchal mentality demands that institutions protect their seemingly vulnerable women journalists (Palmer & Melki, 2018). Editors often reject women journalists' requests to cover conflict, claiming they do not want to bear responsibility if something happens to them. Simultaneously, many women journalists who cover conflict counter such restrictions with other advantages over men, including their ability to enter conservative homes, interview women, and access powerful men who may perceive a woman journalist as less threatening (Palmer & Melki, 2018). In a sense, the war and conflict plaguing the Arab region has offered some advancement opportunities for ambitious Arab women journalists, but also many problems and obstacles. Women's rights suffer dramatically during wars and political instability, where central governments collapse or weaken, and tribal sub-cultures fill the political vacuum, such as in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, but also in other countries that experienced the "Arab Spring." Moreover, violence against women – not only in war zones but generally in public spaces and popular protests – brings increased risks for women journalists in many Arab countries. Rampant sexual harassment in countries such as Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan likely plays a bigger role than in Lebanon (Rezaian, 2017). Moreover, Arab women journalists covering controversial political issues are more vulnerable than men to campaigns of shame, especially in cultures that attach a high value to women's honor and morality. "Accusations of sexual misconduct, designed to humiliate, are often a tool of repression used [sic] to silence critical journalists. They are not limited to women, but such allegations can be dangerous and socially detrimental for a woman living in a conservative Muslim society" (Rezaian, 2017, p. 6).

Lebanese media are more commercial and driven by advertising than most local news operations in the Arab region, which tend to be government-owned or subsidized. Nepotism and corruption play a bigger role than merit in the latter institutions. While men and women can benefit from such practices, corruption

invariably serves men in conservative patriarchal societies. Finally, many Arab countries offer much narrower press freedoms than Lebanon. This may also impact Arab women journalists disproportionately, at least in their ability to report on gender discrimination and women's rights issues in their countries. Such structural factors exacerbate the effects of the glass ceiling, leaky pipelines, and sticky floors and create intensely magnified gendered environments promoting further queen bee behaviors by the few women journalists in positions of power, rather than providing loci for empowering other women journalists. The situation renders discriminatory practices throughout each country invisible to society and outside of political discourse, since the news media get blocked from seriously discussing them.

Middle Eastern news media occupy a privileged position for discussion, negotiation, and challenging of patriarchal gender norms that ultimately harm everyone. The Lebanese news industry could lead by example in addressing gender inequity in the private and public spheres, by promoting increased dialogue on gender roles, enacting internal corporate policies discouraging sexism and leveling the playing field, and supporting legislative reforms recognizing women's basic human rights as equal workers and citizens. Such a shift would likewise necessitate a parallel industry-wide reckoning with gender inequity and imbalance *within* the profession. This is long overdue and would have positive effects for both journalists and the news media.

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