

## **ARAB WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN SPAIN: LIKE CEDARS BESIDE THE STREAM**

### **Abstract**

This paper presents results of a qualitative study designed to give “voice” to women entrepreneurs in Spain, who come from different backgrounds nonetheless united by their Arab roots and cultural commonality. The purposes of the present study are two-fold: (1) to add to the paucity of female entrepreneurial research regarding the role of the macro societal values and traditions (2) to better understand the dynamics of the Arab world as they relate to women entrepreneurs and Islam, specifically in the implications of gender roles and work (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005). We study these questions in the Spanish context, where a renewed entrepreneurship culture is reviving, partly derived from the economic crisis starting in 2008. In a related vein, the intersectionality of different influences that converge on the entrepreneurial impulse is a conglomerate of Islamic values and gender negotiations within the Spanish context. We seek to explore particularly different aspects which characterized our sample, i.e. main factors that influence Arab women in their path to entrepreneurship; self-employment as a real engagement in the labor market for women (Faveri et Al., 2015); an invaluable tool for agency and empowerment (EBRD, 2015); entrepreneurship as a way to procure the involvement of Arab women in the public space and finally, formal and informal features which contextualize the entrepreneurial activity for this particular immigrant group in Spain. The case study research through semi-structured interviews has been the methodology used for this investigation. Thus, we have conducted some interviews that shed light on important information and we have been found that through our analysis the main formal and informal factors on this issue are the educational level, personal ambition, implications of family, economic necessity and social and cultural patterns, being the last three factors the ones which are intrinsically linked to the Arab women studied in our investigation. All these issues

are addressed in depth in our paper expecting to contribute to the debate of gender roles and women's economic dimension by means of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Arab women, Empowerment; Stereotypes; Patriarchy; Family entanglements

## **Introduction**

We are immersed in the second wave of globalization, within a continuous changing scenario characterized by constant fluxes of people, data and goods. This second wave of globalization is a fact with which society, ethics and politics have to interact. Different motivations fuel the migrant phenomenon that characterizes this wave, usually to escape from poverty and procure financial security for their families. Gender questions are also an important part of these new scenarios, even more if it comes hand in hand with international migration to a new society and culture. Women act as “bridges between (both) cultures” (Cebrián, 2008), from it derives their critical role in the host society. It is traditionally attributed to women to keep their own culture while they must facilitate the assimilation of the new scenario for their families. Furthermore, this paper focuses its attention on Islamic values such as family, the role of women and the intersection of public/private spaces developed in a host society such as the Spanish one, specifically in Madrid and also Valencia.

The purpose of this article is to explore the critical role of entrepreneurship in Arab women not only as an exit to unemployment but also as a door to freedom, empowerment and independency. This has already been studied in other parts of the world where patriarchy still holds a grip (i.e. Persian Gulf). Nonetheless, in the Spanish context, though not free at all from gender biases, but where law and institutions defend the same opportunities for men and women, we pose the following questions: what is the intersectionality between public and private space in Arab women entrepreneurs in our country? Does the Spanish context affect the development of these women's professional careers? Do the entrepreneurial opportunities they

encounter provide empowerment and agency in our society? What are their motivations? Do they have to choose between a personal and a professional life? To what extent does entrepreneurship involve Arab women in the Spanish public space? In sum, this paper intends to explore the main factors that affect, positively and negatively, the Arab woman entrepreneur to launch her venture in Spain.

With this investigation, though it is a limited one, we would like to respond to the “growing need for survey-based attitudinal information capturing the self-expressed viewpoints, concerns, challenges and needs of women business owners” (CAWTAR report, 2007, 2) in this particular context and also revoke some stereotypes that exist and curtail Arab women’s opportunities as seen in the Western world.

This paper is organized in the following manner: we first contextualize the entrepreneurial background in some Arab countries that are standing out for their high level of Total Entrepreneurship Activity (TEA). Then, a description of the TEA is analyzed in Spain along with a brief introduction to the immigrant phenomenon in the last years in the country. We also explore the entanglements that curtail the agency of Arab women, such as patriarchy, interpretations of Islam and the complicated balance of work and family. Methodology is also explained along with the main results of our investigation. Conclusions gather the principal points from which future lines of research can depart.

### **The Entrepreneurial Context**

The context, though is not a determinant factor, it has a relevant influence on entrepreneurial behavior. Thus, by examining the role of context in stimulating the extent and variety of such activity, we study the impact on outcomes in subsequent venture performance (Zahra and Wright, 2011).

In this section of the paper we analyze the context considering three main aspects that subsequently affect the entrepreneurial behavior of the Arab women. First, we review the main

factors that have helped the new entrance of Arab women in the labour market, such as the recent Arab spring (2010) and the globalization process, given that “specific socioeconomic, political, market and institutional contexts are key to fostering, enabling and enacting entrepreneurial activity” (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013, 508). Economic necessity has also affected the percentage of necessity-driven entrepreneurship in Spain, as a mode of self-employment. Arab women in Spain, specifically in Madrid where most of our sample comes from, is studied in the next section, describing also the Spanish entrepreneurial outcome in the last year and the role immigrant women have played in it.

### **Entrepreneurship in Middle East and North African (MENA) countries. An overview.**

According to the report GEM Women 2014, countries in the Persian Gulf, revived from the richness of oil and globalization are provoking Islamic financial institutions to funding opportunities and start-up capital. In a related vein, women in other Middle East and North African (MENA) countries are also finding a new way of entrance into the labour market through entrepreneurship, affected also by the globalization process and often due to economic necessity, a variable that inevitably affects the entrance of women into the global marketplace. First, globalization is usually cited in studies as the catalyst for a reconciliation of cultures and a powerful process that can “minimize clash of civilizations” (Tlaiss, 2015, 874); see also Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005 and Syed and Metcalfe, 2015). The entrance of Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) in the MENA countries and their settling down is calling for a reconsideration of some practices and for a further knowledge and understanding of Eastern cultures, Islamic among them. Furthermore, globalization can be understood as a two-way road: on the one hand, “MNCs (...) need to reconsider their knowledge of Middle Eastern culture and Islamic business ethics [...] when importing their practices from Western nations. Performance evaluation standards, compensation principles, training and development, and promotion practices need to be reviewed in an attempt to tailor these practices to what is culturally sound

and acceptable” (Tlaiss, 2015 874-875). On the other hand, the widespread use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is inevitably changing the gender dynamics in MENA countries, as we have seen its predominant role, to cite an example, in the recent Arab Spring. Thus, globalization is a growth medium for the empowerment of women and also it is facilitating their involvement as a “vibrant and growing economic force” (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005, 203). However, there exists a danger of which Syed and Van Buren (2014) warn us against: the use of an “ethical imperialism” that defines gender dynamics from the Western perspective: “there is a danger that corporations that will take it upon themselves to try to construct other societies—with values that those societies have chosen—in their own images without regard for the choices that societies, Islamic and otherwise, have made” (Syed and Van Buren, 2014, 270). Gender dynamics in Islamic countries differ completely from the understanding of them in Western countries, because in MENA countries “the role of women as mothers is paramount and Quranic notions of equality are based on gender differentiation rather than strict equivalence of roles within the home. An approach to understanding work-life balance built on an adaptation analysis would negatively cast the choices of women to balance work and family in ways that place the latter as primary as evidence of patriarchy” (Syed and Van Buren, 2014, 269). We will develop this point later in the paper.

As for the second point, entrepreneurship linked to economic necessity, there exists evidence of the preference for this form of self-employment. “In the MENA region, where female labor force participation rates are the lowest in the world, entrepreneurship can offer new opportunities for women to generate their own income, and help others as they do it” (CAWTAR report, 2007, 2). It has been demonstrated that “increasing levels of unemployment are likely to lead to higher levels of necessity entrepreneurship” (Noguera, 2013, 31). Specifically, “women are more likely to start a business out of necessity in a situation of economic recession than are men” (Ibid.). In fact, “the difference in the entrepreneurial activity rates for men and women is smaller for “necessity” entrepreneurship as opposed to

“opportunity” entrepreneurship” (Ibid.). It goes without saying that entrepreneurship facilitates the work/family balance, as it provides a flexible arrange of time and also space. In a related vein, as we mentioned before, new technologies (e-commerce) are opening novel ways to undertake innovative ventures from their homes, facilitating the needed conciliation. In the MENA region, the report GEM Women 2014 highlights the high Total Entrepreneurship Activity (TEA) for countries like Kuwait, Qatar and UAE, showing “high opportunity and capability perceptions and low fear of failure” (GEM Women 2014).

In the figure 1, we compile some of the characteristics of the female entrepreneurship wave in MENA countries:

Figure 1. Main characteristics of female entrepreneurs in MENA countries

Female Business in MENA countries	Personal profile of the owners	Main challenges
More than \$100,000 per annum	Average age: 35- 54 years	Learning financial management skills
Sole owners of their firms	The majority of women business owners surveyed are married	Finding and keeping good employees (networking)
Women are creating employment	Work/family balance is identified as the most challenging	Access to capital and technology
Extensive years of experience	The women business owners see their gender as a net positive rather than an impediment to their business	The high cost of public services
Actively involved in managing their enterprises		Skills building
Trading internationally		Marketing opportunities
Promoting ICT use		Specialists training

Source: Own elaboration based in CAWTAR report (2007).

According to the recent study of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD, 2015) in other countries such as Egypt or Jordan, the entrepreneurial sector is underdeveloped, and women lack the information needed to start their own businesses as well

as a denial to access to financial resources, “which requires reforms at the legal and institutional levels to facilitate registration and women’s access to information and loans”. In a related vein, women in these countries tend to prefer the stability of regular employment that facilitates the work/life balance, as we will describe later in the paper. “The challenge is to change women’s perspectives on entrepreneurship, making them realise that it can be an opportunity to transform their lives, rather than a financial necessity” (EBRD, 2015, 135).

In sum, some MENA countries as the ones in the Persian Gulf are embracing entrepreneurship, not only for their financial stability derived from oil richness, but also due to the gender biases in these countries, where entrepreneurship enables women to participate in the labour market respecting the public/private dynamics, meaning that women do not enter the public space. In other countries such as Egypt or Jordan, a long pathway is needed to attain the same possibilities of financing and training for women.

### **Entrepreneurial context in Spain**

The entrepreneurial context in Spain has changed increasingly in the last years. According to GEM Spain 2014, after experiencing a decline in the previous year, the rate of Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) in Spain grew to 5.47%, which is a good rate despite the adverse environmental conditions. Nevertheless, this percentage is lower if it is compared to the TEA rate prior the 2008 crisis, when the TEA rate reached 7%. In regard to the motives that impulse entrepreneurship in Spain, GEM Spain 2014 shows that 66% of the 2014 TEA corresponds to opportunity driven entrepreneurs, while 29,4% corresponds to entrepreneurship driven by necessity due to the fact that Spain has been disturbed in the last years with a financial crisis affecting unemployment on a large basis. This strong recession has influenced the necessity-based entrepreneurship rate due to the incapability of established companies and the formal economy to meet demand for jobs. Table 1 compares the TEA rates in Spain and the average for the UE, according to the main motives for entrepreneurship.

Table 1. TEA rates according to motivation in Spain and the European Union (%).

REGION	EARLY-STAGE TEA	NECESSITY DRIVEN	OPPORTUNITY DRIVEN	IMPROVEMENT DRIVEN OPPORTUNITY	MOTIVATIONAL INDEX
SPAIN	5.5	29.8	66.1	33.5	1.1
AVERAGE FOR EU	7.8	22.8	73.4	47.9	2.1

Source: Own elaboration based on GEM Spain 2014

The gap between male and female entrepreneurs has diminished in the last two years and the average age for entrepreneurship in Spain is 35-44 years old. The profile of business ventures created in Spain is that of a small business providing services to local consumers and lacking a firm ambition to grow. Seven out of ten new business ventures belong to the self-employed (which do not employ more people). Compared to the European Union entrepreneurial rates, there exists a decompensating balance between the TEA rate and the established business ownership rate in countries such as Spain or Greece, “because these countries have a lower level of TEA compared to their level of established business ownership rates (Greece: 7.9 TEA vs.12.8 EB; Spain: 5.5 TEA vs. 7.3 EB) (...). This fact can be explained by the presence of a more efficient entrepreneurship ecosystem (education, R&D transfer, access to finance, friendly regulatory framework) supporting new entrants in business activity. But so thin a basis of early-stage entrepreneurial activity can jeopardize economic canvas in crisis situation” (GEM global 2014). In fact, data facilitated by the GEM project supports this statement (see Table 2). If we compare the percentages of new business creation with the percentages of permanence or continuation those same businesses in the labor market, Spain has the lowest rate of nascent ventures but also the lowest percentage of discontinuation or closing of the entrepreneurial ventures.



Table 2. Comparative of nascent and established business ventures (%)

REGION	NASCENT	NEW BUSINESS	TEA	ESTABLISHED BUSINESS	DISCONTINUATION
IRAN	<b>7.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>5.7</b>
QATAR	<b>11.3</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.8</b>
ASIA (AVERAGE)	<b>5.8</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>3.9</b>
SPAIN	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>1.9</b>
EU (AVERAGE)	<b>4.8</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>2.6</b>

Source: own elaboration based on GEM Global 2014 and GEM Spain 2014

Another important factor that underlines the GEM Global Report is that there is a high discrepancy between the perceived capabilities and the perceived opportunities in countries affected by the crisis (perceived capabilities are 45.5% vs. perceived opportunities 19.9% in Greece; 48.1% vs. 22.6% in Spain; 46.6% vs. 22.9% in Portugal), which means that the financial crisis curtails the entrepreneurial intentions (see table 3).

Table 3. Perceived opportunities and perceived capabilities in Spain and EU (%)

REGION	PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITIES	PERCEIVED CAPABILITIES	FEAR FAILURE	ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS
SPAIN	<b>22.6</b>	<b>48.1</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>7.1</b>
Average (unweighted) for EU	<b>34.8</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>40.7</b>	<b>12.1</b>

Source: own elaboration based on GEM Global 2014 and GEM Spain 2014.

Due to the extremely high unemployment rate of young people in many economies (e.g., during 2013, Greece 57%, Spain 54.9%, Croatia 48.7% and Italy 43%), implementing entrepreneurship in these economies it is not anymore only an economic problem, but a social

and political one that demands the highest priority to be solved, according to the GEM Global 2014. Efforts should be directed to increasing the TEA in Spain, working in the direction of increasing perception of entrepreneurship as a good career choice (53.9 % in Spain Vs. 56.9% average (unweighted) for European Union); giving a higher status to successful entrepreneurs (49.0 % in Spain Vs. 66.6% average (unweighted) for European Union) and finally, providing more media attention to entrepreneurship (46.3 % in Spain Vs. 53.3% average (unweighted) for European Union).

### **Female entrepreneurship in Spain and MENA countries, a comparative view**

The percentage of Women Intending to Start a Business is less than 10% in Spain whereas in Middle East countries such as Kuwait or Qatar is around 50%. A major reason studied by Noguera can be that entrepreneurship for women intertwines within the “5M framework”: Markets, Money, Management, Motherhood and Meso/macro environment in the Spanish context. There are formal factors (access to financial resources and economic support programmes, education level) Vs informal factors (perception of female entrepreneurs’ skills, social networks, family context) that affect women’s entrepreneurship in our country. Furthermore, informal institutions are more important than formal institutions for the promotion of female entrepreneurship (see also Alvarez et al. 2011). According to this study, informal institutions or factors are constraints that affect the decision to become an entrepreneur or to look at entrepreneurship as a good option to work. In Spain, it is a fact that these informal factors (culture, social norms, social image of the entrepreneur) influence the level of entrepreneurial activity and have a larger influence on female than on male entrepreneurship (Alvarez et al. 2011).

Specifically, the female TEA rate is less than 5% of adult female population. For Kuwait or Qatar this rate is between 7% and more than 10% for the latter, according to data provided by GEM WOMEN 2014. Even though the female TEA rate is lower for Spain, the Established Business Ownership in Innovation-Driven Economies is higher for Spain (6%) rather than

Qatar (2%) and Kuwait (around 3%). In economies where TEA rates are higher than Established Business rates, women may face substantial challenges to sustain their businesses (access to capital and training). On the other hand, this could indicate that startup activity has recently increased, whether from need or opportunity (which will show up in future years as increased established business activity). In sum, Spain has medium startup rates, with lower female TEA rate but higher stability and less risks than in MENA countries. This suggests greater demand for entrepreneurship in developing economies, with comparatively fewer enterprises having made it to a mature stage, as we mentioned before. Women in Spain have low opportunity perceptions, despite having high beliefs about their capabilities compared to the average for Europe (GEM Women 2014) matched also with the existence of a higher fear of failure in Spain, compared to other countries such as Kuwait or Libya (GEM report 2014); we also lack innovation and an international orientation generally speaking, both for women and men (see Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of Male and Female TEA: Spain, EU, Iran, Qatar, Asia and Oceania (%)

REGION	MALE TEA	FEMALE TEA	MALE OPPORTUNITY	TEA	FEMALE OPPORTUNITY	TEA	MALE NECESSITY	TEA	FEMALE TEA	NECESSITY
Spain	<b>6,36</b>	<b>4,57</b>	<b>69,61</b>		<b>61,03</b>		<b>26,13</b>		<b>34,95</b>	
Average for EU	<b>10,21</b>	<b>5,45</b>	<b>75,29</b>		<b>69,91</b>		<b>21,32</b>		<b>25,47</b>	
Iran	<b>21,45</b>	<b>10,47</b>	<b>59,38</b>		<b>63,04</b>		<b>39,77</b>		<b>36,43</b>	
Qatar	<b>19,29</b>	<b>10,32</b>	<b>75,5</b>		<b>83,43</b>		<b>23,02</b>		<b>15,75</b>	
Asia & Oceania (average)	<b>14,38</b>	<b>11,35</b>	<b>76,22</b>		<b>73,64</b>		<b>21,73</b>		<b>24,67</b>	

Source: own elaboration based on GEM Women 2014.

It is also noticeable that the entrepreneurial ventures Arab women create do not identify with the so-called survival entrepreneurship (EBRD, 2015, Morocco, for example), not with the Persian Gulf type of entrepreneurship coming from rich families endowed with training and professional expertise. Their entrepreneurial ventures come from more or less disadvantaged

backgrounds “who launch individual initiatives of income-generating activity and self-employment” (EBRD, 2015, 55).

### **Arab immigration in Spain**

In terms of immigration, Spain is among the top ten countries in the world for its migrant population, reaching top one in the EU and the third place in the world in absolute numbers, after United States and the Russian Federation in their immigration rate. From 2012 onwards the flux of immigration has been gradually reduced due to the financial crisis.

With respect of background and for the interest of the investigation in Spain, there were 717,992 Moroccan immigrants in 2014, being the third most numbered group of immigrants from outside the EU, representing the main Muslim group in Spain. Nearly, half of the group was women (49,5%). In November 2015, according to data from the government of Spain (Ministerio de Empleo) 201,766 Moroccan immigrants were affiliated to the Social Security, being the most numerous group from outside the EU. The main sectors for immigrant men and women in the general regime are Housing, Hostelry, Commerce and vehicle repair among others. In the self-employed sector: Commerce and vehicle repair, Building, Hostelry and mainly Service sectors.

According to the experts, immigration reproduces the female and male roles and their main object in migrating is to overcome poverty and to guarantee the economic security of their families. Most of them are enrolled in low-qualification jobs poorly rewarded (domestic workers mainly) reproducing the traditional female role (Cebrián, 2008).

This is why it is remarkable the importance of women in the process of integration in the host country as we said above; women are responsible keepers of their own cultures and families but they do also have to facilitate the adaptation process in their host countries. It is important to understand the hard mechanism of “assuming the new without breaking their own roots”. The host countries’ policies and measures must ensure that in this process the rights and duties

are respected but also they are allowed to fully tap the information and services that guarantee their full integration in their host country (Cebrián, 2008).

According to Arjona (2006) in the displacement of the woman there is involved a huge class and ethnic resources' mobilisation, meaning not only movement of finance capital, but also cultural and ethnic assets in strategies that surpass the mere economic scope. Arjona highlights the fact that these women are discriminated, first for being women and secondly, for being immigrants. Some of them come to their host country following a patrilocal pattern, where the woman abandons her place of origin to reunite with her husband. New processes (mainly derived from the economic environment in the host country) have resulted in immigrant women entering the workforce, with some difficulties, into niche markets creating an ethnic economy. In this field, the two factors, which affect most the incorporation to the professional market, are the level of education (language skills) and the Islamic morality that limits the access to the public sphere and requires flexibility to balance work and family. Thus, entrepreneurship becomes a suitable alternative, as we will see later in the paper. Arjona (2006) describes this female immigrant group as a young and a diverse one, with different backgrounds and educational profiles.

### **Arab women: patriarchy, religion and family entanglements**

Once analyzed the context of entrepreneurship in some MENA countries and Spain, and immigration in the latter as external factors to bear in mind, we now explore the gender dynamics that are central to understanding the key paper that religion and culture play in the establishment of male/female roles and therefore the intersectionality between religion, family and entrepreneurship, intrinsically linked to the Arab woman.

As we already stated above, there are cultural biases, more or less supported by the normative teachings of religion, or rather its interpretations, to women entering the public sphere. Traditional values and the "societal and familial dominance of males" (Gray and Finley-

Hervey, 2005, 205) in Muslim societies affect and discriminate women's careers in entrepreneurship (Jawad 1998; also Tlaiss, 2015). The dominance of patriarchal principles in cultural and traditional values specifically affect women's participation in the workforce in the Arab region and their chances of success in their entrepreneurial ventures (EBRD, 2015).

As we mentioned before, the role of women as mothers, caregivers and fundamental bases of the family is prioritized above their enrolment in the economic/public sphere. It is a fact that education of girls in many Arab countries is a fact nowadays, but the leap of incorporating women to the workforce is still a reality to fulfill in years to come (the World Bank names this fact the "MENA paradox").

We do not intend to generalize a world as diverse as the Muslim world, nevertheless, the sharing of a common set of beliefs and customs let us introduce some patterns of behavior and ideologies. Previous entrepreneurship research argues that "there is an emerging trend for Muslim women to surpass the many rules and regulations in order to pursue their entrepreneurial intentions" (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005, 205), as data from the GEM project also reflected above. Studies show that entrepreneurship is becoming a new way of incorporating women to the labour market, even "supported and encouraged (Madichie and Gallant 2012), with the first wife of the prophet, Khadija, being a champion and prominent trader" (Tlaiss, 2015, 860). Nevertheless, it is recognized that Arab women entrepreneurs face problems specifically derived from this patriarchal view of culture and tradition, in the sense that men are the breadwinners, women are the givers of life, and the latter have an invaluable task as mothers and guardians of the family. This fact affects and determines women's rate of employability in the Arab world and in other parts of the world, as well.

It is important to highlight that within Islam there seems to be an emphasis on diversity and complementarity of sex roles, rather than on exact sameness of women and men in all spheres of life, deviating from the common (Western) preposition of equality meaning sameness for

man and woman. Rather, “the Quranic notion of equality appears to be based on gender differentiation, not on identity” (Syed and Van Buren, 2014, 259). Islam declares that a man is responsible for economically supporting his family members, including his wife and children, while placing a high value on a woman’s role as mother (Syed and Van Buren, 2014). In consequence, there is a set of expectations both for men and women in the familial sphere, also imposed by their own families and society in general. Nevertheless, Syed and Van Buren (2014) note that this is a “nuanced perspective on gender roles within the Islamic world” (271), due to the fact that business necessity or economic necessity can soften these gender roles as we will see later in the paper.

Furthermore, women’s intersectionality between the private and the public sphere it is a problem still to be solved in these countries. “Traditionally, women’s roles are relegated to the home, and to reproductive and unpaid care work (i.e. the “private” sphere), whereas men’s roles are associated with the marketplace, and productive and paid work (i.e. the “public” sphere)” (EBRD, 2015, 27). This is not only in the MENA countries but also in Western countries (see also Buttner, 2001). Here lies the main issue in which women and also men have to negotiate new rules, to surpass the “dominated/dominating relationship (...) particularly felt in the relationships between husband and wife” (Gray and Finley-Hervey 2005, 204) in the private sphere, but also in the public domain. Some authors explain the serious implications of crossing the boundaries of public/private sphere as follows:

“Mernissi (1996) argues that the institution of paid employment in Muslim societies, Arab countries in particular, is a traditional domain of men, who consider it a matter of religious duty as well as male pride to support their wives. It is not unusual to find men who feel “insulted if one asks them whether their wives work outside the home” (Mernissi, 1996: 64). A woman in paid employment is a traumatizing idea for such men, particularly those from lower literacy backgrounds. A narrow interpretation of Islamic female modesty has particularly served to remove women from the public space including paid employment. Such patriarchal traditions seem to pose a major challenge

to women's freedom and capability, including their freedom to pursue professional careers in Muslim societies"(Syed and Van Buren, 2014: 262)<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, for men, the duty to bring food and money home is understood as a religious responsibility. This typical foundational premise of patriarchy is also attacked by recently deceased Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi in most of her work, stating that "women's entry into public space is thus felt as a castrating phenomenon by males whose identity is constructed on an idea of virility confounded with financial power and the control of female relatives' movements" (in Rhouni, 2010).

Nonetheless, a specific negotiation is to be made in the Arab countries that follow the Shariah, where the positive law (labour and penal codes) and religious law (e.g. personal status codes, family laws and social norms) or rather its interpretations, conflict. This negotiation is the hard debate between a more modern approach to customs on the one hand, and the observance of the norms that safeguard tradition and cultural values on the other hand. This is defined as legal pluralism (EBRD 2015; see also Gray and Finley-Hervey 2005).

We pose that tradition and culture, specifically entangled with religious values observed in Islam, intersect in the Arab woman whether in a Muslim country or abroad. The duty and social pressure to be a mother, to care for family and husband, to have children and raise them, defines the traditional role of women, sanctioned by Shariah, by mullahs, by the law, by men, grandmothers and mothers, in sum the whole society. Furthermore, it can be also sanctioned by the high rates of divorces and separations in the Western world, where women have trespassed the private sphere and have incorporated to the labour market.

Mernissi argues:

"Historical Islam has deeply ingrained the fear of female sexuality in the male consciousness, describing patriarchy in Islam as an organized system which treats gender equality as violation of Islam's (pre-supposed) premise that women must remain

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<sup>1</sup> See the importance of women's employment to attain a change in their status within the household in patriarchal societies such as Afghanistan and Pakistan in "Making markets work for women: how push and pull strategies can support women's economic empowerment" (Faveri et Al. 2015).



under the authority of a male relative (father or husband) and that they must be spatially or socially confined and excluded from matters other than those pertaining to family” (Syed and Van Buren, 2014, 264).

We pose that Arab women (immigrant or not) live in the constant negotiation and re-edition of several concepts, whether they are conscious of it or not. Terms such as patriarchy, religion and family define and entangle the lives of the Arab women, positively and negatively. In fact, every woman feels and deals with the old statements of patriarchy and its remnants, the commandments of religion and the compromise of family duties. Nowadays, generally speaking, women do not have to choose anymore between family life or professional life; the promise of having it all leads women to a complicated juggling of these different, separate spheres.

Nonetheless, we also pose that entrepreneurship (along with other external factors cited above) is calling for a “silent revolution”. A first reason for this is that Arab women entrepreneurs are reinterpreting the Qur’an. As Syed and Van Buren posed (2014) “the real challenge lies in how narrow and patriarchal interpretations and practices of religion could be reformed to bring about gender equality” (263). In second place, women are conquering the dream of being breadwinners themselves. Back to 1982, Mernissi stated that “the basic, and the seemingly harmless, fantasy on the part of a woman of being a wage-earner in a Muslim society is definitely the first step in a silent but deep and overwhelming subterranean revolution” (in Rhouni 2010). If women enter the economic scenario, then tradition is altered, patriarchy is shattered and family redefined, given that men are not anymore the only family provider. This “subterranean revolution” alters also the politics and power spheres. Mernissi explains “the Moroccan husband is faced with anxiety-provoking ambiguities since the law (Moudawana, 1957, revisioned in 2004) gives him the right to control his wife’s movements, whereas economic reality confiscates it” (Rhouni, 2010). A woman setting her foot into public space changes everything and calls for a reediting and actualization of the world, as we know it. For

Mernissi there is a “strong correlation between power relations underlying gender dynamics and the authoritarian form of power exercised at the level of politics in the context of neopatriarchy” (Rhouni, 2010, also in Gray and Finley-Hervey 2005). As Mernissi herself stated that “step” introduces chaos in both public and private sphere, because the frontier is altered. The concept of frontier is a very interesting one in the work of Mernissi because the frontier stands for power or powerlessness. We do not say this only happens in the Arab world, but these negotiations are heavier in these countries due to the intermingling, as we stated before, of the political and religious powers that both regulate private and public spheres, in a legal pluralistic society. According to Gray and Finley-Hervey (2005), “it is central to recognize that Muslim social customs are based on the societal and familial dominance of males” (205), though, ironically enough, the factor of economic necessity and the blocked entry to business ventures (public space) results in entrepreneurship as a new way to enter into the work/public sphere. We will come back to this point later in the paper.

Several studies assert the idea that the Qur’an and some interpretations of it “exaggerate the sexual dimension of a woman while obliterating her economic identity” (Rhouni 2010). This androcentric conception of femininity nurtures women’s unemployment and other economic circumstances, as the one stated above (virility equals financial power) and also the eroticization of gender relations. As Rhouni states “women’s access to work space (...) is often experienced as sexual aggression in a society in which women’s bodies (...) have been controlled by the traditional division of space”. In this sense, the EBRD 2015 states, “harassment in the workplace constitutes a large obstacle for working women. A woman interviewed for the study said, “no one is interested about the thoughts or education of women. What draws attention is a woman’s body” (76). Also the consideration of women as “legal minors” is a considerable obstacle in the professional life of women in MENA countries. The need for permission to move outside the private space constraints the possibilities of developing any kind of work as well as the obtainment of permissions to loan money to launch a business.

In sum, the “dream of a regular paid job” (Rhouni, 2010) is not so easy to obtain for a woman in the Arab countries. According to the report of EBRD 2015 in the MENA countries, these are the main factors that leave “little room for women to engage fully in the labour market” (29):

- Roles within households
- Care burden
- Household chores
- Sexual division of labour

First, options are reduced to those jobs that do not require an exposure in public. Islamic customs do not permit most mingling of the sexes in public, so “women are usually not part of business transactions” (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005, 205). Secondly, the interplay of family life and professional life determine the options available to women.

“Women tend to prefer working in lower-paid positions in the public sector (i.e. civil service jobs) to the private sector because public sector jobs in the region tend to offer them more stability, more paid family leave and finance and credit options. The public sector also tends to have working hours that may facilitate better work and life balance” (EBRD 2015, 8).

In other words, the familial advantages of a job are a major condition to accept that job, to procure a better balancing of private/public life. Thirdly, “the [MENA] region is also characterized by the heaviest burden and the highest gender gap for unpaid work (household chores and care work) resulting in a large time deficit, which works to the detriment of income-generating activities” (EBRD 2015, 8). At this point it is also interesting to note that in the MENA region women devote a maximum of 5 hours 24 minutes per day to household chores and care, against only 40-50 minutes attributed to men. When compared to the average in OECD countries, there is an important statement: women devote nearly the same amount of time (4h 55) per day cooking, cleaning or caring but the main difference is that on average, men in OECD countries spend 2h35 minutes per day doing unpaid work. A study in Tunisia even shows that “men who did not have a job would not take on a larger share of the household

chores” (EBRD 2015, 142). This fact differs from most OECD countries, being a determinant factor given that if Muslim men do not support household chores and care, women are overwhelmed and cannot perform a regular paid job. Generally, both in the OCDE countries and in the MENA countries, woman today has to learn how to “juggle” with different facets of her lives, all important and relevant to her, but we pose the hypothesis that the migrated Arab-Islamic woman has more negotiations to be made: religion, tradition, culture, new host country, roots, work, family, etc...all these spheres conform a complex way of living with in which she has to learn to tackle her possibilities. Furthermore, the understanding and support of the partner is what patriarchy has still its hold on. “The unequal burden of unpaid work is the result of the traditional status of women in a patriarchal social setting” (EBRD 2015, 143). We state that men in the MENA region are struggling with this new scenario, while in most OCDE some changes and stereotypes, though not vanquished at all, are being already renegotiated, as some conclusions from our exploratory study will demonstrate.

In sum, all those “frontiers” which a woman must trespass to attain independency and a certain economic status can and are already being surpassed through entrepreneurship. Some authors have stated that entrepreneurship is “a new frontier for Muslim women” (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005, 205) being a real phenomenon in countries like Arabia Saudi and UAE, also in Morocco and other countries from the MENA region as data revealed above.

Mernissi (1940-2015) argued all her life for a re-interpretation of the Qur’an to lead to a new status of women within the Islamic society. It is interesting to note that Arab women entrepreneurs are re-interpreting the Qur’an for a more individual interpretation of Islamic teachings and their practical applications to pursue their entrepreneurial ventures.

In fact, Tlaiss’s paper (2015) main result is that Islamic teachings derived from the Qur’an, as individually interpreted by Arab women entrepreneurs “created the boundaries within Islam that accommodate their entrepreneurial activities” (872) and by doing so “gained validation for

their entrepreneurial careers, guidance on the ethical management of their businesses, and a shield from the traditional interpretations of Islam” (Íbid.). Tlaiss (2015) recalls for “a need for a better understanding of how women’s entrepreneurship does not conflict with socio-cultural or religious norms and how the environment can contribute to supporting this phenomenon” (874). In the end, Arab women are trying to demonstrate that they can juggle the public and private spheres, without minimizing or neglecting one for the other and viceversa, and also re-interpreting the main prescriptions of Islam; we pose that the “silent revolution” has begun.

## **METHOD**

The method of qualitative research employed in this study consists of a set of case studies, using the methodology design advanced by Yin (2009), based on a collection of personal accounts from individuals that meet pre-defined criteria through face-to-face interviews, using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborn, 2007).

Qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources, investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses that allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. This is the reason why we use this method, because scarce studies exist analyzing our study phenomenon and different lens of inquiry.

Cope’s (2011: 608) use of interpretative phenomenological research is justified with “the strength of a qualitative research design such as this lies in its capacity to provide situated insights, rich details and thick descriptions. Richness is provided by paying close attention to both context and process [...]”. As our unit of analysis is “the Arab women entrepreneur”, this methodology allows the researcher to empirically achieve a better understanding of the main

reasons that led an Arab women to start a business in Spain and its relation with the context and how they overcome potencial cultural barriers.

We developed seven case studies in order to explore differences within and between cases. The goal is to replicate findings across cases. We choose carefully the cases because we aim to predict similar results across cases, or predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2003). In order to construct the case studies we conduct interviews, which are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses (McNamara, 1999). We use a general interview guide approach - the guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee. We developed the semistructured interview guide on the basis of a literature review and input from community partners of the "arab women entrepreneurs".

Our study population was Arab women embarked on entrepreneurial projects working in Madrid. However as we conducted a qualitative study we don't have the aim to interview all of them, but only the necessary women in order to have a more in-depth comprehension of the different factors that influence in their entrepreneurial decision. We cannot claim to have fully saturated the whole categories of these factors but we pretend to identify the most relevants in relation to our conceptual framework.

We have been conducting seven interviews (one for case) over a three-month period (September to November 2015). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were regularly conducted with Arab women working as entrepreneurs in Spain or who have worked as entrepreneurs. These women's have very different backgrounds, including different ages; different origin, educational and social level and they work in very different activities. They were identified

with the aid of Casa Árabe and through the researchers' personal contacts. Their names have been altered for the purpose of confidentiality. The interviewees were first asked some demographic questions including personal questions about age, marital status, education, and social backgrounds, the nature of their business, their previous employment, and when they started their current business. The interviewees were then asked questions pertaining to their motivations and what drove them to open their own businesses, the impediment that they faced, their success stories, critical moments in business, and frustrations. Respondents were also asked to provide details about conflicts between their work and families and what they believed to be the best coping mechanisms. Many open-ended questions were asked allowing them to elaborate on the issues raised (Itani, 2009).

The interviews aimed at probing four key issues:

- (1) What are the main barriers that Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain encounter at startup?
- (2) To what do Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain attribute their success?
- (3) What are the satisfactions and frustrations that Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain face in their attempts to start their ventures?
- (4) What recommendations can be made to alleviate Arab women entrepreneurs' situation and career opportunities? (Itani, 2009).

Data Analysis we used a 6-step thematic content analysis to identify themes representative of participants' perspectives on pathways to jail. After a subsequent round of independent coding, the team met to compare initial themes and reached consensus themes. Interviews and iterative analyses continued until saturation of major themes was achieved. We followed the pattern suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1989): organization of the data, generating categories, themes, and patterns, and searching for alternatives results.

Participants gave oral consent and completed a brief demographic characteristic survey and all participants were interviewed at length (between 1.5 and 3 hours) through a semistructured interview with a trained female research assistant. The interview guide contained open-ended questions with set probes designed to explore motivations and experiences regarding their specific problematic.

The interviews were taped and later transcribed. The research questions included examining the values and meanings of entrepreneurship and family or the lack of, motivations, education, roots, experiences, etc. The data collection took place in their context (Casa Árabe) or in their own houses or companies, in order to facilitate them an appropriate environment to communicate their life experiences.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

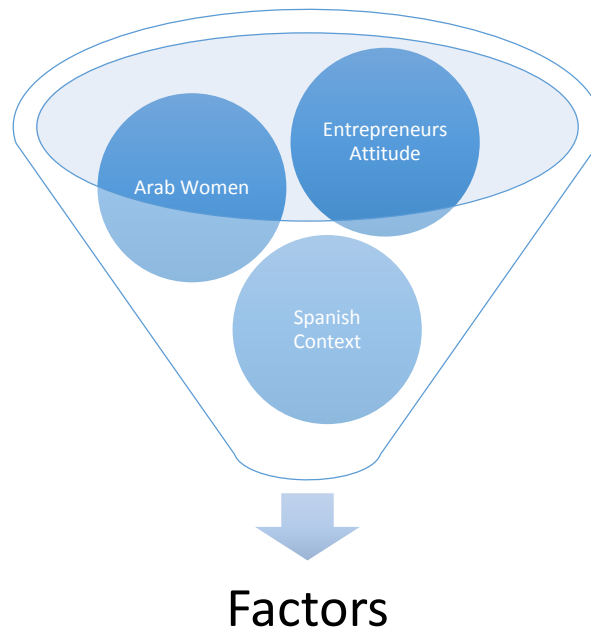
This section examines the results from our study of Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain, elaborated on the responses from the interviews concerning their motivations to become entrepreneurs and other factors that influence their development in their professional careers.

Our sample has been a diversified one, coming from four different countries (Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan), though with a large span of time living in Spain (from 10 to 33 years in Spain); the age also varies from 25 to 57 years old; they are all educated with secondary and tertiary education degrees; they confessed themselves Christians or Muslims, with a diversified level of commitment with religion; the level of economic acquisition fluctuates between upper and lower-middle class; four out of six are married with two or three children maximum. Our sample implies a broad spectrum of opinions and points of view, but they share nonetheless common features that prove to create a certain pattern given that they partake similar factors that motivate their professional careers that constitute the key alternative results of the paper.



Categories emerging out of the case studies are three: Entrepreneurs' attitudes; Arab Women and Spanish context (figure 2). The factors that promote or constraint the entrepreneurship venture arise from the interrelation analysis of these categories, which we develop in the theoretical review.

Figure 2. Main Categories



Source: Own elaboration

Considering that pattern of Arab women in Spain, we pose that they are trespassing the different frontiers that culture, stereotypes and the environmental context are setting on them. The intersectionality of public and private spaces in their lives calls for a renegotiation of gender bias that they are performing themselves, finding their own path in the world of entrepreneurship and economic independence in Spain.

We identified some common factors in the process of this study that characterized the Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain, namely: education, personal ambition, work/family balance, economic necessity and social/cultural patterns.

These factors are exposed below. Following Noguera's classification (2013), we separate these factors between formal and informal factors. Formal factors include education and economic

necessity; informal factors include personal ambition, work/family balance and social/cultural patterns.

## **FORMAL FACTORS**

### **Education**

It has been shown that the effect of general education as measured in years of schooling on entrepreneur performance is positive (Van der Sluis et al., 2006; Van der Sluis and Van Praag, 2007), and business training is effective for the performance of people who applied for microfinance to start their own business (Karlan and Valdivia, 2006).

Our complete sample has pursued studies in Western countries (USA or Spain), two-thirds of the women driven by their own families to attain a good level of education and languages. One-third was motivated by their own desire to pursue their dreams of working, even though their families did not support them. The main reason for immigrating to Spain has been education and languages. Aisha has pursued her dream of creating her own clothes to tap into the niche market of Muslim clothing in Spain. She asserts that she always liked fashion and she learnt how to sew from seeing her female family members do it. It has been in Spain where she has pursued a grade in Pattern Making and Fashion, reaching high grades and success. She is now an entrepreneur with her own registered trademark, even though her family does not support her working. The case of Aisha adapts to the description Al-Dajani (2013) utilizes for displaced women that utilize “heritage entrepreneurship”, in the sense that entrepreneurship is a form of earning money but also “preserving and celebrating a cultural heritage” (505) through her designs (which she saws) for observant-Muslim women.

Amina declares herself as religious but not traditional, “we have adapted to Spain”. She had an entrepreneurial venture leading her own take-away restaurant. She held her “modern” and open-minded views on business brought along problems with some Muslim clients in the restaurant, where one of her clients asked for Arab music to be played and being denied the request, she was menaced. She asserts:

“I’ve been raised in Spain and I know a man is not more than me, or knows more than me for being older. If you trust in yourself, no one scares you”.

Imani was born in Spain, her father being Lebanese and her mother Spanish. She states that she has always got to explain her roots:

“I have always been from here (Spain) but when someone knows my surname, he/she identifies it as someone different and begins to judge me”.

She also explains the cultural biases she encounters:

“I’m from Spain and from Lebanon, but here in Spain people assume I’m Lebanese and there (Lebanon) people assume I’m Spanish”.

Imani’s family has a modern facet:

“My father has not taught us Arabic, he wanted us to learn English, he is very open-minded”. She also struggles with the veil: “If you wear the veil here, people judges you only for wearing it; but to keep your mind at peace, you have to step outside (from Lebanon), it helps you being calm”.

Alma is thankful for her language skills, meaning that it has opened all the doors outside. She also asserts that she has been raised in an open-minded family, not very religious.

“I’m an entrepreneur since the moment I was born, I make things to perdure and there is a continuous movement, like a river, I don’t want still water”.

She also asserts that the problematic that an Arabic women encounters has to deal with education, not religion.

Hana has an extense CV, being a University teacher, former politician and immigration expert in Spain. She declares herself Spanish “though with Jordan in my heart”. She was a former teacher of rights and laws for illiterate immigrant Arab women in Spain.

“I used to teach them the law of their countries, though it is not ratified by the mullahs...they didn’t know anything about that...there is a difference with the women that go to school and speak Arabic and French, they have a higher level”.

She also asserts she is open-minded and that her language skills opened the door for her “it is the door to the exterior world”.

Higher education along with language skills is positively associated with entrepreneurial ventures in our sample. Also, the positive encouragement of the parents to study abroad is determinant for Arab women to undertake new professional ideas.

### **Economic necessity**

As we stated before in the paper, economic necessity is a game-changer, in the sense that it can open the door to a regular paid job for an Arab woman. Economic necessity can alter the private/public frontier. If to sustain the family, an Arab woman has to step outside her home, the roles can be altered. Nevertheless, that work must be a respectable job, approved by the Shariah and the Qur'anic norms of living.

Alma stated in the interview that when the family is in an economic necessity, men do not tell women not to work.

“Roles in the Arab world are heavy, women take money home, educates the children, so if there is money enough, women do not work outside the house. The rightful job is the one where there are no men, no alcohol, not in public space with men involved...a catering company is a good option, for example. It is also true, it is not the same if you have been living in Spain ten years or if you've just arrived. But the Qur'an states that man is the provider and the woman has to take care of her husband, but sometimes or in other countries is just the opposite depending on the economic necessity”.

Alma also acknowledges their role as providers for their parents back in Tunisia, if there is an illness or other problematic.

Aisha comes from a lower-middle class family. Thus in order to pursue her entrepreneurial venture she works as a waitress to continue to develop her fashion project. She finances her business, still with little profits. She thinks it is a question of time to be known and to continue working hard.

Shirin has also been discriminated by her American colleagues. They didn't understand why Shirin was working outside home with her jewelry shop, given that she had a husband that provided for her and her two children

“they didn’t understand and that drove them crazy. Now I think what matters most is your personal project, with communication and organization you move it forward. For me there were no difficulties in setting my shop, I had some help. I wanted to do it for personal fulfillment, and also to set an example for my kids”.

In other words, the fact of having spent some years in Spain, accompanied by economic necessity in the family, can lead to accept a changing in the roles, altering the frontier of man/breadwinner, woman/caregiver. In order to attain success in this change, it must be accompanied by a more egalitarian distribution of household chores and care.

## **INFORMAL FACTORS**

### **Personal ambition**

Entrepreneurs are characterized as creative and imaginative people, who are high in social competence (Baron, 2000) with a prevailing need for autonomy; freedom and independence in order to escape from “...organizational constraints limiting their potential” (e.g. Chapman, 2000; Longenecker et al., 1988). In the case of our sample, the role of personal ambition plays an essential part in our sample, probably due to the fact that they have to overcome important obstacles to pursue their entrepreneurial ventures.

Aisha affirms that what is paramount is to have a clear mindset about what do you like and go for it, paired with ambition and perseverance.

“I’m searching for personal fulfillment, something that fulfills me, which I like and that is mine”. “I realised that here in Spain, a lot of Muslim women don’t dress properly because they don’t find clothing that fits them. Then I thought that I know the customs, our own taste, our needs as Muslim women, so I thought I could do something about it, change something, contribute to offer a new image of the Muslim woman...that’s where I started”.

Aisha states “I want to make something that fulfills me, and fashion does it, I have plenty of ideas, illusions and challenges”. She is young but ambitious,

“in Valencia and Spain I’m already known, now I want to go abroad, for example Morocco, Dubai where my real target is, but also Paris...also the European woman, I

want to be known in the whole world, because I want my trademark to create employment and richness, tapping a real niche market, that is my profesional ambition”.

Furthermore, Aisha poses to change what Muslim women wear in order to change the stereotypes with which they are perceived in the Spanish society: “I want to change the stereotyped Arab woman, always at home and dressed in that way...with no personality...”.

The case of Amina has been a different one. After closing her take-away restaurant because of the train bombings of Madrid in 2004 she dreams of becoming again self-employed,

“If I could, I would be an entrepreneur...I have the ideas, I don’t have the money...”.

Imani H., as an important film-maker in Spain, also known abroad, is interested in “how art can diffuse stories that have not been told, or have been wrongly told...”. She finds herself in an advantageous position for having Spanish and Lebanese cultural backgrounds,

“we have to tell something that if not were for us it wouldn’t have been told. It is that space that we are given as people telling a story as Spanish-Lebanese women. You tell an ordinary story, so that you emphasise with the other; the stories we tell through our documentaries are human stories, not of violence, but with a high emotional component”.

Alma is a strong-minded Tunisian woman. “I knew I could not fail, I’m used to work on a goal-driven basis, I’m my own employer”. Alma used to work for MNCs that hired her for her language skills. Now she’s in charge of the language school of Casa Árabe in Madrid. “I’m always alert, always with new projects and ideas, it’s a fertile land. But in Spain people are really attached to their payroll, I see that as a stagnation. I’m happy because since I’m in Spain I’ve employed four teachers”. Alma is also mother of triplets. In the interview, she explained how she managed her personal and professional life. “When I gave birth to my kids, I had to settle with my classes in Casa Árabe, and I only accepted night jobs, from 6pm onwards, when my husband returned home from work. During the day I stayed with my babies”. Alma is a hard-worker for a twofold reason: economic necessity and personal ambition.

“I want to improve every single day, for my family, for my future, for my family in Tunisia. I can’t stop, I’m a nervous person, I work from Monday to Saturday. There are a lot of women like me, they are forgotten though”.

Alma does not obviate the natural role of mothers, she believes babies have to be with their mother. “I have progressed in my life because I’ve had some help but also because I sleep 5 hours per day!. It depends on the person and the resilience he/she has. You don’t have to be scared but this has to do with the education”. We highlight the following quote that Alma stated:

“the Arab-Muslim woman, in order to progress has to sacrifice the family environment or her own personal life (marriage, etc) or to stand up and not continue with all your profesional achievements...I haven’t sacrificied my personal life because I had very clear that I would marry whenever I could”.

Shirin used to have a jewelry business in Madrid that was open for twelve years. She also shares some character features with the other women from the sample, that is, strong character, open-minded, extrovert, confident and hard-worker.

In other words, Arab women in Spain share the common dream of any woman of attaining something that is theirs in their own right, juggling family and work, in perfect harmony.

## **Family**

Family entanglements are one of the factors that are harder to deal with. Not only the obligations and responsibilities derived from the caring of the parents and siblings but the right to develop their own personal life, without being judged for taking the path of developing the professional project before it is developed the personal project.

Muslim fashion designer Aisha had to fight hard for her dreams,

“little by little I have tried to be understood by my family, I’ve been a rebel saying what I wanted. When my father told me to marry or to work, I told him I wanted to study; he didn’t agree, I have to go out of my house. I was destroyed, my father didn’t talk to me in six months, he didn’t want to know anything about me, my mother cried a lot...but in my mind it was all clear, it is not like I’m doing something wrong, I want to create my own life, what I like, to take my own decisions...”.

It is interesting to note how Aisha had to step outside of her father’s house to pursue her dream, to leave the paternal/patriarchal house/sphere to live her professional life. “Finally, my father had to understand. He is very religious, I’m religious too, Muslim to the bone, but here life changes, I can’t live here like I’m in Morocco, this is other world...it is impossible, or you go mad or you confined yourself at home without doing anything or you get married”. Aisha

emphasized the transgression it means to step out of your father's house if it is not to get married. "In Morocco, if you go out of your house it is to get married and if not...you are not respected anymore". Now, she believes she is never getting married.

"As an observant Muslim women to get married now is nearly impossible. I used to have a boyfriend. He told we could get married and continue working from home...in the fashion world is impossible".

The strong desire of reaching far in the fashion world, to have her own business, to grow and to pursue some big company in the future induces Aisha to think she has to sacrifice her personal life, meaning not getting married and not having offspring. However, Aisha's strong will to pursue her professional career is solid enough to renounce the familial sphere.

The case of the family involvement in Amina's business venture was somehow different. In fact, the idea to create a take-away restaurant was to involve her mother in something professional, after a long disease. She nevertheless asserts that she would never undertake a business again with the family, "there was no account control, there were some disputes...I would launch a business again by myself".

Alma affirms that Arab women's lives have to facets: the professional one and the social and familial one. It is also true that the household burden is very hard to women in general, Muslim or not, or married to a Muslim man or Christian one.

"It is very complex for the Arab-Muslim woman. If you ever come back to your country, even though you are 50 years old, you have to say you haven't had any boyfriend, nor sexual relations, nor even drink or smoke. There are double standards of morality, two faces... Women in the Muslim world go through two different phases: first you are under your father's rules, under his roof. Then you get married, and it all depends on your husband. It depends if he's open minded or not. The same happens with Spanish men. The latter is also hurt if his wife succeeds more than him".

Nevertheless, Alma acknowledges that she is not the boss at her home "I'm in charge of my children: their education, health, clothing, etc. But I'm not used to control my husband because my mother did not control my father or my brothers...". Hana's testimony also matches with Alma's view on Spanish men, "I've escaped from patriarchy and I'm married to one of them...but he (her husband) was happy that I wanted to do things. He was a pilot, I used to



spend many hours alone, that's why I started a business, a language school...". She combined her work and raised her two children. "I've been dedicated to them until they have been eight years old, then, I came back to the university to study".

The case of Shirin has followed a different pattern. "When I was 40, we came back to Spain. My husband got a job in a bank and he did not have to travel so much, so I decided it was my momentum to launch my jewelry business". It is important to notice that she prioritize her personal/familial project first and then she decided to be an entrepreneur, to step on the public sphere.

"Nowadays, women are prioritizing their professional lives and later the personal one. I've done otherwise and I have also succeed".

However, she recognizes that she closed her jewelry business for the crisis of 2008 but also for personal matters, but she is very satisfied with her juggling of both spheres: "I have stepped out, I have been an entrepreneur. I now noticed that my female friends and other female members of my family look at me to know my opinion on things. But I also know that what matters is your personal project. Your family is what you do, it is your own project."

Alma also acknowledges that admiration that she provokes in her married sisters. "They used to call me spinster in Tunisia, that I was going to be a spinster all my life...but I have it clear in my mind: a woman without her own money, without her economic independence is no one, even more if you have grown in a poor family with no resources. I used to tell my sisters: don't get married, you have to work and study because if you earn less than your husband, you can't fight. He would tell you: why are you working? Your salary is nearly nothing, stay at home. Back in Tunisia, my father does not fight in front of me... I have earned that alone".

The implication of family in the process of deciding the future is a difficult one as it is implied in our sample. Stepping outside the private sphere to develop the professional project sometimes implies judgements and misunderstandings, even at a point of no return to the private sphere, meaning not attaining a complete personal project with a family on their own.

## Social and Cultural Patterns

Social and cultural patterns refer to the stereotypes these Arab women entrepreneurs have encountered in the process of creating their businesses, here in Spain or in their own families, ruled by other cultural traditions that curtail the professional motivations of our sample. This stereotyped vision of the Arab woman is another barrier that they must surpass in order to achieve their projects.

Aisha for example stated in the interview

“in Spain, other people see it weird, an Arab woman entrepreneur...some of them are happy, and others are not, really. In religion, I haven’t encountered prejudices, but when I was studying, some people told me to come back to my country and things like that. I think they were just envious, I won a prize and they didn’t like that”.

According to Imani’s view on the difference on entrepreneurship for men or women, she stated “in Spain I don’t see differences between a man or a woman, or that they discriminate you for being a woman...maybe in Morocco is different, but not here”.

Film-maker Imani asserted that “entrepreneurship has opened a lot of possibilities for us. Also, having the knowledge of that country (Lebanon) has allowed us to develop new projects”.

Alma stated that “religion and family are two obstacles you must surpass to succeed in your professional career”. However, she also indicated that not all the women wearing the veil are oppressed by their husbands. Some of her teachers in the Casa Árabe Language School wear the veil, they even have their PhD degree, and “they are not oppressed by nothing in the world. For them, it is a decision, their own decision”.

On the other hand, Alma stated there are some Moroccan women who do not talk Spanish, so they formed their own community, with their friends in the Mosque or in the market, “these women have not stepped out of their countries of origin, there are lots of them. But, their children they do step outside, go to university, etc, they do not stay at home, so generations are changing gradually”. Hana thinks otherwise,

“immigrant people are more conservative because they feel lonely, they come together and begin to be stronger...in a way we are going backwards. I have also given classes to some illiterate Moroccan people. The husband of one of the attendees asked

me for a class only for women. I told him we were in Spain, the law does not allow that. After some years, people, most of them, are adapted to Spain and they like it here. But in the home sphere, there are a lot of different things, different dynamics for the Arab woman”.

In other words, there is a need for gradually adapting the social customs and patterns in the host society for immigrant women and their families. This adaptation comes hand in hand with education, which does not mean to abandon the personal set of beliefs, but a mutual enrichment, of the host society and the immigrant woman.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored the entanglements Arab women entrepreneurs find in their daily juggling of family and work in Spain, and how have they crossed the boundaries that surround them. One key implication of this study is that informal factors such as culture, social norms and family context affect specifically the migrant Arab woman in the Spanish context. It is a fact that Arab women in Spain have to trespass different frontiers, specially the sphere of family. One of the reasons is that Arab women in Spain, with a long permanence in this country, have adopted the Spanish/Western way of life, in the sense of prioritizing a professional project over family life. Even though some of them proclaim themselves very religious, they accept a more accommodated view of Islam, contributing thus to the “changing role of Muslim women” (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005, 215). Also education and language skills have been key to develop their professional ventures, regardless of their economic position. It is important to highlight the crucial role of family, and how the husband has supported the personal ambitions of their wives (in a rather passive way), even though it is interesting also to notice that two thirds of our sample have left their entrepreneurial ventures, though they continue to be committed with a certain professional vein. The intersectionality of public and private spheres through entrepreneurship creates some conflicts, leading sometimes to a rupture of professional and familial life. In that case, professional/public venture hinders the entrance into the private/personal life. In a very feminist way, we could say that some cases require not only a

room in the paternal house, but a home of her own to pursue their professional and economic independence.

We pose that Arab women in Spain lack the necessary impulse from the entrepreneurial ecosystem, so active now especially in Madrid. They do not receive financial aid, nor training courses or information. In a positive way, it must be said that there are no legal restrictions on Arab women's entrepreneurship or gender bias that stop them from working and pursue their dreams. The social norms dictated and preserved by their families are not strong enough in a liberal country to influence their decisions to attain a professional career. In this sense, it is also a Western pattern, for good or for bad, meaning men is not the only breadwinner, women has not only a reproductive role. Women, regardless of their origin, can step in the Spanish "public" sphere, though it is up to them to leave that facet of their lives if their personal life requires it. So Arab women entrepreneurs share common challenges with their Spanish counterparts but with the aggravating factor of social/cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities in the private sphere. Nevertheless, personal ambition and education enhance professional advancement, and if there is offspring, men in the OECD countries are expected to help more with childcare. Another important conclusion is that entrepreneurship can amplify women's impact on their closer community, as it is also supported in Al-Dajani's contribution.

In sum, the "silent but deep revolution" is taking slow steps towards a higher degree of empowerment of Arab women in Spain, impacting their families, society and also economic environment, though as Al-Dajani states in one of her papers "it is not a panacea to challenge patriarchy or a solution to inherent subordination" (2013, 518).

This paper contributes to women's entrepreneurship from a gender-aware framework based on the voices of the Arab women themselves. This study of Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain is a work in progress; for the moment we have conducted these interviews though we are conscious that more fieldwork is needed in order to achieve the saturation index and more rigorous conclusions. However we pose that Arab women entrepreneurs in Spain studied

generally are subject to more constraints and frontiers than their Spanish counterparts and also from other parts of the world.

Nonetheless, we believe the empowerment cycle through entrepreneurship has begun and it is slowly but firmly encouraging women to pursue their own economic independency, so that the “not-so silent revolution” which Timmons referred to twenty years ago to define entrepreneurship in economic terms is now transforming in that “overwhelming subterranean revolution” that Mernissi envisioned, when women will attain their economic independency, in an elegant exercise of juggling of different spheres, changing the gender dynamics in Western and Eastern countries.

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