

Careers of Algerian Women Managers: The Psychological Drivers of Discrimination in Professional Careers

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Abstract: *Today, the texts governing the Algerian economy claim equality between men and women in the labour market: no training, no profession, and no position of responsibility is legally closed to women. Algerian law prohibits all discrimination in hiring and career development. The imbalance has even been reversed in one essential respect: women are entering the university field more than men and are more successful. However, they account for only 19% (ONS, 2020) of the working population and are still only marginally present in positions of responsibility in the public and private sectors. However, this progressive and constant access of women to so-called 'male' bastions has led to the emergence of a professional category, namely female managers. The reason that led us to choose this research object is the desire to understand and apprehend the professional pathway of this category of women (executives), to attempt, through professional and family representations and perceptions, to understand the identity construction of women occupying executive positions. In this perspective, empirical research built on a qualitative approach, based on semi-directive interviews with 20 women executives working in a public paramilitary institution, appeared relevant. This research aimed to understand the career path through the professional experiences of women managers insofar as it highlighted professional trajectories interacting with family life and different professional rhythms in terms of career. More generally, how women managers in this institution articulate their private and professional life and place them in an organisational context. In this sense, studying the practices and social representations of women managers means understanding the codes, values, and ideologies that women's work occupies in Algerian society as a whole and this paramilitary institution.*

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Introduction

Today, the laws organising the Algerian economy allow for equality between men and women in all spheres of public life, particularly in the labour market. To this end, no restrictions are placed on the choice of training, the choice of professions or access to positions of responsibility. Moreover, Algerian law prohibits all discrimination in hiring and career development. Inequality has even been reversed in one essential segment: Women have invested more than men in the academic field; they are more numerous and prosperous. However, they account for only 19% of the working population and are still not very present in positions of responsibility, either in the public or the private sector. However, this social architecture has led to the emergence of a professional category of women managers.

However, the feminisation of this category has not systematically led to a comparison with the careers of male managers. The trajectories of women managers are marked by inequalities in their advancement, characterised by horizontal segregation, in this sense, a high concentration of women managers in specific types of jobs, and vertical segregation, marked by a scarcity of women in high strategic positions. Despite the presence of this segregation, the emergence of this professional category had an impact on career patterns in terms of the sexual division of labour, the relationship to the family, the relationship of women to their careers, and the managerial models developed in an attempt to reconcile a demanding professional life with stable family life (Laufer & Fouquet, 2001) by attempting to put in place individual action logics that respond to career success strategies by circumventing a complex organisational system.

To this end, empirical research on the careers of female managers working in a public paramilitary institution seemed relevant to us since it allowed us to highlight professional trajectories that interact with family life and the different professional rhythms in terms of career. More generally, how women managers in this institution articulate their private and professional lives and place it in an organisational context. In this context, we ask the following question: How do women managers build their professional careers while considering their family lives?

Through this article, our work consists of shedding light on and questioning, beyond the sole object of women's work, the whole relationships between men and women and the relationship models between them. In this sense, studying the practices and social representations of female managers means grasping the codes, values and ideologies that women's work occupies in the Algerian society as a whole and in this paramilitary institution in particular. It is either a question of reproducing the family pattern, differentiating oneself from it, or finding a compromise between reproduction and differentiation. To do this, we will propose a brief review of the literature on the concept of career, in the second part, we will set out the methodology adopted in the framework of this research and at the end, we will present the results.

Literature Review

According to J.M. Peritti (2001), a career “is a succession of assignments for an employee. It appears to be a permanent compromise between the company's needs, the available potential and the desires expressed by the employees. This compromise is expressed by recruitment decisions, training and internal professional mobility”. Through the literature, we identify two approaches to careers: a traditional approach and a modern approach. In the traditional approach, Guerin and Wils (1992) consider that a career is linked to a stable trajectory, in the same employment sector and with a single employer who offers all opportunities in exchange for service. The traditional trajectory is defined by vertical advancement to positions with higher levels of responsibility and better pay benefits (Hall, 1976). From these definitions, it appears that the career is dependent on individuals without considering the contextual elements in which people evolve. It is also part of an objective logic marked by objective and stable benchmarks: grades, salaries, hierarchical levels and streams. This objective career refers to the bureaucratic conception of organisations (Guerin and Wils, op. cit.).

In modern logic, it is a question of considering new organisational forms, the multiplication of job categories and the inherent competencies. In this context, a career is defined as “the sequence of work-related activities and behaviours and associated values, attitudes and aspirations of an individual throughout his or her life” (Gutteridge, 1988). It refers to a subjective content of a career incorporating how individuals perceive their

career and the meaning they attach to it (Schein, 1971, cited in Wils and Tremblay). Schein (1971) was the first author to consider the career as an interaction between individuals and the organisation in which they evolve. Thus, the individual aspect originates in personal experiences during his or her professional life. Indeed, the individual becomes an actor in his career according to his values and motivations. Thus, according to Schein, the ultimate responsibility for developing one's career lies with the individual. However, none of these approaches has integrated the gendered aspect of careers and the place of women in the career path, and some authors believe that these models do not integrate the reality and experience of women (Bastid, (2004); Bender, (2004); Belghiti-Mahut and Landrieux Kartochian (2008). Thus, the career presents a non-linear aspect, as it is interrelated with other spheres of activity in women's lives (Spain et al., 2011).

One of the first theorists to focus on women's careers was Super (1957), who highlighted the correlation between women's careers and family life. It was followed by various authors who highlighted the specificity of women's careers, most notably Hall (1976). To this end, in his developmental approach to careers, he demonstrates that there can be conflicting or compatible interactions between the evolution of women's careers and the different stages of family life. In this sense, at the time when a woman's career is at its peak, she is faced with trade-offs in her family life that coincide with a very strong family demand.

To this end, career plateauing and self-placation appear, defined by certain authors who use different definitions to characterise this phenomenon. According to Peretti (2001), an employee is in a career plateau situation when his or her promotion prospects in the company are limited. Cerdin et al. (2009) refer to a feeling of the end of professional life. Some refer to blocking vertical hierarchical evolution (Veiga, 1981; Tremblay & Roger, 1992). Others consider that beyond this objective measure, the plateau corresponds to a feeling of no longer being able to progress in terms of responsibilities or salary (FERENCE et al., 1977; Feldman & Weitz, 1988; Roger & Tremblay, 2004; Lemire et al., 2003). Hall (1985) and Slocum et al. (1985) even consider that the absence of horizontal mobility can be seen as a form of capping, insist on the need to distinguish between objective and subjective capping by referring to the work of Ettington (1992), which shows that, even if they are objectively capped, people who still hope to progress are better able to cope with their objective capping situation than those who have little hope of progressing. At that time, the author, pointing out that family responsibilities fall mainly on women, shows that it is at the time when women enter the career establishment phase, which requires significant professional involvement, that they are also subject to the strongest family demands. It also states that men increasingly share this pressure as dual-career families become more common.

The literature also identifies obstacles and barriers that are due to implicit or unconscious gender stereotypes and that can be symbolic or experienced (Kiczková, 2011: 127-131). The difference lies in the importance of their descriptive and directive components. While the descriptive components are based on the assumption that there are differences between a group of men and a group of women whose different competencies, skills and everyday behaviours will be described, the directive components indicate how men and women should behave in order to be 'real' men and 'real' women. Descriptive components are found in lived stereotypes, while directive components are found in symbolic stereotypes. Both types of stereotypes can be found in the perceptions and thoughts of the interviewees (men and women, employees, and managers of both sexes) about the company and the individual. Gender stereotypes are closely related to horizontal and vertical segregation (ILO) and the perception of competencies and skills as being exclusively or mainly adapted to a given gender.

Methodological Framework

According to Dubar (1998), there is a variety of discourse and practices on the part of respondents classified in the same socio-professional category. It is, therefore, essential to establish categories from the interviews based on "categories of verbal expressions" used in the interviews. We opted for a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews for this research. A qualitative survey was carried out with 20 female executives working in an extensive Algerian public administration with strong geographical branches, recognised in this executive category on the statutory level and coming from the same institution in different fields of activity. Our interviewees were not selected based on statistical representativeness.

This research aimed to understand the career path through the professional experiences of women managers. According to the nature of the object studied, we used theoretical sampling, which assumes that the theoretical corpus supports data collection. The aim is not representativeness or quantitative generalisation of results but to coordinate existing theories with data. Ultimately, the interviewees form a heterogeneous group that enriches the research. They work in different functions within the paramilitary administration, have different family situations, are of different ages, come from different social backgrounds and all work in Algiers.

The interviews we conducted resulted in a theoretical saturation or no relevant information. Thus, 20 interviews were conducted in the context of this research (see table below).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Position	Degree	Number of Children
Interview 1	Deputy Director	Institute of Customs and Fiscal Economics	02
Interview 2	Head of Office	License + access to customs school	01
Interview 3	Director	National School of Administration	without children
Interview 4	Head of Office	PhD	04
Interview 5	Head of Office	License	without children
Interview 6	Head of Office	License	02
Interview 7	Head of Office	DEA	03
Interview 8	Head of Office	License	without children
Interview 9	Inspector	PhD	without children
Interview 10	Deputy Director	License	03
Interview 11	Head of Office	Master	04
Interview 12	Head of Office	Engineer	02
Interview 13	Head of Office	Engineer	03
Interview 14	Head of Office	Master	C
Interview 15	Deputy Director	Engineer	03
Interview 16	Head of Office	License	03
Interview 17	Head of Office	License	02
Interview 18	Head of Office	License	without children
Interview 19	Director	National School of Administration	without children
Interview 20	Head of office	License	02

Source: Compiled by the author

Based on our research objectives and questions, an interview grid was developed according to the specific themes we wished to address. Then, a series of questions related to these themes were drafted, selected and divided into seven themes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Topics Discussed During the Interviews

	Theme/Headings	Objectives
01	the educational trajectory	Aims to trace elements of socialisation at the family level
02	the professional trajectory	Aims to trace elements of socialisation at the organisational level
03	the Report to Work	Aims to trace elements of socialisation at the organisational level
04	access to positions of responsibility	Aims to determine the presence of perceived behavioural, emotional and cognitive differences between men and women in accessing and performing responsible positions
05	the quality and skills needed for the managerial function	Aims to determine the presence of perceptions in the elements required for success
06	reconciliation of work and family life	Aims to understand the perceptions they have of themselves within the family
07	professional perspectives	Aims to understand the different strategies developed to maintain the balance

Source: Compiled by the author

At the end of our analysis, we decided to look more closely at headings 3, 4, 5 and 6, where women managers' discourse is located, allowing us to highlight their career representations and experiences. We will carry out our analysis on this category of women executives to understand the concept of career through the prism of gender relations in this organisation by attempting to make a typology of professional trajectories through the prism of the family.

Analysis of the Results

In this administration, three hierarchical levels of available jobs reflect the architecture of the decision-making centres: the head of the office, deputy director and central director. The last two functions are left to the discretion of the supervisory authority, i.e., a central administration, while the first level is left to the discretion of the direct supervisor, i.e., the deputy director.

Our respondents, mainly heads of office, are inserted in heterogeneous professional fields, and do not have a common trajectory, either in training or professionally. It should be noted that the feminisation of this administration came late (at the beginning of the 2000s), and all those present before that date were admitted as standard bodies (not assimilated to the paramilitary corps). With the decision to open the competitive entrance exams to this administration to women, the integration of common bodies into the technical bodies was felt.

In the context of our research, in tracing the careers of our interviewees, we have observed unequal career lengths according to the age differentiation of our interviewees. Indeed, the youngest in our sample are in their thirties; the oldest have not reached their fifties. This disparity in career length means that we are facing a variety of career paths (from 5 to 22 years within the institution), characterised by organisational sedentariness, in the sense that they have constantly evolved within the customs organisation without considering leaving the sector. It is true that, from the interviews we conducted, there are few similarities between the life stories with variations in the perception of career progression or slowing down. However, the form of career and the general characteristics of the changes and strategies are considered, associated with the primacy given to the family pattern and the resulting compromise between professional and family life.

Women in this trajectory, representing a quarter of our sample, have university profiles from specialised and prestigious schools (Ecole Nationale d'Administration, Institut D'Economie Douanière et Fiscale) or with a technical qualification (computer scientist). They all have professional trajectories in the same institution (the majority having spent more than 15 years in this administration), and this is despite the importance of the changes that have marked this organisation (reorganisation, changes in customs texts, diversification of the missions attributed to the institution) since the beginning of their careers has also given them many opportunities to move up the hierarchy by accessing positions often reserved for men. It shows their ability to adapt and prove their loyalty to the institution. Access to power is often the result of an upward logic in which the issues of conquest, rivalry or conflict are not very present in favour of a logic certainly governed by human resources management but where loyalty to the institution is essential.

This trajectory is more progressive, passing through a broadening of skills and results (better mastery of the technicality of the function, increased knowledge of the texts governing the customs profession, etc.), which ensure legitimacy and extend the sphere of influence. Women in this group feel they are making a career on merit, with a strong professional conscience and highly appreciated results. The desire to help their teams progress also seems to be a strong motivation in their professional lives. Their qualities as local managers are highly developed and recognised. They are very attached to the values of the institution and its image and develop good relations with their superiors. From this point of view, these women, whom we describe as “conquerors”, give primacy to this type of professional relationship, the immediate objective of which is to learn the job and, in the long term, to become independent. Their status as 'women' is not an argument for choosing higher positions, but they seem satisfied with participating in organisational evolution.

As far as private life is concerned, those who are confronted with it seem to be able to reconcile private and professional life fairly well. In this trajectory, we are facing a 'homogenous' couple (with the same level of education) where the female career is as important as the male career, and they practice family logic with the cohabitation of the dual career. The spouses, like their wives, are involved in management, helping each other to bring up the children, excluding domestic tasks. These couples, in which professional and private life must be reconciled, reveal new forms of family organisation. Indeed, new marital arrangements must be found when neither the man nor the woman wants to give up their career while having a family life. These involve a greater investment by the man in the private sphere to allow a more equitable distribution of roles between fathers and mothers. In a way, the traditional model of male and female roles no longer exists in favour of the availability of one or the other. They work in a known environment where they are trusted to be there when needed. They often consider that asking for special working conditions when you are a mother is impossible, but they push women around them to progress.

Inhibited Trajectories. Studies have shown that female managers are at the heart of the greatest tensions, as they are heavily absorbed in their professional activities at work without being relieved of domestic responsibilities at home (Bozon, 2009), which creates tensions between work and family life and detrimental effects within the couple.

Women in this type of trajectory have a career path built up according to organisational circumstances and have found their career advancement and progression held back by a work-family conflict based on the husband's refusal to see his wife progress professionally beyond the position of office manager. It is a position with a hierarchical level of $n+1$, which does not require unfailing availability, as may be the case for management positions. The spouses of these women managers are holding back their progress, fearing that their work will influence their wives' ability to take on their family roles. Lack of time and availability are the root of recurrent conflicts in this type of andocentric couple. Female managers must organise their working time around the family organisation.

Contradictory Trajectories. In this category, women adopt a less voluntaristic career logic. They live within the institution without seeking power or recognition of their skills. In fact, among them, some women seek to create a comfort zone which allows them to reconcile their professional and private lives, especially for mothers and often concerns homogamous couples. To this end, professional career strategies are combined with the masculine (the spouse) and women in this category arrange their careers according to their spouse's and put the brakes on their ambitions. This voluntarist perspective allows them to adopt a strategy of voluntary withdrawal to protect their family or imposed by the institution. This imposed withdrawal comes from the organisational obstacles related to the wearing of the hijab, which discriminates against women managers in accessing higher-level positions of responsibility.

Discussion of the Results

All our interviewees put the reconciliation of work and family life at the heart of the concerns of all the mothers we met. Once they have become mothers, most women are obliged to make changes in their daily lives to deal with family contingencies. Therefore, they implement strategies better to manage personal and/or professional working time. The general strategy of these women with a high level of involvement in working life is to reduce family and domestic temporalities and increase work time. It is often to the detriment of social life and professional socialisation. The implementation of all these strategies shows the desire of women to continue working while playing an active role in their children's lives. If a professional mother feels torn between work and family and feels guilty about her high level of involvement in professional life, it is because of the social norms that link women to their role as mothers and educators.

The professional organisation fuels these inequalities in the assumption of domestic and family work, in this case, the paramilitary administration, and inherent in the adaptations imposed primarily on women; hence, as we have noted, barriers to certain hierarchical promotions for these women managers. On the other hand, their career profile is oriented towards 'laissez faire', and limited in the chances of accessing hierarchical positions, where responsibility and power are exercised. This value system, which creates norms of gender exclusivity in prestigious jobs and careers, reinforces men's "masculine identity" and constitutes grey areas for women's career paths.

However, if family constraints and the career management policy or lack of policy established by the paramilitary administration led to the exclusion or disinterest of women managers from the 'race for honours', the valorisation of skills leads women managers to construct strategies to regulate against this resistance. Most women managers display strong professional aspirations and constantly seek to reaffirm their status as managers within their institution. It emerges from this attempt at a constructed typology of the strategies developed by women managers that, tired of 'not being themselves' (Marry & Ehrenberg, 1998), they put in place various attitudes to overcome the links of resistance which cross the social and professional field. It is "a counter-effect, a sort of revenge of culture on social life, which pushes them to assert themselves. Their suffering would be at the origin of their capacity to resist" (Denieuil, P.-N.). These strategies constitute a dynamic defence against the hostility of their environment. In this respect, we have identified various types of attitudes depending on the situations these women managers face. First, the strategy of 'singularity' practised by some women managers is the 'strength of the wrist' action claiming equality in the face of male domination. In the second strategy, women managers adopt a strategy of circumvention, claiming non-discrimination through professionalism; they work through cunning to prove their know-how. We also noted the strategy of withdrawal chosen; this tactic incorporates the idea of social control by keeping out of the competition for power to maintain the balance of their family, usually by giving way to the spouse.

We have shown that while female managers have been pushed by their parents into educational projects, their fathers have passed on their values of success and 'assertiveness' in their day-to-day work and the legacy of a love of the job. These transmissions become assets when they are challenged by the spouse and the 'ancestral cultural' order of society. The various regulatory attitudes encountered among our female managers are imposed as individual logic to weaken the 'dominant' positions and develop positive openings. These socially constructed attitudes do not constitute a "voluntary" or "innate" identity position. These cultural defence strategies implemented by female managers act to make gender diversity more tolerable and increase the chances of social visibility. Our socio-empirical study shows that the traditional model is far from being dominant. On the other hand, the model that combines traditional and modern values is still practised by most female customs officers; it is, according to them, conceived as a process of change. The increasingly confirmed desire to carry out an activity outside the home is clear for women managers. It emanates from

affirming a manifestation of identity, allowing for self-esteem. This development indicates that women go beyond their traditional image to assert their innovative side. This conception is rather a sorting operation to create new ethics accepted and tolerated in all social classes in a society in full “transition”. Without rejecting the traditional model, but adapting it by modernising it, because it also turns out that any change remains fragile, the family maintains many of its functions and is constantly being traversed by compromises and negotiations that increasingly redefine family relations and social relations in the private and public spheres. Our findings have revealed certain questions about the differentiation of the professional trajectories of men and women managers. The practices and identity representations of the work sphere between men and women remain marked by inequalities, as do the trajectories and prospects, which remain different. One should note that several questions about these 'hard cores of resistance' in the higher professions remain unanswered. The lack of social debate on the issue leads to many ambiguities. Therefore, it would be interesting to continue this type of research to consolidate our results.

Conclusion

We have tried to confirm the existence of discrimination through the professional and family trajectories of our interviewed women to analyse the career structure of women managers. Indeed, despite their level of education and ability to occupy positions of responsibility, women managers encounter difficulties entering the professional hierarchy. Even though some women hold positions of responsibility, they do not fail to point out that daily life is a source of “frustration” and “stress”. Faced with this complex situation, they often aim for different strategies to overcome the knots of “resistance” and negotiate to establish their career path.

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