



Female Entrepreneur in Algeria: Impediments of Empowerment and Transcendence Challenges

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Received :25/01/2024

Accepted :28/05/2024

Abstract

The paper focused on revealing stereotypes and the problematic of the glass ceiling, as impediments to empowering female entrepreneurs in Algeria, and monitoring the current challenges facing women entrepreneurs in adverse environments, especially those related to the destruction of social legitimacy. Therefore, it was important to reveal it, and to highlight how it contributed to deepening the participation gap of men and women in the entrepreneurial field. The study concluded that the obstacles to empowering women with an entrepreneurial orientation are many and complex, but stereotypes entrenched in individual's still see entrepreneurial activity as a masculine practice, and she in turn determines the degree of legitimacy that is granted to women in entering a specific field or practicing a specific activity, within the circle of societal acceptability. However, the study found that there are some positive changes that support both genders in the field of entrepreneurial practice, but the degree of support/obstruction varies, from one activity to another, and from women entrepreneur to another.

✓ Keyword. Female entrepreneur, Stereotypes, Glass Ceiling, Challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a surge in discussions, both in media and academic spaces, about female entrepreneurship and businesswomen or female entrepreneurs in Arab societies in general, and Algeria in particular. There is a political movement towards supporting this socio-professional category. However, this supportive discourse does not negate the constraints and difficulties faced by these women, especially since the social environment, with its cultural particularities at the grassroots level, has not yet fully accepted the idea of women entrepreneurs.

This positive movement is institutionally manifested in the encouragement, funding, and support of women with entrepreneurial orientations in Algeria. This movement must consider the impacts of socio-cultural and economic dimensions in either facilitating or hindering this positive trend. Although the political discourse encourages the establishment of small and medium enterprises in various fields through different developmental policies and programs, female entrepreneurs face multiple challenges in their interactions with various actors and relevant institutions within somewhat hostile environments.

The socio-cultural environment is the most complex and the least responsive to change. Several categories still impede the emergence of female entrepreneurs in Algeria. Social rules, norms, and values, and the stereotypes they have shaped, play a significant role in the scepticism and constraints faced by these women, simply because they are women. If a female entrepreneur is defined as any woman who owns and manages a business or enterprise in a specific field of activity, the likelihood of her encountering stereotypes that question her ability to succeed in a complex and uncertain field makes every woman rethink her decision before embarking on a new venture in this area. This confirms that the risks for a woman entering the field of entrepreneurship are greater than those for a man.

Many women have a tendency to establish their own projects, but few have been able to actualize this due to the division of social roles based on gender, and the nature of social upbringing within nurturing families. These have established certain patterns of thinking, making what is desirable and legitimate subject to this fundamental division of roles, resources, and power. This paper aims to reveal various stereotypes and what are known as the 'glass ceiling' and 'glass wall', as invisible barriers facing female entrepreneurs in patriarchal societies, where these barriers have rendered women's presence in the entrepreneurial field modest and widened the existing gap between women and men in this newly emerging form of economic activity. It also aims to monitor the current challenges linked to

establishing the legitimacy of entrepreneurial practice, traditionally associated with masculinity.

The theoretical study begins with a general assumption about the reflections of the surrounding socio-economic environment and its role in shaping the category of female entrepreneurs in Algerian society on one hand, and its restricting role on the other. It explores the clash between economic necessities and the logic of involving various actors in the path of community development, against the prevailing cultural and normative patterns in a society that confronts modernity and clings to tradition, at least in certain cultural aspects that it seeks to highlight and preserve. This has created a system of distribution and division of roles, professions, resources, and authorities based on gender, granting legitimacy to these roles and access to resources based solely on gender, regardless of competence, inclinations, and orientations. This situation extends to all Arab countries, albeit to varying degrees.

Based on the above, we ask the following questions:

- What are the stereotypes that confront female entrepreneur in the Algerian context?
- How do the obstacles to the empowerment of female entrepreneur in the Algerian context manifest themselves?
- What are the various challenges that they face?

2. Why Female Entrepreneurs, Barriers to Empowerment, and Algerian Society?

The structure of this section revolves around the three terms, encompassing issues and intellectual debates that require examination and scrutiny to prevent interpretations and analyses that may not align with the intent of the article in invoking certain meanings and implications within specific viewpoints and not others. The three terms are female entrepreneurs, barriers to empowerment, and Algerian societies. In this section, the article aims to tackle the subject in its three parts to demonstrate the importance of dealing with female entrepreneurs as a cognitive subject. Why does it address the barriers to empowerment and their accompanying challenges? And why is the geographical context framed as "Algerian society" rather than Arab society?

2.1. Female Entrepreneurs as a Cognitive Subject

The aim of addressing female entrepreneurs as a cognitive subject is not to reinforce the discourse on the marginalization and exclusion of women, nor to study women as an ideological subject, nor feminism as a political topic. Instead, women

are specifically highlighted here as social actors with their own status and role in society, which is undeniably significant. Focusing specifically on female entrepreneur's points to their representation of a new social form with societal presence, distinguished in an environment that traditionally views entrepreneurship as a male-dominated activity. Studying female entrepreneurs as a diverse group, as new players, and outlining their resistance to a somewhat hostile society means rejecting the thesis that sees women as a uniform and homogenous group. Instead, it involves studying women in their diversity and strategies for positioning themselves in social spaces that view them as the 'other' or as intruders.

2.2. Barriers to Empowerment

After establishing that women should be studied as a cognitive subject and recognizing their differences and diversity, this section focuses on a specific aspect of sociological interest in this socio-professional group. It examines their integration and interaction with the surrounding environment, specifically from the perspective of barriers to empowerment. This angle highlights the culture of Algerian society with its value orientations, norms, and religious beliefs. These manifestations fundamentally describe society's view of women, its interaction with them, its expectations from them, and are expressions of a collective habitus that guides, encourages/discourages, creates opportunities, discriminates, and expects, based on logic formed through successive historical contexts. This has shaped society as it is, tending towards slow change.

This study addresses what can be understood as "objective barriers," as opposed to subjective ones, focusing on the invisible barriers manifested primarily in two key forms: internalized stereotypes and the glass ceiling, neglecting other barriers. This form of barrier has not received sufficient attention in such studies. These socio-cultural constraints are not just a phenomenon in Algerian society but are present in many patriarchal societies to varying degrees, making the topic globally relevant.

However, subjective barriers differ from one country to another, such as differences in financial allocations for women, variations in infrastructure, supportive developmental policies for women, differences in women's knowledge and experience, professional choices, and family attitudes towards women's entrepreneurial orientation, among others.

Understanding and comprehending the barriers to the economic empowerment of Algerian women is possible only when viewed in their broader social context, not as an individual problem. The emergence of female entrepreneurs from within society

on one hand, and their restriction by the same society on the other, points to the paradoxes and contradictions experienced by Algerian society in the clash of modernity with traditional culture. Studying subjective or individual barriers requires in-depth field studies that take into account individual differences and variations in spatial contexts and specific environments.

2.3. Why is it Necessary to Study Female Entrepreneurs in the Algerian Context?

It is undeniable that there are disparities in capabilities among societies, whether these are material or immaterial, individual or collective. This variation between societies is also evident in how they deal with new individual orientations, particularly in the economic sphere. The shift towards economic participation is no longer exclusive to men; women now have a say in this regard, a change that was met with restriction and limitation for long historical periods. This has resulted in several barriers centered around the issue of economically empowering women.

The justification for studying female entrepreneurs in the Algerian context lies in the low percentages of female participation in the entrepreneurial field compared to many countries worldwide. This is sufficient reason to understand and monitor the backgrounds and barriers that have led to these low rates in this region, more so than in other parts of the world. These are reflected in the dominant socio-cultural backgrounds, prior to economic dimensions, meaning the values, standards, rules, and thinking patterns of this dominant aspect. These factors all contribute to the emergence of conflicts and tensions in the interaction of Algerian culture with its traditional culture and current economic necessities. These manifestations are related to gender roles, expectations, forms of resistance, and the contents of each cultural component that either encourages or hinders this new form of role that Algerian women are currently aspiring to.

In Algeria, as of the end of 2019, "there were 159,807 women with a commercial register, out of a total of 20,598,100 economic operators registered in official activity, meaning that women represent 7.7% of the total actors in the Algerian economic field" (Centre for Commercial Registration, 2020, p. 5). This is a modest percentage compared to the male economic actors.

This situation is not unique to Algeria; for instance, in Tunisia, "the proportion of sole proprietorships run by women in 2013 was about 123,000 enterprises, representing 23 percent of the total 871,534 companies of this type. It is worth noting that sole proprietorships represent 81.7 percent of registered companies" (ILO, 2016a, pp. 14-15).

In Morocco, "according to statistical data provided by the Moroccan Office for Industrial and Commercial Property (OMPIC), from 2009 to 2013, 155,090 enterprises were established, including 36,923 runs by women, averaging 23.8 percent. This percentage decreased slightly over this period, from 25.5 percent in 2009 to 22.6 percent in 2013" (ILO, 2016b, pp. 17-18).

The focus on barriers to economic empowerment for women in Algeria is subject to local and national contexts. When discussing the Arab context, for example, it is necessary to acknowledge the overlapping, multiple, and complex contextual factors in Arab countries.

Arab nations differ in the proportion of women turning towards entrepreneurship and in the rate of establishment of enterprises run by women, due to variations in political and economic conditions in each country. Additionally, the degree of societal response to women's entrepreneurial orientation varies. For example, Lebanon has experienced significant economic stagnation, clearly affecting women's tendencies towards self-employment. Similarly, wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, and political strife in Sudan and South Sudan have affected the possibility of creating nurturing and supportive ecosystems for female entrepreneurship and enhancing women's participation in developmental projects and their economic empowerment as part of a clear societal project.

These political and economic circumstances, along with the lack of real conditions for female entrepreneurship, make this female orientation subject to socio-cultural and economic barriers. This makes the paths to development in Arab societies diverse, with women's economic empowerment being a crucial aspect. Therefore, it is important to focus on relatively stable spatial contexts where the socio-cultural dimension is more prominent, and the current Algerian context represents a promising space for research in this topic.

3. The Concept of Female Entrepreneurship in the Algerian Context

Defining the concept of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur is highly complex and ambiguous, as it refers to multiple perspectives that are difficult to consolidate into a single definition. The concept of an entrepreneur or a female entrepreneur varies across societies and is influenced by the temporal and spatial context, the theoretical frameworks, and the diverse perspectives involved. Sometimes, this actor is viewed as a founder of an enterprise, an innovator, an opportunity seeker, or as part of a complex and multi-faceted entrepreneurial process.

Moving away from economic propositions that reduce the concept of an entrepreneur to its economic function, and from psychological theories focusing on the traits of the entrepreneur, this text defines the concept of a female entrepreneur based on the Algerian context, which contributes to entrepreneurial practices and female entrepreneurs. It avoids Western-dominated approaches in defining concepts, meanings, and practices, taking into account the unique cultural specificities that cannot be overlooked or ignored.

The Arab orientation towards entrepreneurship and business leadership is nascent compared to many European and U.S. states, which have made significant progress in this type of economic activity. Therefore, the conceptual definition here is based on two fundamentals, encompassing dimensions, as the study claims that both dimensions define the concept of a female entrepreneur in Algerian society:

- The first dimension is related to the concept of ownership: A woman cannot be considered an entrepreneur unless she owns an enterprise or a project, whether in the formal sector or as an informal activity. It doesn't matter if this project was started from scratch, inherited, or purchased. The focus here is on the ownership of the project, whether individual or collective. The emphasis on ownership stems from the need to distinguish between working for others (whether for an individual, a private enterprise, or a government institution) and self-employment, which requires owning the capital or the activity

-The second dimension is related to the concept of management: A woman also cannot be considered an entrepreneur unless she is actively involved in the entrepreneurial management process, whether it pertains to administration and coordination or innovation and production. The significance of a female entrepreneur arises from the role she plays as a manager, innovator, and producer, responsible for assembling resources and synergizing them to achieve desired goals, as well as providing employment opportunities, meeting some societal needs, and creating wealth.

These two dimensions are important in distinguishing between a female entrepreneur and a capital owner who delegates the task of investing her capital to someone else, and between a female entrepreneur and a manager who manages without owning. This represents a new reality that establishes a new role for contemporary women. From being non-working to working, women's scope of activity has evolved to become capital owners and managers instead of mere workers, employers instead of employees, negotiating for projects and deals instead of settling for a wage or salary, seeking innovation instead of completing routine activities, and

becoming public relations agents, thus becoming actors with new roles within the current context of effectiveness.

The shift in many Algerian women's focus from seeking employment or work in the public sector to finding a place in the entrepreneurial field has passed through complex paths within a restrictive environment. Not all women who had entrepreneurial intentions became entrepreneurs, as they faced socio-cultural and economic barriers that prevented them from actualizing their intentions and ideas. Among the most significant barriers to the economic and entrepreneurial empowerment of women are socio-cultural barriers like stereotypes, the glass ceiling issue, and the glass wall.

4. Stereotypes and Empowerment of Female Entrepreneurs

It is undeniable that individuals, whether men or women, are influenced by their socio-economic environment. They are shaped by their environment's values, beliefs, and norms, both consciously and unconsciously, affecting their thinking, values, educational and professional choices. This environment can either be supportive or obstructive. In Algerian society, as in the rest of the world, entrepreneurial practice has historically been perceived as a male domain. Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, commercial and industrial activities have been associated with men due to various factors.

Historically, there was a division in the domains of activities for men and women. Initially, women participated alongside men in what was known as the domestic labour system (household activities). Later, a separation between the private sphere (the home) and the public sphere (especially workplaces) was established. The theory of separate spheres posits that "there was a separation of genders at every level within society, in manufacturing and retail trade, in professions, in public life and churches, in journalism, and in the home, where 19th-century texts glorified the strict division between public and private, thus separate spheres as a powerful ideology dominated in that stage of the 19th century, especially" (Vickery, 1993, p400). This situation persisted until the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

During this historical period, women's entry into the workforce in many societies was often seen as exceptional and marginal. The concept of the entrepreneur was exclusively associated with the male entrepreneur. Concepts such as authority, leadership, and power were linked to men and primarily associated with the possession of resources (financial capital, technology, infrastructure). These resources, monopolized by men under societal legitimacy, positioned women as subjects rather than actors. "Women were deprived of economic opportunities, as

were many men for reasons related to class or race, as they lacked direct access to economic resources" (Bergmann, 2005, p4), especially since law and custom denied women the right to ownership and the ability to invest and manage.

The situation of women in that historical period was the result of various political and cultural factors distinguishing different societies. However, "significant changes in the global economy in the second half of the century greatly altered women's status in the market. In addition to structural transformations, changes in social values and norms led to an increased influx of women into the labour market, driven by the need for financial independence and self-sufficiency" (Thomas, 2002, p4). These transformations, which also stemmed from structural changes within the contemporary family, later became a catalyst for women with entrepreneurial orientations.

Following the global economic crisis at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the economic world faced a new economic logic or model centered around micro, small, and medium enterprises, moving away from large companies with high technology and investment capital, and a large workforce. The economy needed smaller, more flexible enterprises adaptable to different environmental changes. This development was favorable for women, as they became able to establish their micro-enterprises; such enterprises did not require significant financial capital, high technology, or a large workforce. These factors, among others, prepared the ground for the emergence of a new actor, the female entrepreneur, in the early 1970s.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that the emergence of entrepreneurial activity was initially male-dominated, with men controlling societal resources within the public sphere. Meanwhile, women remained within their private sphere, traditionally associated with domestic management. Based on this historical practice of entrepreneurship, which was exclusively a male domain, mental structures have been ingrained in individuals and communities in various societies.

These structures carry the gendered notion of who is socially legitimate to practice entrepreneurship, supported by governments and political authorities through various developmental programs and policies. In contrast, these mental structures reinforce this monopoly and hinder the entry of new actors into this field of activity.

These entrenched mental structures, which reflect in individuals' culture and guide their perceptions and practices, represent stereotypes. Stereotypes refer to "specific beliefs about a group, such as descriptions of what members of the group look like, how they behave, or their abilities, and are also defined as 'cognitive

representations of how group members are similar to one another and different from members of other groups" (Turko, 2016, p54).

The same applies to female entrepreneurs as a socio-professional category, towards which stereotypical images have taken root in individuals' mental structures, not only in Arab societies but also in Western societies. These stereotypes relate to entrepreneurial activity itself and its association with male entrepreneurs, excluding women. "Stereotypes lead to social categorization, one of the reasons for biased attitudes (such as us vs. them), and can become restrictive to the extent that they eliminate the possibility of women becoming entrepreneurs" (Turko, 2016, p54).

Entrepreneurial activity has always been known as a male domain, and women's orientation towards this field has imposed various stereotypes affecting their participation rates in the entrepreneurial field, the type of activities chosen, and their marginal presence. Most prefer micro-projects instead of risking larger ventures due to various obstacles that prevent them from mastering entrepreneurial management.

Contemporary women aspire to play a more significant role in the public social sphere, with entrepreneurship as a potential mechanism for this. However, this aspiration collides with barriers to their economic and entrepreneurial empowerment. Perceptions rooted in individuals' imagination about the gender capable of entrepreneurship, characterized by risk, uncertainty, competitive advantage, innovation, opportunity utilization, and resource ownership, have historically been associated with male entrepreneurs.

In contrast, women with entrepreneurial orientations face internalized stereotypes that question their ability and competence in various activities, hindering their empowerment. The paper identifies some of the stereotypes facing female entrepreneurs in Arab societies:

- The male precedence in entrepreneurial activity has laid the foundation for all forms of stereotypes ingrained around women, work, and management. It has deepened the gender gap in terms of power (leadership and management) and ownership (access to various resources). Historically, entrepreneurship was deemed suitable only for men, at least in previous decades, although this has gradually started to change. However, the gender gap in Arab societies, in particular, remains wide.
- Stereotypes also relate to public sector employment (i.e., government sector), where individuals of both genders in Algeria, for example, have had a particular mindset since the socialist era to the present. During that time, "the state was the

mandatory partner in every economic activity. The source of disappointment was that the state did not fulfil its role as a universal driver of the local economy, as farmers considered public service as the only profession, with public sector employees priding themselves on the title (employee), and anything else was just filling a gap or covering poverty" (Ben Salem et al., 1988, pp. 98-99). In that era, the state was the general contractor (national companies), and the society in that temporal and spatial context developed a particular habitus through socialization and individual pathways, making them perceive public service as self-actualizing and elevating their social status. Therefore, the general orientation was towards waged work instead of entrepreneurial action, especially among women who preferred stable employment over potentially risky ventures.

- Among the stereotypes is the historical practice of each social gender in various societies, including Arab societies. For example, "the general stereotype is that women are born to stay at home and take care of their children, and that women are of a lower status than men, with men having authority over women" (Gray, 2005, p204). Although the difference between men and women is not synonymous with inferiority but rather non-homogeneity, the historical separation of gender roles has made women unrecognized for entering the complex field of entrepreneurship. Thus, laws and customs have supported the male entrepreneur and hindered the woman, establishing a global entrepreneurial mindset built on masculine considerations, while women were deprived of societal opportunities to prove themselves.
- Similarly, "the roles in the family imposed by society and caregiving responsibilities are significant obstacles to women's entrepreneurship. It's a very powerful stereotype that when women participate in work life, they will neglect their home duties, and in this case, their family responsibilities are more important" (Turko, 2016, p56-57). This perception also makes the Algerian society critical of women who show an entrepreneurial orientation, questioning whether this orientation might negatively affect their family roles, with the general expectation that women should confine themselves to domestic management, while men have the legitimacy of economic and entrepreneurial management.
- What further complicates matters for women with entrepreneurial inclinations are the concepts related to entrepreneurship and the characteristics of a successful entrepreneur. "These practices are often described using male stereotypes of a heroic, self-made man driven by the will to conquer and push forward into markets, proving himself superior to others" (Gupta, 2012, p3). Changing these associated images could alleviate the burden they impose on female entrepreneurs,

as some human characteristics such as heroism, impulsiveness, competition, and risk-taking are associated with men rather than women.

- Women are often described as emotional and weak, while entrepreneurial practice is associated with characteristics like risk-taking and uncertainty. This has made women undesirable in the complex field of entrepreneurship. "Characteristics considered masculine include competitiveness, activity, independence, decisiveness, confidence, while feminine characteristics are seen as social and emotional, such as understanding, warmth, emotion, caring" (Fagnson, 1991, p34). These characteristics and others have shaped perceptions in individuals and institutions about the illegitimacy of women in entrepreneurship; they lack the traits and competence required for certain types of contemporary economic activities.

Finally, it can be said that an individual's decisions and educational and professional choices are influenced by social upbringing and what is socially desirable. For instance, a woman may express her desire to start a specific project but may first encounter what can be called "fear of failure" or more accurately "intimidation of failure" because people are accustomed to stable jobs in the public sector, and anything less than that is a risk to be avoided to not fall into failure and lose everything. Moreover, there are other discourses that discourage women from entrepreneurship, such as the need for significant capital to establish their own project, associating the establishment of a business with the presence of substantial capital, whereas in reality, it is not always as perceived and marketed through common discourses and statements.

5. Female Entrepreneurship and the Glass Ceiling Issue

Women in Algerian society, as in other societies, have faced invisible barriers known as the glass ceiling. This concept originally relates to barriers that hinder women's advancement up the professional hierarchy. Additionally, there are glass walls, which refer to the professional segregation between occupations designated for men and those for women. This issue has its roots in tribal systems, but in the current era, it can be said that the series of related transformations began with women's access to education. Although it is a right endorsed by religion and later by law, societal engagement with this legitimate demand experienced significant delays, varying according to different societal contexts.

After securing the right to education, women's aspirations evolved as they sought the right to work as a continuation of their educational journey. Women's motivation to work was self-realization, but they faced various constraints within the workspace, typically employed in secondary roles, with almost no promotion

opportunities and low wages. This situation is a result of what is academically known as the glass ceiling.

The concept of the glass ceiling dates back to "1984 in America, when a columnist for the 'Corporate woman' in The Wall Street Journal used the term as a metaphor to describe what was happening in American companies and other parts of the world. It was stated that there is an invisible, yet entirely impenetrable barrier that inappropriately prevents most women from reaching the top ranks in the corporate hierarchy, regardless of the type" (Kephart and Schumacher, 2005, p8).

In Arab societies in general, and particularly in Algeria, the situation was no different; rather, it was more severe, especially from the mid-20th century to its end, where many women encountered several barriers in accessing work, let alone obtaining promotions in formal workspaces.

Algerian women tended to engage more in informal activities, despite these often-offering little benefit to those involved. This is, of course, due to the determinants of Arab women's economic participation, especially the socio-cultural ones. These determinants negatively impact "the creation of a friendly and supportive environment for women's work, evident in the difficulty of obtaining employment, which increases women's unemployment rates, and the lack of legal and infrastructural support for women in the labour market, leading to discrimination against them in wages and promotion opportunities" (Al Ketbi et al., 2010, p255).

This implies that Algerian culture, with its male-dominated values, has created rules for division, exchange, and ownership based on a masculine logic, where men were preferred over women in the public sphere.

The gender discrimination in the public sphere has affected not only women's opportunities for employment, promotion, and wages but also another aspect related to the division of professions designated for men and those for women. This division, rooted in the historical preference of men over women in a patriarchal society, created what is known as professional segregation or the glass walls, where "women typically hold positions in human resources, communications, and informatics, and are excluded from operational jobs (production and commerce) that are specifically associated with masculine traits such as energy, combativeness, decision-making, and greater commitment. The male imaginary perceives women as less committed to the institution, incomprehensible, and unpredictable" (Lipovetsky, 2012, pp. 263-264).

Undoubtedly, women have now significantly entered the formal labour market, particularly in specific professions like education, healthcare, and public

administration, while maintaining traditionally feminine professions such as sewing, textile industries, and some traditional crafts. However, this did not prevent women from venturing into traditionally male-dominated professions, albeit to a limited extent.

The situation has changed from the past when public enterprise was the dynamic driver of the economy, and the personality of the manager was the motivation, not where one becomes an entrepreneur. "The personality of a public enterprise manager had a significant allure, dominating the motivations of entire generations of youth due to the opportunity it provided for gaining dominant social positions, in addition to power and establishing influential networks" (Madoui, 2008, p46).

However, due to these structural transformations in Algerian society, individuals' orientations have changed, with women becoming more passionate about realizing their potential and exploring themselves through broader participation in the public sphere instead of settling for roles defined for them in the private sphere. This has driven them to seek other alternatives that allow for a margin of freedom in action and financial independence, with entrepreneurship being one of the mechanisms to achieve these goals.

Women's orientation towards entrepreneurship, as business leaders, did not prevent the presence of other invisible barriers, referred to by Bosse and Taylor (2012) as the second glass ceiling. "Female entrepreneurs found the corporate atmosphere constraining their aspirations for new challenges, and gender discrimination played a role in many women's decisions to leave the companies they worked for" (Mingji, 1999, p585).

The most suitable option was to turn towards self-employment or establishing small and medium enterprises owned and managed by women. Entrepreneurship distances women from exploitation by employers, gender biases at work, and offers them greater flexibility, freedom, and broader independence in decision-making and financial control, and business development. However, this new orientation of Algerian women is fraught with risks and is subject to the prevailing male-dominated culture.

A key indicator of the second glass ceiling facing female entrepreneurs globally, including in Algerian society, is "the relatively restricted access of women to bank loans. The decreased access to capital is one of the pitfalls that collectively lead to the bankruptcy of female entrepreneurs compared to males. In this case, the second glass ceiling is a global phenomenon" (Bosse and Taylor, 2012, p58). However, the

situation in Algerian society is somewhat different. It cannot be asserted that female entrepreneurs struggle to access capital. For instance, access to financing is equally available to both women and men.

The major barrier to women's empowerment in this regard is not access to financing because they are women, but rather due to bureaucratic impediments. Moreover, women entrepreneurs face economic and non-economic difficulties stemming from societal non-recognition or acceptance of their venture into industries or commerce traditionally dominated by men, competing with men in one of the sources of their power.

The only constant regarding women's issues is change. Women have made significant strides compared to the past, a testament to their existential strength in a resistant society that differentially treats genders. This reveals the extent of tangible societal change, with clear manifestations.

Despite the increasing number of educated women entering the labour market each year and their growing presence in the entrepreneurial field, despite the obstacles that still hinder their presence and progress, their representation remains far behind that of men. This places both Arab women and society at large in the face of a series of socio-cultural and economic challenges that need to be confronted on multiple fronts.

6. Female Entrepreneurs in Algerian Society and the Challenges of Overcoming

Female entrepreneurs in Algerian society face various discriminatory practices, making them vulnerable to a range of current challenges they must adapt to, benefiting from different obstacles and unexploited societal opportunities, and available market outlets. These challenges are mostly related to stereotypes that have materialized as patterns of thinking, practices, social rules, and even official laws that require gradual change and the re-engineering of societal thinking to pave the way for different social actors in the stalled development process.

The current challenges facing female entrepreneurs in Arab societies can be classified into two interconnected categories that support each other: socio-cultural challenges and economic challenges. Breaking these stereotypes and invisible barriers, as social obstacles, fundamentally depends on the current challenges that enable women to prove themselves and contribute to the societal development process, rather than settling for secondary roles in the current social life as is traditionally expected.

6.1. Socio-Cultural Challenges

There are current socio-cultural and economic challenges that vary depending on the temporal and spatial context, the field of activity, and the size of the project. In this section, the focus is on the socio-cultural challenges, namely the integration or merging of cultural aspects into social ones. Among these challenges are :

➤ **Securing the Legitimacy of Entrepreneurial Practice:**

Perhaps the biggest challenge faced by female entrepreneurs in Arab societies is securing the legitimacy of entrepreneurial practice and breaking the male monopoly on it. This task is not easy and requires individual and institutional efforts to legitimize and enhance society's acceptance of women in the entrepreneurial field and to improve their capital in it. Legitimacy, in this case, is wrested from the cultural-normative context that defines roles, statuses, acceptance, and recognition of women's right, like men, to engage in certain activities unless they violate the values, standards, and behaviors commonly accepted in society.

Legitimacy, as Suchman (1995, p574) states, is about "normative and cognitive forces that constrain, construct, and empower actors, as it is a generalized perception or assumption that actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions."

Empowering women in the entrepreneurial field, and their participation and contribution to the development process, necessarily involves enhancing their legitimacy in a space where numerous socio-cultural, economic, and political factors intersect. A society that has known entrepreneurship as a purely male activity questions women's economic and social existence in a field with its actors, resources, and operational logic.

The presence of women in this field does not threaten male existence, and the nurturing society owes women recognition. The issue is not about gender, but about the added value each actor can provide, fostering healthy competition for development, innovation, and continuous improvement.

➤ **Ability to Face Risks :**

Traditionally, men are known for their inclination to take risks, historically through their involvement in wars, epidemics, strenuous activities, financial and technological investments, etc. Thus, risk-taking has become a masculine trait, while women are perceived as less inclined to take risks and prefer stability.

This perception of risk is the product of a cultural context that distinguishes between genders in their approach to potential risks associated with entrepreneurial activities in an uncertain environment. "Stereotypes about appropriate behaviors for men and women, and these discourses about female entrepreneurs, are linguistic practices that create real effects. There are differences between women and men in dealing with risks, which are due to women's unwillingness to expose family resources to risk, as their traditional role is to take care of the family" (Dalborg, 2015, p89).

However, this does not negate the other. Women's caution in avoiding risks does not mean they are incapable of bearing them; it is related to our perception of this issue rather than its actual reality.

Experiences of female entrepreneurs in various fields show that many women are inclined to take potential risks, rise to challenges, and break the barrier of fear of failure or loss. This suggests that this trait can be acquired through practical experience rather than being an innate male characteristic. Saying that women are capable of taking risks (which varies from one woman to another) does not deny men's ability to do so, but risks should not be reduced to financial risks only. Risks in terms of emotional effort, reputation, and family resources are all important aspects of an individual's life, and investing in them has both positive and negative implications.

Therefore, it can be said that the risks for women entering a male-dominated space may be greater than those for men themselves. The issue is about our perceptions of things and how they are done.

These two challenges summarize the overall situation faced by women, and specifically female entrepreneurs, in the public sphere. In terms of social legitimacy, it encapsulates the traditional system of dividing roles, statuses, and resources, and what is expected of each gender. Challenging these social norms and standards exposes women to several barriers that have made their presence marginal compared to socially and historically recognized men.

As for the inclination towards risk-taking, it reflects the characteristics of the active entrepreneur historically and theoretically known. There can be no entrepreneurship without initiative and risk. Stereotypes that depict women as emotional are contrary to the concept of risk-taking, making society relatively distrustful of women's ability to assert themselves in a field that requires endurance.

6.2. Economic Challenges

In addition to socio-cultural challenges, female entrepreneurs face various economic challenges that have contributed, to some degree, to hindering the feminine entrepreneurial orientation. According to Fillion, "discussing entrepreneurship cannot be done without addressing the entrepreneur who created it, the paths they have taken, the difficulties they have encountered, the characteristics they possess, and their entrepreneurial strategy" (Fillion, 1997, p131).

Discussing economic challenges in the context of socio-cultural issues implies a deliberate suggestion that changing stereotypes towards Arab women in general, and female entrepreneurs in particular, as well as breaking the glass ceiling, involves proving women's worth in economic practices, either by promoting exemplary models or through feminine innovation, to enhance women's competitive capabilities in production spaces.

Therefore, it is essential to discuss the economic aspects in the context of feminine entrepreneurship, whether concerning the macro or micro environment. The macro environment represents the institutional framework and infrastructure that either stimulates or restricts entrepreneurial practice (for both male and female entrepreneurs).

The micro environment refers to the organizational framework of the feminine entrepreneurial project, the ability to exploit available opportunities, and acquire the resources required for each project within a specific environment. Thus, addressing economic challenges here is not for their own sake but as one of several mechanisms that can change or reduce the socio-cultural barriers facing Algerian female entrepreneurs in the medium term.

➤ **Institutional Rules and Infrastructure :**

This aspect is not specific to women but applies to both genders. An entrepreneur cannot position themselves in a socialist or rentier environment, in an environment that does not support entrepreneurial action in its economic and developmental policies and programs, or in an environment lacking real infrastructure, including transportation, facilities, industrial and innovative capabilities, and applicable laws within a general ecological system.

Female entrepreneurs in many Arab societies face the challenge of weak infrastructure despite claims of a shift towards a market economy instead of a directed economy, where the state's role is regulatory rather than controlling and dominating economic practices and actors based on a political balance rather than an

economic one. "Institutions as structures form the broader social, commercial, and political environment for aid, creating situations and conditions that a person must deal with" (Chell, 2008, p54). This challenge is societal, and female entrepreneurs can only confront it within the context of collective efforts, such as reducing bureaucratic requirements.

➤ **Building an Innovative Institutional Framework:**

Establishing a feminine presence in the entrepreneurial field involves overcoming difficulties in accessing financing, markets, and various resources within an institutional framework that enhances the performance of feminine entrepreneurial projects. Entrepreneurship is a competitive practice based on the ability to access information, improve performance, innovate, build competitive advantage, exploit available opportunities according to social data that ensure the success of a well-thought-out project that considers societal specifics, competitors' strategies, available resources, market balance, and making appropriate decisions. In this case, the female entrepreneur must internalize this understanding in her thinking patterns, practices, and interactions with the surrounding environment according to specific strategies, while her performance and ability to prove herself in her institutional interactions are also at stake.

7. CONCLUSION

With the global and Arab world undergoing significant changes, the presence of female entrepreneurs has gained recognition in political discourse, civil society, and academia. Achieving this recognition has been extremely challenging, impacting the rate and magnitude of women's presence in the entrepreneurial field. This is the result of various socio-cultural and economic factors that have created a gap between genders in terms of entry rates, resource allocation, business scope, and size. Based on this study, several conclusions can be drawn:

One of the primary factors women encounter before and after declaring their intent to engage in entrepreneurship is the stereotype that affects various aspects of women's social and economic life globally and particularly in Algerian society. These stereotypes are related to predefined gender roles, social upbringing, and personal characteristics compared to those traditionally defined as male traits of an effective entrepreneur. This has undoubtedly hindered an increase in women's presence and narrowed the gap between men and women, thus affecting women's economic empowerment.

Amidst this scenario, female entrepreneurs in Algeria face current challenges within the socio-economic environment. Historically, this environment was restrictive for women's attempts to enter the economic field, which was even restricted for men when the state controlled the economy. The biggest challenge for Algerian women is to change these stereotypes, enhance their economic roles, and realize that the real start of women's role as complementary to men's – not competitive – begins with changing perceptions entrenched in the social imagination. Additionally, preparing an environment conducive to female entrepreneurs requires concerted social efforts affecting all aspects of the institutional field in which they operate.

Adapting perceptions, values, norms, planning mechanisms, distribution, and production to contemporary global and local requirements, involving all actors in the desired development process, and devising political and developmental policies irrespective of socio-cultural characteristics that do not align with entrepreneurial practice are crucial. Bureaucratic and discriminatory practices are barriers with significant impacts on empowering female entrepreneurs in Algerian society and their inclusion in institutional work, thus reproducing previous failures.

The principle of any change originates from the spirit of the nurturing society, which can either be a source of change and development or a source of obstruction and restriction. What is ingrained and embodied in individuals' thinking patterns and social practices reflects the nature of this society and its current state, shaped by historical arrangements and accumulations. Therefore, the image of the female entrepreneur in Algerian society is a small part that reflects the determinants of realizing an entrepreneurial project in a political, economic, and cultural environment that is hostile to the spirit of a society with entrepreneurial thinking. The challenge here is a societal one, and without a systematic and well-thought-out process, entrepreneurship can only be discussed in the context of societal obstacles and constraints.

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