

Writing from Inside Out: Accounts of Sudanese Women Working In the Media

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of some Sudanese women working in the media. The paper brings to the center of analysis voices and experiences of women reporters, presenters, head of media sections, directors, and writers through adopting autobiographic and ethnographic research methods. The main question of this paper is how the “glass ceiling” metaphor-the invisible barriers that one, read women, can see through but not easily get through is applicable to the position of women in the media institutions of Sudan? Applying qualitative research methods, the paper found that Sudanese women journalists are constantly facing and negotiating gender disparities in work place, and poor working conditions; cultural/society’s perception of women working in the media; limited margin of press freedom in the country, and confronting the Islamist perception of the government of the Sudanese “woman”.

Introduction

This is a case-study paper that examines the experiences of Sudanese women working in the media. The main objective is to bring to the center of analysis voices and experiences of women reporters, presenters, chairs of media sections, directors, and writers through adopting autobiographic and ethnographic research methods. The paper also dwell on answering the question of how the “glass ceiling” metaphor-the invisible barriers that one, read women, can see through but not easily get through is applicable to the position of women in the media institutions of Sudan.

The paper focuses on Greater Khartoum (Capital of Sudan) due to the realization that regional disparities between media institutions in different regions of Sudan, have resulted in the confinement of media activities to the North, specifically in Greater Khartoum. Major media production and distribution activities; radio stations, newspapers, magazines and television channels were all based in the Greater Khartoum. There are functioning regional newspapers printing houses in Sudan.

Placing the Study Within the Literature:

Career Progression and Glass Ceiling

Research on “glass ceiling” has contributed to the body of knowledge in two very important ways: First, it highlights the need for research about women; research frequently marginalized in both the academic and business arenas. Second, it has begun to suggest factors that create and maintain the glass ceiling in corporate public relations and communications (Wrigley, 2002)

According to Lee Bollinger and Carole O’ Niell (2008), the first reference to the term “glass ceiling” maybe attributed to Gay Bryant, then editor of Working Woman, who in an interview is quoted as

saying, "Women have reached a certain point- I call it the glass ceiling. They're in the top of the middle management and they're stopping and getting stuck" (Lee Bollinger and Carole O' Niell, 2008, P.9)

Women have been a part of the working world for hundreds of years but only very recently has the world of work truly changed for women (Higginbotham & Romero, 1997). Women, in many parts of world, during the 1950s and 1960s were trying to find a compromise between household duties, education/training, and professional responsibilities. In fact, research in the 1950s and 1960s focused on women in the workplace in terms of the type of jobs they held traditionally (Morrison, White & Van Veslor, 1992). As Morrison and Van Veslor (1992) mentioned, women during the 1950s and 1960s were most often labeled as "support staff," and very few were recognized for their significant advancement toward positions of executive management.

A report titled '*The Glass Ceiling and beyond – the status of women and diversity in the South African news media*' by the South African National Editors' Forum, stated that the majority of decision makers overseeing production routines in South African media houses are men, with women occupying less influential positions. In a 2008 report on *Gender Equality in the Media in Eastern Africa by the East Africa Journalists Association (EAJA)*, only '*3% of the total number of women journalists in nine East African countries sit at the decision making organs of their media institutions*'. In addition the chances for advances of women to managerial and editor positions is very slim. This means that women have limited control over policy on content production in newsrooms.

A report published by *the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)* mentioned that female journalists in Egypt, Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen, receive only 10 percent of the assumed positions of leadership compared to the control of women of about 50 percent of the programs in the field of audio-visual media. The report confirmed that Arab women journalists still face difficulties in advancing within the field of media work, especially the press, as compared to their male colleagues, besides facing difficulties in attending media institutions as its officials see that men are better suited to working in the press field.

Stereotypes and Traditional Attitudes toward Working Women in the Arab World

Many conservative Arab societies hold traditional socio-cultural stereotypes and attitudes about the role of women. Conservative and traditional attitudes highlighted in the literature of women in the Muslim world by Magharabi, Al-Dabbagh&Hayajneh, (1994); Bech (1994); and Al-Hatimy (1983) portray women's primary role as a wife and mother. Women are not necessarily looked upon as having the abilities and potential for developing professional careers. They are portrayed as being inferior to men, naturally emotional and unsuitable for leadership positions (Hammoud, 1993.) Traditionally, in many Arab societies men have been considered the sole breadwinners and providers for their families. The idea of women working is degrading and a disgrace to some Arab men who consider that it is their responsibility to provide for their wives and family. Therefore, traditional Arab/Islamic societies maintain that first and foremost, women should prepare themselves for their roles as wives and mothers. Work should only be considered as a last option under economically extraordinary circumstances.

These culturally constructed stereotypes about women in many Arab countries have their impact on the positions of women at the work place, whereby male employers regard women as being less capable than men and unfit for responsible positions, claiming that their family obligations take priority; and hence, subjects them to lower productivity and absenteeism (Beck, 1994;Hammoud,

1993). Despite the recent changes in the economies of many Arab countries that changed the gendered labor structure of these countries resulting in increasing waves of women working in all sectors, these negative attitudes and traditional stereotypes towards women in Arab/Islamic societies still stand as one of the major resisting forces to progress of professional working women, particularly for those in management (Salma M. Al-Lamki, 1999.)

To answer the main question of the paper: How the “glass ceiling” metaphor-*the invisible barriers that one, read women, can see through but not easily get through* is applicable to the position of women in the media institutions of Sudan? The two discussed above approaches of understanding women status and barriers to professional advancement are viewed here in this paper as valuable frameworks for understanding the voices and experiences of the Sudanese women journalists presented in this paper. Moreover, in this paper, intrinsic to the understanding of the experiences of Sudanese women journalists is an understanding that agents (women) and structures (political, legal, educational, patriarchal, etc.) interact (Sakr, 2004.)

Media Institutions in Northern Sudan: A Historical Background

Print Media in Sudan

The history of journalism in Sudan dated back to 1903 when three non-Sudanese publishers published the first newspaper *Alsudan*(The Sudan). The first Sudanese newspaper owned by prominent Sudanese figures that constituted the main Sudanese political parties later on was published in 1919. The first English twice-a-week newspaper in Sudan (*Sudan Herald*) was published in 1911 (Shomo, 2006). The British rule issued a media law in 1903 to curb the ownership of an increasing wave of newspapers by national political parties.

During the parliamentary period (1985-1988), Sudan had a very vibrant press, with most political parties publishing a variety of periodicals. The number of daily papers was more than 20 and the number of weekly publications about 15. Sudan had at the time some 55 publications in Arabic and English. However, on its first day in power, in one of its first decrees the military regime of Omar al-Bashir (1989), the current government of Sudan, banned all newspapers and closed all publications except the Armed Forces newspaper. During the following years, only a few papers and periodicals were authorized – all published either by the military or the government. Consequently, this period witnessed the mass emigration of experienced Sudanese journalists who fled the country to work in media institution of the Arabian Gulf States, Europe, and the USA.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the North and the South parts of the Sudan (CPA) in January 2005 was an important juncture in the recent history of journalism in the sense that it provided more space for publishing of newspapers and provided a space for Peace Radio station Radio Maria to broadcast messages promoting peace and cultural diversity (Sudan-Media Brief, 2008.) According to the Annual Performance Report of the National Press Council (2006), the total daily distribution of newspapers in 2005 was 292,730 copies. The five major political newspapers are *AkhbarAlyoum* (32,904), *Alsaafa* (25,663), *Al Rai Al Aam* (22,732), *Al Khartoum* (19,046) and *Al Watan*, (18,713). Today there are at least 17 daily political newspapers in Arabic of which seven are considered to be government- independent. The media landscape also includes five English dailies, two economic papers, seven sports dailies and 10 social (popular) papers. It is also important to mention that the Press and Printed Press Materials Council (National Press Council), which is directly supervised, and elected/nominated by the Sudanese government, has been central in defining, curbing, and redefining the margin of “freedom” that Sudanese press could (Kupe, T. (Ed), (2003.)

Broadcasting

Unlike printed press, broadcasting, in the overwhelming majority of African countries, has been the most controlled medium for both technical and political reasons. The technological limits to the frequency spectrum and its allocation at both the international and national level has meant that unlike the press, not just anyone can broadcast. Politically, the colonial powers, which introduced broadcasting to Africa, controlled it and used it for largely political propaganda purposes. Postcolonial African governments also followed a policy of control of broadcasting mainly for political reasons. In the 1950s, 1980s, and 1990s when three military coups took over the power from elected governments in Sudan, broadcasting stations were the first institutions to be taken over by coups' leaders. The political control and monopoly of broadcasting by postcolonial government of most if not all countries in Africa since independence has been justified on the grounds that broadcasting is a public service critical to development, the fostering of unity and the promotion of national culture and identity. To achieve these policy goals, broadcasting was often located in Ministries of Information.

In Sudan, the state-owned Sudan Radio and Television Corporation, SRTC, is the only broadcaster with transmission facilities within Sudan. Sudan State TV broadcasts 18 hours a day is received in all large urban areas. Its international arm Blue Nile TV is on ArabSat broadcasts predominantly in Arabic. Radio Omdurman, Sudan's TV arm, broadcasts 24 hours a day and can be received throughout almost all Sudan. In addition, there are 17 functioning regional radio stations across the country. They are owned and operated by state or provincial government but the SRTC owns the transmission facilities and usually pays some if not most of the staff (East African Journalists Forum (EAJA), 2008.)

The government, primarily through the Ministry of Information, the Office of the President and the Security Service, tightly controls the SRTC. Content is proscribed not only by political and security criteria but also by the government views of "correct" and "appropriate" moral and spiritual values. Content that threatens the "national interest" of the country is also proscribed. However, "national interest" is often narrowly and politically defined to reflect the interest of the government.

The broadcast section of the media in Sudan is also the subject of many regulations. Sudan does not have a free, independent and pluralistic broadcast media. The main TV and radio stations are run by the State and a military censor is reported to be working at the Sudan Radio and Television Corporation (SRTC) to ensure that television news "reflects official views". There are no privately owned TV broadcasters, apart from a cable service jointly owned by the government and private investors. The few non-government radio broadcasters are limited to private FM stations in Khartoum and in the Southern part of the country, and some international broadcasters, including the BBC and Radio Monte Carlo, relay on FM in Khartoum. Government control over the broadcast sector has deprived the public of an independent and pluralistic broadcast media that can provide it with information from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, there is no policy to encourage private or community broadcasting or to develop a pluralistic broadcast media, nor is there an independent broadcast regulatory body (Sudan Media Brief, 2008.)

Women and Media in Sudan

Since the inception of print journalism in Sudan, writings by women appeared in the daily newspapers. However, at that time the women wrote using pen- names because of social and traditional constraints. It was against the culture and religion for women to appear in public, including their names being read in print.

The 1945-1965 periods witnessed the appearance of professional journalism in terms of investigative reporting and the increase in the number of trained journalists. The period also, according to Shomo (2006) witnessed the birth of regional newspapers, independent journalism, and specialized journalism such as women's magazines. It is important to stress here that the Sudan was one of pioneering countries in Africa and the Middle East in terms of women's journalism (women's magazines). The first women's magazine in Sudan *Bint Al-wadi* the Daughter of the Valley was published in 1946. Sirksian sisters (Takwy and Zarwy) owned the magazine. The magazine was a monthly one that focused on literary and social topics. In 1955 *Sawat Al-Maraa* the Voice of the Woman magazine was published, edited, and owned by a prominent woman activist in Sudan (Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim). In the same year, another women activist (Suad Al-Fatih) published *Alaman* women's magazine. The magazine focused on cultural issues related to women. During the period of 1946-1996 the number of women's magazines in Sudan jumbled to 13 magazines.

More generations followed suit, working in all the fields of the mass media and particularly in journalism. Currently, the number of female Journalists is approximated at one third (30 percent) of the total number of media practitioners in the country. Approximately, there are 1119 women out of the 3885 journalists in Sudan.

The number of Sudanese women breaking through the glass ceiling to reach senior leadership positions in all the media, not only print media, sections was rising at a slow pace. Despite the absence of any statistics reflecting number of women working in the media in Sudan, one can easily observe that men were still the ones overwhelmingly holding key positions in media organizations and bodies governing media. From my own investigation and research I got to realize that the percentage was quite low in comparison with the overall number of women who joined media organizations. There were four women holding senior positions in the national Corporation of Radio and TV in Sudan while the approximate number of women working in that corporation is 800.

Sudanese Women: The Political and Social Structure

Women constitute 26.5 % of the total labor force. Sudan's Constitution clearly states that all Sudanese are equal before the law regardless of sex and race. Since 1973, labor legislation according to Sudan's constitution guaranteed equal pay for equal work for men and women. In November 2000, the President decreed that women would receive two years paid maternity leave. While most women work within the agricultural sector, a large percentage also work as professionals, serving as ambassadors, university professors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, senior army officers, journalists and teachers. In 1996, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa published a book entitled 'Africa's Roll of Distinguished Daughters'. Of the fifty distinguished African women listed, ten were Sudanese. These included academics, lawyers, journalists and psychologists (Hoile, 2010)

Sudanese women became involved in nationalist politics from the mid-1940s onwards. Women secured the right to vote in 1953. In Sudan, women have an unfettered right to elect and be elected in presidential, federal, state and local elections. A quarter of all federal parliamentary seats are reserved for women. Women are also ensured a minimum of ten percent of seats in all other state legislatures, and other elected local bodies. There have been women ministers in Sudanese governments since the early 1970s. In 1972 Frida Ibrahim was elected to be the first Sudanese woman judge in Sharia (Islamic) legal system. That was an unprecedented act in the Muslim and the Arab worlds combined.

Educationally, the first school for girls' elementary education was launched by Sheikh Babikr Badri bin 1907 in Rufaa city in Central Aljazeera region. Women's education in Sudan, especially high education has been evolving and expanding, especially during the 1990s. Tens of thousands of Sudanese women study at many of Sudan's universities. More women enrolled in Sudanese universities in the first five

years of the 1990s than the total number of women who had entered universities since independence in 1956.

Women and the Postcolonial State of Sudan: The Islamist Discourses of Identity and “Authenticity” in Sudan

The proliferation of the Islamic movement and the emergence of the National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudanese politics in 1978/79 gave the postcolonial state in Sudan another role as a safeguard of Islam and the Islamic "authentic" culture. The main ideology of the NIF, the current de facto government of Sudan, is based on reviving Islam (mainly the *Sharia* principle of Islam) as a political power against the West. The Islamist orientation of the state culminated in 1983 with the declaration of *Sharia* Islamic laws by Nimeiri's regime.

El-Ahmadi (1994) referred to the term Islamization as a dogmatic politicization of religion that its main aim is power. Moreover, Islamism or Islamization is the politics of identity that presupposes the core of religion is doctrine rather than ritual. Islamism in the Sudanese context sees "pure" and "authentic" Islam as Sudan's only defense and cultural salvation against the west and the only solution to Sudan's economic crisis. While for the Communist the main crisis of the women's positions is "backwardness" for the Islamists the main crisis the Sudanese women encounter is "foreignness". Thus as a solution to the crisis of Sudan and the Sudanese women the Islamist state of Sudan asks what are the "authentic" roots of Sudan's Islam? These politics of authenticity and identity politics of the Sudanese State manipulated the participation of women in cultural and economic practices that the state views as not suitable for the "ideal" Muslim Sudanese woman.

Central to Islamist ideology of the current government of Sudan and cultural authenticity is the family and woman. The Islamists view family as a nucleus of the "ideal" Islamist society. Women ('the woman'), on the other hand, are perceived as essential to the socialization of children. Accordingly, women as the safeguard of Islamic culture should be committed to the "ideal" Islamic image of a woman. Hale argued that in the name of the "ideal" woman, as morally central to the ideal family, Sudanese women's behavior is, thus, ideologically manipulated.

This essentialist representation of women requires the re-domestication of women, the reconstruction of the moral fabrics of the society and the assignment of women as agents of that reconstruction (Malik, 1995). Thus, in 1992 the Islamist State in Sudan formulated many regulations to control women's physical activities and to control women's sexuality especially in urban areas of Sudan with the exception of the South because of the civil war. Famous among these regulations is the 1992 Khartoum Act according to which women should wear *hijab* (Islamic dress). Moreover, women should not mix with men in public places and in transportation, women should not travel without the company of a *muhrim* (a father, a husband, a brother, or son) and women, especially urban poor street vendors, should not work in the early morning and late evenings.

The post-colonial state in Sudan has been seeking tight control over women's access to power and privilege. Ironically enough, the Islamist elite men positioned the Sudanese women as the carriers of morality at the same time they are guided by the same men. In all cases the state and its ideologies objectify women. Furthermore, at the social level, differentiation between public and private domains in the Sudanese society like other Muslim societies stood as an obstacle for women's advancement.

To encapsulate this part, by going back to the main threat of this paper: the understanding of agent and structure as interacting, I can say that the ideological, political, and media map of Sudan I outlined in this part, as well as the advancement of women against all of these odds, shape the views and experiences of women journalists to be explored in the following part of this paper.

Discussion

This part of the paper weaves the voices and experiences of ten Sudanese women journalists I had direct open-ended interviews with, and views of a group of five young women journalists working in a newspaper in Khartoum. The voices will be displayed here represent women working in varied positions who themselves represent different generations of women working in the media. Although the interviews were conducted in Greater Khartoum, the Capital of Sudan, but the experiences of women journalists are accounts of their work experiences in regional media institutions in Sudan beside their work in the media of Khartoum.

Prejudice: The Gender Gap and Work Conditions for Women Working in the Media

Many of the participants in this research agreed that despite all the recent technological developments in the field that made their performance much easier than before there is still a gender gap for women working in the media. As one of journalist work as radio producer and presenter noted: "gender disparities within the media reflect the reality of our society and the overall status of women." (Eiman El-Hassan, August 2010). They mention that vertical segregation (more women at the bottom of the hierarchy and far more men at the top) is partly due to discrimination. Traditionally, journalism has been a male-dominated profession in Sudan; however, the influx of female graduates from the universities across the country has increased the job opportunities for female journalists over the past years. Conversely, gender inequalities still exist, leaving women behind when it comes to working conditions. Women, specifically in print media are generally paid less and they do not have the same access to training as their male colleagues. Also, women are clearly underrepresented at editorial and management level in all media outlets in Sudan.

Basic working conditions and employment rights in the Sudanese media are poor, especially in the print media. A group of five young women journalists working in *Altayyar* (the Current) newspaper in Khartoum had revealed some painful accounts on gender disparities and discrimination in their work environment. The journalists mentioned that the young journalists have been experiencing exploitation by newspapers editors. Editors demand young journalists to go through training before their appointment as journalists. However, the young journalists exclaimed, training usually extends for more than 24 months without pay. They added: "We report stories, pay the expenses of transportation from one place to another, and work often times for more than 80 hours. There are no real regulations that limit the number of working hours or ensure compensation. The Sudanese Union of Journalists in Khartoum has a framework for salary rates, which sets the minimum wage for journalists at 350 USD per month, but few media owners agree to pay this minimum.

The Islamist ideology of the current government molded its cultural/Islamic discourse around an "ideal" image of a Muslim woman, which requires the re-domestication of women, the reconstruction of the moral fabrics of the society and the assignment of women as agents of that reconstruction (Malik, 1995). Accordingly, in 1992 the Islamist State in Sudan formulated many regulations to control women's physical activities and to control women's sexuality (physical appearance) especially in urban areas of Sudan. One pressing example to the government's control of Sudanese women's physical appearance and mobility is the famous incident of lashing journalist Loubna Al-Hussien which was covered by all media including international media outlets. On July 3, 2009, Sudan's Morality police arrested a female journalist "Loubna al-Husseini" for wearing "trousers". The Morality police had publicly humiliated, and then arrested her and other thirteen women journalists, in a restaurant. The police beat them all, then the court sentenced the women to forty lashes in public for the crime of "indecent clothing" as CNN reported. Another Sudanese female journalist "Amal Habbani" faced charges of "defaming police" when she wrote an article in support of Hussein in "*Ajrass Al-Horreya*" (Freedom Bells) Sudanese newspaper in August 2009.

Women journalists are only facing the 1992 Public Street Act, which target them as “women” but also, like their counterpart men journalists, are constantly confronted by the restrictions imposed on their profession by the Press and Publications Act of 2004. The Act imposes a number of tough restrictions on the right to express oneself through the media, imposes harsh sanctions on journalists. The Act established the Press and Printed Press Materials National Council (National Press Council). The National Press Council issues licenses for media organizations, imposes penalties including the suspension of newspapers, and also acts as gatekeeper to the journalistic profession through organizing and holding professional examinations and administering a national register of journalists. The Press Council is established under the supervision of the Minister for Information and Communications, and its budget is controlled in part by the government. Sudan government in practice is exercising significant influence over the National Press Council.

The lack of independence of the National Press Council impacted the margin of freedom for the media institutions in Sudan. The Council issues and suspends or revokes licenses for both media houses and individual journalists. Under Chapter III of the Act, only registered companies, legally registered political or social associations with a registered editor-in-chief, may publish newspapers. Further conditions require that all editors-in-chief be at least 40 years old have at least 15 years of professional experience, possess a university degree and that they have not been convicted of an offence “inconsistent with honor, honesty” or any offence under the Press Act. The determination of age and years of experiences for the position of editor-in-chief have limited the number of women who can break the glass ceiling to reach that senior position. As I mentioned earlier the journalism field in Sudan has been a male-dominated field, women with university degrees entered the profession recently with the increasing number of Mass communication colleges and programs.

Under the 2004 Press Act, a journalist’s license may be revoked or suspended when he or she has been convicted of a ‘press offence’ more than once, or for a breach of professional standards, which include a vague requirement to ‘respect chastity’. Newspapers may have their license suspended or revoked for “contravention of any of the conditions of granting the license”. Since the introduction of the 2004 Act, numerous newspapers have been suspended. Examples include *Al Sudani*, which was suspended for an indefinite period after reporting on the beheading of a newspaper editor; the suspension of *Al-Watan* in February 2007, after it published an interview with religious militants; and the seizure of an entire daily print run of *Ra’y Al-Shaab*, in September 2006. There have also been reports of prejudice in the National Press Council examinations against English speakers, with the result that many Anglophone journalists have not been able to gain accreditation. The Act also prohibits the free distribution of foreign publications, and requires non-Sudanese nationals to obtain a separate license before being allowed to publish.

On the other side of the coin and according to all women journalists I interviewed, the Sudanese Union of Journalists has failed to enforce laws or regulations that would ensure acceptable working conditions for journalists.

Cultural Factors

One of the main questions I asked to all women journalists I talked with was related to the extent to which the “image” of women working in the media has changed over time. Ibtihal, a broadcaster eloquently responded by stating the following:

“The community image of the professional women or women journalist has changed. Our profession as *Muthiaat* broadcasters used to be devalued and looked down at by the Sudanese society; the same way the society devalue female singers and actresses. Now the situation is different. It is quite common to find a father who would come by himself to the

TV or the Radio premises looking for opportunities for his talented daughter in children or youth programs. Media education has definitely played an important role in improving the image of Sudanese women journalists qualitatively and quantitatively." (Ibtihal Al Mustafa, personal interview, October 10, 2010)

RawdaElhaj mentioned that, "fortunately, we have passed the era in which our profession is viewed as loose by the Sudanese society. Probably the earlier generation of journalist women experienced or suffered from this kind of discrimination from the society but we did not. I believe the Sudanese women journalist have gained respect and dignity they deserve from the society." The major problem from Rawda's point of view lays not necessarily on the society's perception of the profession, but the dilemma that usually faces women working on this profession is conflicting nature of the profession and the nature of cultural/gender roles assigned by society to women. From my own perspective, I see journalism and more specifically broadcasting, as a profession is selfish in a sense that it demands you as a whole and requires devoting all your time and life to it. It is not like so many other professions in which you do your job and go home. It requires to stay after regular working hours, staying late in the night, or spend the night working in the studio, and some times travel and spend days away from your family. I think the profession with this kind of duties contradicts with my identity as a wife and a mother. I have my social life and family commitments and being a mother is my first priority and in life. I see it as a problem or a challenge encountered by women and can be considered as a negative aspect of our experience because men can do it easily. They can stay late in their office, they can stay overnight, and can easily travel in missions inside and outside the country and stay away from their families. It is a problem because you feel that the work needs this type of commitments. In many cases I feel that there are excellent opportunities for me to travel abroad and conduct interviews but I can't exploit these opportunities due to my family commitments.

In relation to our image as women journalists, another media professional (EimanMohamadElhassan) encapsulated her experience as follow: I think this image depends to a large extent on the cognitive and cultural development that we have achieved as women and the perception of the community of us as workingwomen. I remember in one of my earlier days in Radio (late Omdurman (late 1970s), I was supervising a late show and it was late in the night when my colleagues escorted me home by Radio Omdurman private bus. When we arrived we saw my father outside the house carrying a stick. I was scared seeing my father with a stick in his hand. I told my colleagues that if I didn't make it to work tomorrow, it means that I had a broken leg or a broken arm caused by that stick. She added "my male colleagues immediately approached my father apologizing on my behalf for coming home late through explaining some circumstances happened in our work that night. My father received them well and accepted their apology. In a private conversation with my father after my colleagues left, I asked him about the reasons for him to hold a stick. He said he was worried about me and intended to go to Radio Omdurman building looking for me and he feared the dogs at that time of the night so he carried a stick to protect himself. I was really relieved knowing that the stick was for homeless dogs and not for me.

At the same time, it's those kinds of economic pressures that Mahdi says has led so many Sudanese women into journalism. Ten years ago, female journalists were extremely scarce but as more girls and women shed tradition to find work, journalism benefited.

"International pressures are forcing Sudan to open up and along with that comes the need for communicators. And women are going for it," she says.

Leadership and Decision Making –'The Glass Ceiling'

One of the few women who barely succeeded in breaking the glass ceiling to top management positions in media institutions in Sudan is MajdaAldabi. Majda is the head of the Department of Culture, Sudan Radio and Television Corporation (SRTC). I would like to devote this part of the paper

to narrate Majda's story as was told by her during my indepth interview with Sudanese women journalists. Majda started her carrier as a journalist in a city called Atbara in the Northern region of Sudan. She said: First I worked at a par-time position with Atbara TV then I joined the Federal Ministry of Culture and information in Khartoum in 1973. However, for family reasons and due to my will to stay with my family I returned to work in media institutions in Atbra again. I worked in the Investigation and Report section at Atbara TV, I also worked as a reporter for a regional newspaper in Atbara called Al Nakhee (Plam trees), in addition to my work as a chairperson for the Information Section at the Regional Ministry of Culture and Information in Atbara.

In 1977 Atbara Public Radio (Naher El-Nile) Radio of River Nile was established and I was chosen to work for it. Amazingly, I continued to cooperate with the TV and the two newspapers. I was able to do all these tasks because I was young, dynamic with no much of family responsibilities and commitments like what I have now. At Atbara Public Radio, I produced *Monwaat* cultural and variety programs. Then I chaired *Gissim el Tanseegwa el mutaba*. "Synchronization/Management and Follow up" Section. In 1992 I was appointed as a Director for Atbara Public Radio and I was the only woman among the directors of all regional radios in Sudan including Kassala, Dungle, Medani, and El Obiedh. We did an excellent job with regard to the administrative structure of the Radio in addition to the programming and the content. We had committees from Atbara to look after the quality of our programs and we were the firsts to introduce feedback techniques to our programs' content through conducting regular audience questionnaire and studies. Our Radio station was the best among other radios in Sudan. As a matter of fact, Majda added, in many annual meetings for regional radios in Khartoum, Atbara Radio Nher El Nil Radio was chosen as a model for quality program and administrative structure to be followed by other regional radios in Sudan.

In 2002 a new arrangement was established where states TVs and radios were separated from the national broadcasting corporations. I think this arrangement followed the new federation law whereby the state governor was responsible for all administrative aspects in his or her state including information and media systems. This decision had an impact on the personnel of Atbara TV and Radio. Some of them who belong to the National Corporation of Radio and Television were asked to come back to Khartoum, some personnel were dismissed, some decided to retire. I decided to stay and shortly after that a State corporation of Radio and Television were established and I was appointed as a director for that corporation. I started right away looking for a building for the newly established corporation because there was a new bridge in the Nile that had to be established which had to come right across the old building of the Radio Station.

Majda continued with narrating the success stories of her unit by mentioning that: We also succeeded in creating a new administrative structure for the corporation, a new law, and an advisory council from the elites, college professors, journalists in Atbara and the State of Nahr El Niel to lay out policy and guidance for media profession in the State including reviewing our plans, strategy, and program content. We were the first in Sudan to adopt a new technology and equipment for *Itha'a Wadi El Neil* Wadi El Neil Radio, even before Omdurman Public Radio. We also adopted a good policy for training our personnel and technicians. We trained personnel out side the country and we brought experts from Germany to supervise the installation of the new equipment and train staff for using it. The corporation again was recognized as a model for its achievement and the quality of its program. This recognition happened several times during annual meetings and conferences of national and regional corporations of radios and televisions in Sudan. I think we were successful because we studied and understood social, economic, political, and cultural situation of people in the State. The economy in Atbara and the State in large depends mainly on agriculture and rail ways industries and services and the people particularly in Atbara are highly sophisticated. Our questionnaires and studies clearly indicated high status of awareness and knowledge of the people of the State and advanced level of knowledge and understanding of what we presented to them through radio and television. Atbara is

well known of its political history and the contribution of its people in the independence of Sudan. I believe its people still contribute to the political and cultural development of this country. As media professionals we put great consideration to the cultural and political awareness of these audiences. We also considered their expectations and satisfaction and always value their feedback and criticisms. It was a huge responsibility to present what makes our audiences happy and satisfied and I think that was the main reason behind the success of our programs.

Again for some reasons related to my family I did not continue my work as the chairperson of the Corporation of Television and Radio at Nahr El Neil State. By the time that my daughters came to Khartoum for their college education and I had to come with them, therefore I joined again the national corporation in Omdurman taking the position of directing the Department of Culture at the Sudan Public Radio. I have to say that during all the time working in administrative position I did not ignore my profession as a journalist. I continued producing radio programs and cooperated with newspapers and television in Atbara and Khartoum.

I think managing media institutions is totally different from managing other institutions. It requires a great deal of flexibility that can be found in women rather than in men. During my entire managerial career I have never taken a decision that I regret taking and no decision I made I didn't implement. I have never taken a decision when I was angry, frustrated or even tired. Whenever I feel angry or irritated I go home to avoid taking any decision.

To me Majda's story is fascinating and it encapsulated a journey of a woman who began her career as a part-time with little family responsibilities till she reached one of top positions held by women journalists in Sudan juggling many responsibilities as a mother, a wife, a manager, a and a reporter. To further investigate the issue of "breaking the glass ceiling I asked other journalists about their opinion on this issue. RawdaAlhaj, a journalist and a poet believes that women in media institutions in Sudan still suffer injustice and unfairness when comes to leadership positions. According to Rawda, considering the proliferation of huge numbers of newspapers, TV channels and stations, broadcasting stations and FM radios in Sudan and the large numbers of women joining the profession, women are not given equal opportunities, compared to their male counterparts, to lead important media positions. Even within internal departments and sections in these media sectors women are nearly absent from leading roles. With regard to the Sudan National Radio I can mention AblaMahoud who was assigned as director of training and recently Magda Aldabi who is currently the director of department of culture. "I think this is due to prejudice against women because if a man and a women are competing for the same leading position with same levels of work experience, skills, and qualifications, the man would be chosen for the position not the woman. Women are also left behind when it comes to promotion compared to men due to the prejudice related to women ineffectiveness in leadership" (Personal Interview with RawdaElhaj, August 12, 2010.)

Sudanese Women's Perception of the Future of Journalism in Sudan and Portrayal of Gender Issues

Many of the Sudanese women journalists I interviewed share the following account by Ibtihal, a broadcast journalist and TV presenter, who thinks the new generation of women journalist has overcome and forever the obstacle of fearing the media and facing TV cameras and audiences. She added by saying that in the past a broadcaster has to choose either to present his/her program in standard Arabic language or in Sudanese colloquial, but now the new generation of journalists has invented a hybrid language accommodating the two styles of Arabic and felt very comfortable in using it, which helped a lot in overcoming the fear of facing the camera and the audiences. The profession itself has changed; our work as women in the TV or the Radio is no longer just *muthiaatrabatto* connect between different programs. Our work now is more sophisticated as it requires depth of knowledge beside analytical and presenting skills that could be acquired and enhanced by education

and training. There is an opportunity now for us, which was not available for our predecessors, as women to discuss political issues and to confront officials and political leaders with pressing questions. She also added "the number of women journalists has tremendously increased as you may notice. If we take first generation of women journalist in the TV, for example, the number is quite a few that you can count in the fingers of one hand. There were Siham el Maghrabi, Layela el Maghrabi and Huiam el Maghrabi followed by Rwada el Haj and IsraZein el Abdeen. Currently, the numbers of women journalists in all disciplines are huge with no comparison at all to the past" (Personal interview with IbtihalMohamed Al Mustafa, August 15, 2010.)

Most of the women journalists I interviewed in this research see the future of women in journalism in Sudan lay in advocacy journalism. Women journalists, they stressed, can be very effective in advocating literacy, peace making, and can intensively investigate on cultural, and taboo issues such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). "We are more capable conveying the message of peace to the audiences. As women journalists we witnessed and covered the historic moment of signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and South in 2005. Our voice was loud and our "peace" message was very clear when we covered that event through not only news but also through special programs such as *Bietna*(Our home), *el Sabah el Jadeed*(The New Dawn) through which we focused on women major victims of the more than 50 years civil war in Sudan. Women were killed, wounded, harassed, and displaced from their homes. Therefore, we believe that women can be active in peace making.

This point of agreement among most of the women I interviewed had specifically interested me as I always try through my work to find ways to rework the hyphen between activism (issues of women empowerment and women's agency: in this case women journalists' ability to change the news) and structures within which women operate (what is available and not available to women within these structures)

Van Zoonen has deployed a structural approach to argue that we see more female journalists today because competitive pressure to attract viewers in a multichannel environment is privileging the so-called human-interest angle in news. "Redefinition of the news genre increases the number of openings for women who were traditionally relegated to 'soft news'. Accordingly, it is not women who change the news, but changes in the news that open the way to women. Paying due regard to structures in this fashion helps in evaluating changes that appear to be increasing media visibility for women in the Middle East. There, censorship laws restricting media content limit the scope for groundbreaking input by everyone, male and female, at all editorial levels. In these circumstances, a large percentage of women in the workforce, no matter how senior, are not synonymous with critical mass" (Sakr, Naomi, 2004, p. 9)

Through my observations I came to recognize that there is no women media in Sudan, in the sense that there are no programs and magazines addressing contemporary women's issues. Ibtihal confirmed that there is no such women media in Sudan. She said: "print journalism is a head of media because there are some magazines like *Ustrati* My Family" and *LahowaLaha* For Him and For Her that deals with women issues. Women's media in Sudan is important and there is a dire need for it. Women drama can also play important role in educating women and raising women's knowledge and awareness of their rights" (Personal interview with IbtihalMohamed Al Mustafa, August 15, 2010.)

The media in Sudan is yet to put women's issues as part of its media policies in terms of addressing the need to produce programs for women and in terms of sustaining programs initiated by women journalists who felt the need to produce such programs. One of the women journalists I interviewed EimanMohamad El-Hassan has attempted during the 1990s document experiences of Sudanese women particularly creative and talented women. This has been accomplished through a radio

program called *QalamImra'a* "A Woman's Pen", produced and aired by *Itha'a Al Bait Al Sudani* "Sudanese Home Radio". Through that program, Eiman hosted many women among them were journalists, poets, and novelists. Eiman had produced thirty episodes of this program. She also produced a radio program called *AlMarah Al Hadeega* Woman like a Garden, which was designed for women who have achieved success in public and/or personal lives. Eiman added that: "I was completely responsible for the search/research, preparation, execution, and production of the two programs. The main motivation behind the idea and the execution of this program by me was my own realization that largely the Sudanese woman lacks access to a forum/through which she can express her talent and creativity in a male-dominated society like the Sudanese society. There is another radio program for women called *Saloon Hawaa* Eve's Saloon. I actually work with them and I witness that the program gives space and special attention to women's issues related to fashion, make up, cooking, raising children etc. There are no programs to document women's experiences except the ones that I produced (EimanMohamadElhassan, personal interview, August, 2010.)

Lack of Effective Networking by Women and Lack of Recognition of Women's Role in the Industry

"I strongly believe that there is a lack of recognition of women's achievements in this country and ignorance of the history of specially professional, talented and creative women. The irony is that new generations of women lack knowledge of Sudanese women's history. Therefore, I think documenting our experiences and achievements as women is extremely important and we have to do it ourselves and educate others about it" (Eiman, El-Hassan). Eiman added that despite the existence of number of programs in the different TV and radio channels addressing women and women's issues these programs still confine women within the traditional themes of: beauty, cooking, child-care, etc. Eiman is the pioneering women journalist to air a program reflecting on the experiences of Sudanese women poets and writers.

The discussion of effective network and recognition of women's role in the industry brought to the forefront the role of journalism professional organizations in the country in addressing concerns and professional questions facing journalists, especially women. There is a widespread perception among media practitioners in Khartoum that the Sudanese Union of Journalists, a government-controlled entity, does not represent the views and aspirations its members. In fact all women journalists I interviewed in this research mentioned that they don't feel the existence of the union let alone see their rights protected by the same union. "Unions worldwide have been slow to act on gender issues. It took the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) 75 years to get around to holding its first conference on gender equality in 2001" (Sakr, Naomi, 2004, p.10.)

Worth mentioning here is that, as a reaction to the increasing incidences of harassment and violence against journalists and the lack of action from the Sudanese Union of Journalists, a new movement called the Sudanese Solidarity Journalist Group was born in May 2007. It began spontaneously as a reaction to the suspension of the *al-Sudani* newspaper and the subsequent imprisonment of its publisher and editor. According to media professionals, the movement has given journalists a forum to fight back collectively for the first time.

Conclusions: The Multilayered Jeopardy

The main question of the paper: How the "glass ceiling" metaphor *the invisible barriers that one, read women, can see through but not easily get through* is applicable to the position of women in the media institutions of Sudan? To address the question of the paper, I classified the accounts and stories of Sudanese women journalists into themes; each theme addresses an angle of the broad question about the "glass ceiling" metaphor. It became clear to me through the narratives of women journalists and through the data I collected on the history of Sudanese media, that few women broke

the glass ceiling and advanced to high managerial/leadership positions in the media institutions of Sudan. Putting into consideration the vertical gender gap that is taking place in all media institutions in Sudan (large number of women at bottom of the ladder and few number of women at the top of the ladder) I can say that the metaphor is indeed applicable. Sudanese women journalists are constantly facing and negotiating gender disparities in work place, and poor working conditions; cultural/society's perception of women working in the media; limited margin of press freedom in the country, and confronting the Islamist perception of the government to the Sudanese "woman".

Women journalists in Sudan began their journeys at the beginning of the 20th century confronting traditional views of a society that marginalizes and looks down upon women who hold public positions. In recent years, media education in Sudan has helped in improving the image of women journalists who began to "invade" the profession with huge waves. Moreover, like many other women journalists world wide, Sudanese women journalists have been trying to balance and to find the happy medium between their obligations as wives, mothers, and just women and the obligations of the profession and its social responsibility. Moreover, Sudanese women journalists like other Sudanese women are confronted by a state ideological structure that has been experiencing tight control of women through establishing regulations to define/shape "ideal" women's appearances and restrict women's mobility.

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