

Gendered visible and invisible inequalities in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA)**Guest Editors**

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We invite submissions to this Special Issue of *Gender, Work & Organization (GWO)* dedicated to examining gendered visible and invisible inequalities in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. We adopt an intersectional lens to inequality and define it as the discrimination and marginalization that occurs as a result of intersecting power dynamics borne from multiple forms of diversity (Woods, Benschop & Van Den Brink, 2022). Crucially, we focus on inequalities tied to the very visible dimension of gender, and its subsequent interaction with other visible societal attributes such as race, age, religion, disabilities etc. as well as more invisible manifestations of gender inequality when gender interacts with more implicit dimensions such as class, tribal identity, culture/sub-cultures, and geographical location.

This special issue seeks contributions on micro-level/individual experiences of gender inequality, meso-level organisational adjustments/responses *and* the role of enduring socioinstitutional norms and public policy interventions in correcting and/or maintaining gender inequalities across the region, thus highlighting intersectional issues that affect women's participation in the labour market. Our aim is to encourage research on the MENA region that adopts intersectionality as a lens to think about gender inequalities at work by expanding and deepening their analyses of power dynamics in organizations through an intersectional approach (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Intersectionality describes the social power dynamics in situations where individuals might have privilege in some situations but are oppressed in others (Collins, 2015; Hancock, 2007; Holvino, 2010) and can be useful for exploring power dynamics within organizations and not limiting inequality to fixed social categories of social identity or location per se (Woods, Benschop & Van Den Brink, 2022).

Visible gender disparities in the MENA region continue to subsist with far-reaching implications for labour markets *and* societies at large. For instance, while female participation rates in education are on the rise across the Middle East, the unemployment rate for young women in the Middle East is also one of the highest in the world (51.9 percent unemployed women compared to 17.8 unemployed men - ILO, 2020). Women remain clustered in the traditional and 'socially acceptable' fields of education, learning and training, and health care (Aldossari & Murphy, 2023; Tlaiss and Dirani, 2015) and are chronically under-represented in more vocational/technical fields such as engineering, computing, electronics and accountancy (Calvert and Al-Shetaiwi, 2002; Rutledge, et al 2011). Beyond these visible discrepancies, invisible inequalities rooted in socio-cultural and religious notions of family honour and the

currency of female purity and morality (Ali, 2015) continue to impact women's lived experiences.

The theoretical legacy of gender equality literature, and how it informs work and organizations, is well-established. This special issue aims to further this conversation by exploring and critically examining gender, and gendered intersectional manifestation, against the unique socio-cultural and institutional backdrop of the MENA region. Despite the significance of the MENA region, it remains notably under-explored and under-represented in mainstream gender research, a research gap that is problematic for a range of theoretical and practical reasons. First, our understanding of gender inequalities in the oft-studied 'Global North' context (Hennekam et al., 2017) is unlikely to translate completely in this region given the socio-institutional distinctiveness of the Middle East and North Africa. For example, the historical interaction of religious nationalism, Islamic ideologies, tribal identity and patriarchal family structures have reinforced the control and subordination of women in the MENA region, engendered gender segregation in educational and work spheres and severely restricted women's labour market choices (Aldossari & Calvard, 2022; Alkhaled, 2021; Karam & Afioni, 2021; Sidani, 2005).

Second, MENA is a region of growing geopolitical, economic and strategic interest on a global scale and research on how gender plays out in labour markets, organizations *and* wider society will be of interest to a range of stakeholders (such as third-sector organisations, multinational firms, governments both within and outside the region and internationally mobile employees aiming to work there) (Budhwar & Pereira, 2023). However, there are significant methodological roadblocks in responding to the needs of these stakeholders since lower labour market representation of women in the MENA, as well as gender segregation in both personal and professional spheres, have historically limited real-life access to women.

Third, and most significantly, the region is currently undergoing large-scale and swift transformation, marked by a range of reforms and public policy initiatives that are specifically aimed at increasing women's labour force participation and challenging prevailing patriarchal norms and customs (Koburtay et al., 2020). For example, many of Saudi Arabia's recent public policies have a progressive gendered focus, focused on increasing Saudi women's labour force participation (especially in previously male-dominant sectors) and cross-sector female leadership (Aldossari et al., 2023; Varshney, 2019). The UAE and Qatar's regulatory reforms and free trade incentives to attract foreign investment were introduced alongside the Emiratisation programme that targeted increasing national women's employment in the private sector (Rees et al., 2007; Salem & Yount, 2019). Furthermore, Egypt's National Women's Strategy NWS2030, and implementation of gender quotas in certain sectors, specifically aims to increase women's socio-economic and political empowerment and protection (Barsoum, 2019). These socio-structural changes represent a unique backdrop to study changes in the very concept of gender, specifically how the interpretation/reinterpretation of underlying notions of independence/inter-dependence, sameness and mobility may change, maintain or create visible and invisible gender inequalities in the region.

Crucially, we encourage submissions that specifically adopt a feminist lens. Examples may include a critique of the liberal feminist perspective (Gerson, 2002; Holvino, 2010) which can be useful to explore the efficacy of various forms of state/legislative interventions adopted by

countries across the MENA region in correcting gendered inequalities; a radical feminist lens (Rowland & Klein, 2013) which can help link gender inequalities in this region to power differentials arising from the positionality of sexuality, motherhood and family within patriarchal structures, and a socialist feminist perspective (Holmstrom, 2003), which can help link patriarchy to capitalism and the subsequent manifestation and perpetuation of gender inequalities in labour markets and modes of production. Additionally, given the importance of religious political identity within the MENA region, we also invite submissions with an Islamic feminism theoretical positioning (Moghadam, 2022) whereby notions of gender equality and social justice signal a secular re-reading of religiously mandated norms.

In this special issue, we are seeking both theoretical and empirical papers on the following (non-exhaustive) list of topics:

- The dynamic creation and interaction of visible and invisible inequalities for women, and other marginalised groups, in the Middle East and North Africa highlighting the intersection of macro-systemic forces (e.g. socio-cultural patriarchal forces, Islamic ideologies), meso-systemic forces (e.g. workplace culture, HR policies and practices) and individual's identities embedded within multiple systems.
- Variations in the micro-level work experiences of individual women, and manifestation of gender identities, across a range of organizations, sectors and countries within the region. More specifically, how does the social standing of women impact their lived experiences at home and in workplaces?
- Meso-level, organisational responses (or lack thereof) to the dual forces of slow-to-change, socio-religious restrictions on women's employment alongside public policy agendas aimed at increasing female labour force participation in the MENA region;
- Examination of the socio-cultural, institutional and regulatory constraints on, or enablers of, gender inequalities in the MENA region.
- The extent to which the historical legacy of Islamic ideologies in the region shapes the position of women in society and the workplace. Do variations in these ideologies (for example, Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia versus Shiaism in Iran) have differential implications for gender marginalisation?
- The extent to which patriarchal norms are undergoing changes. What socio-cultural and/or institutional factors are affecting this change? How are these changes being manifested in workplaces? And how does this in turn shape women's career opportunities and prospects?
- The transfer of 'Western'/foreign/Global North narratives on gender to the MENA region and how the complex mechanisms of transmutation, co-optation and/or rejection of these narratives either mitigate or create gender inequalities within this distinctive region. What type of indigenous knowledge is being generated from within the MENA and how does it affect the narrative around gender issues in this region?
- A comparative lens looking at differentials in the conceptualisation of the lived experience of women and of gender inequalities *within* specific MENA countries (for

instance, across organisations/industries/sectors) as well as *across* countries within and outside the region.

- Examining the way gender inequalities are having an impact on the enactment and experience of diversity, intersectionality, feminism and activism in the region.
- Examining the role that governments, NGOs and civil society organizations play in changing macro- and meso-level structures and how these in turn may change, maintain or create visible and invisible gender inequalities in the region.

Submission Information

Submissions should be made electronically through the **Submission System**

<https://submission.wiley.com/journal/gwao> Please refer to the **Author Guidelines** <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14680432/homepage/forauthors.html> before submission. Please select the 'Original Article' as the article type on submission. On the Additional Information page during submission, select 'Yes, this is for a Special Issue' and the Special Issue title from the dropdown list, 'Gendered visible and invisible inequalities in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA)'. For questions about the submission system please contact the Editorial Office at gwooffice@wiley.com.

For enquiries about the scope of the Special Issue, please contact direct your queries to the Guest Editor, Dr Sara Chaudhry, s.chaudhry@bbk.ac.uk.

Deadline for submissions: 17 June 2024

About the Guest editors:

Sara Chaudhry is a Senior Lecturer in Management at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research focuses on two key themes: 1) international human resource management issues, specifically work on HRM in the global south, the cross-border transfer of HRM policies and practices in multinational enterprises, career orientations of multinational employees and global talent management, and 2) diversity in employment experiences (for a range of employee groups such as women, parents, older workers etc.). She was a member of the guest editorial team for a special issue titled 'Uncovering missing voices: The invisible aspects of idiosyncratic deals (i-deals)' in the *Group & Organization Management Journal* (ABS 3*).

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Fida Afioni is a tenured Associate Professor in HRM at the Olayan School of Business at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and currently serves as Associate Provost, leading faculty development and institutional assessment efforts. Her publications, at the intersection of HRM, careers, and gender, have won multiple awards and appeared in leading journals in her field, the most recent being in *Gender, Work, and Organization*, the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. She currently serves as HRM/HRD section co-editor in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and is an editorial board member in *Career Development International* and *Human Resource Management Journal*.

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