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#FEMALEFORWARD

Johanna
Hawari Bourgely



Mediator

The WOMEN of MILBAYN

~~HOW?~~

~~WHY?~~

~~WHO?~~

~~WHAT?~~

~~WHEN?~~

WOMEN

Empowering women and closing gender gaps in the world are key for economies and communities to thrive. Therefore, the aim of our series "Women of Lebanon" is to give women from very different backgrounds in the country a voice, as we believe that it is important to portray strong women and use their impact to inspire future generations. Thus, this series will cover a whole range of different topics and sectors, from human rights, the arts to business and politics and all the women in the series have one thing in common: they are outstanding personalities who believe in change and the importance of individual responsibility to work for a better society. I am particularly grateful to Nicole Hamouche, the author of this series, who has identified and interviewed the ten women in our series and has worked so hard to make this project happen.

Enjoy reading and we hope that you will get inspired too!

Best regards,



Kristof Kleemann

*Project Director
ENF Lebanon and Syria*





Johanna Howari Bourjeily is the founder and director of the Professional Center for Mediation at USJ.

Through this center that she created, Joanna Hawari Bourjeily has trained more than 10,000 people in Lebanon (pupils, students, professionals) to resolve conflicts without violence.

She fled Lebanon at the age of three due to the Civil War and decided to become a criminal lawyer. Her life was changed when a client of hers whom she was representing in court assaulted someone, prompting the prosecutor to request that the case be processed in penal mediation so that both the agressor and victim can settle the conflict amicably.

This was the turning point in her career where she saw mediation and peaceful conflict resolution as a means of helping her home country overcome its challenges through peaceful communication. This lead her to establish the USJ Professional Mediation Center in 2006.

She wants the Lebanese youth to know that they have a choice: Settle conflict through dialogue, or let themselves be carried away by their impulses and violence. What's important is how you manage it!



**Johanna
Hawari Bourgely**

<https://www.facebook.com/CPMUSJ/about/>

IN HER OWN WORDS



JOHANNA HAWARI BOURGELY

**Warrior for a pacified Civil Society
Promoting Mediation, non-violent Communication and Conflict Resolution**

by
NICOLE HAMOUCHE

Was it the violence of the country she was born in – Lebanon- that has put Johanna Hawari on the path of non-violence and mediation? She had to leave Lebanon at the age of four, when her father, Yasser Hawari, a free speaker, and famous journalist was threatened by occupation forces and escaped a bomb in his office. The call of the origins exerted its attraction on Johanna, who had studied criminal law and criminology at Assas University in Paris. The young woman who worked as a lawyer for a couple of years, chose to leave the trial arenas to dedicate herself to the promotion of mediation, non-violent communication, and conflict resolution. She had discovered the virtues of mediation in a case she was defending in Paris: the prosecutor had asked that the case be handled in mediation for the aggressor and the victim to discuss and manage the conflict amicably. This event was eye opening for her, she says as she found the process much more human than traditional trials, with their shares of stress, distance, and show. Captivated by the potential of mediation, she immediately envisioned it as a way to help Lebanese live in peace. This calling, together with the call of love - she had a Lebanese companion who would become her husband - took her back to her native land in 2001. She put together the first mediation center in the Middle East in October 2006, the Professional Mediation Center of St. Joseph University of Beirut after having founded *Médiateurs sans Frontières* ie. *Mediators Without Borders* in 2005. *Médiateurs sans Frontières*, in partnership with the NGO *Mouvement Social* undertook an initiative that addressed the youth in various tensed regions in the country.

For Johanna Hawari, the Professional Mediation Center – CPM - came somehow as an urgent response to the surge of violence upon the 2006

war. The center raises awareness on the topic in schools and universities, trains mediators and takes mediation assignments in various fields: family, culture, professionals, and programs in schools as project incubators. It also has developed an activity of incubation in schools and jails.

Johanna’s objective is to give practitioners tools and training so that they know when entangled in a conflict that “they still have the choice to go to violence or non-violence”. Against all odds and despite the difficult and violent environment in Lebanon, Johanna Hawari continues to believe in the freedom of choice when one is taught and given the resources: “we don’t build a cathedral in one day. The most important thing is the stone we are building on” she says, and “the stone here is the youth in school and universities”.

With the CPM, Johanna feels she is on a social mission, that of building a pacified civil society. For her, there is no doubt that the current times clearly announce that “it will be the era of mediation in the world: we have no choice currently, but that of a constructive dialogue, of solidarity”. When asking her if she still feels her mission is relevant in the current state of decay in Lebanon, her conviction that “all the seeds (they) are planting will bear fruit” seems unshaken.



Tell us about your journey in mediation and how you came to found the Professional Mediation Center.



I studied mediation at the Institut Catholique de Paris. I chose to enroll in this one-year diploma after having experienced mediation in a case I was working on. I was defending an aggressor and the prosecutor has suggested that we go to mediation: I found the process very human, it allowed the victim to speak in front of the aggressor and to be heard and the aggressor to be viewed as human and to understand that he had acted out. I also find the closed doors proceedings more human than public trials. Hence,

I decided to specialize and train in mediation. Ever since I graduated, mediation was on my mind. I felt I could take it to Lebanon: the mere fact of listening to someone is appeasing, you help them evolve. I wanted to feel useful and thought I could be so in Lebanon. The country was a fertile field for mediation and the societal ambition I had. I was also at that time engaged with a Lebanese painter who wanted to go back to Lebanon. He became my husband.

“The mere fact of listening to someone is appeasing, you help them evolve.”



Hence the return. How did you found the Professional Mediation Center and what are its role and activities?

When I got back to Lebanon in 2001, I worked for 5 years in a law firm. Then, in 2002, I decided to launch a pilot project of mediation to gauge the interest. I proposed a training in Beirut to eighty lawyers, the training was given by IFOMEN, the same institute I had studied at in Paris. The idea of mediation had never left me since I had studied it though it took time for me to take the initiative and step fully into it and abandon the law practice. For me, through mediation, I am on a mission to help myself and help others. I founded *Médiateurs sans Frontières* in 2005. And

in 2006, answering a call for proposal from the European Commission, we presented a project in partnership with the NGO *Mouvement Social*: the project started in 22 complex and tensed regions of Lebanon with youth from 14 to 22. It was about non-violent communication, dialogue, and mediation. The idea was to create a network amongst youth - through various activities and summer camps - so that they learn to know each other beyond preconceived ideas. That same year, I also offered a mediation course at the Intercultural Mediation Masters at USJ a degree in partnership with the European UNESCO chair. Further,



I proposed to establish an independent mediation center that would be linked to the University. Students can come from any background, they acquire, not only a way of doing but also a way of being - it is a relationship posture. And they earn a professional mediator diploma. The knowledge they get can be applied in various realms: family, commercial or civil contexts. Moreover, mediation is an amicable way of freeing the tribunals and of avoiding the recourse to judiciary solutions.

**Is there awareness about the subject in Lebanon?
And how much readiness and openness is there
for these kind of subjects?
How is the environment like?**



From 2005 to today things have changed a lot. Mediation has entered our culture, even if there is still a long way to go. Also, several mediation associations have been created from former CPM members, that is to say that there is a need. I also see the impact of our advocacy, based on the number of requests we get, and on the demands of interventions in public and private schools. We graciously offer our interventions to public schools, training students and teachers as well as parents. Since 2009, we have partnered with 40 schools and 10.600 students have attended awareness sessions. The age bracket targeted is: 8 and 12 to 14. Students even have a mediation room within the schools. Many schools are giving courses now, called introduction to mediation and empathy, to children of the age of sixteen. At Saint

Joseph University, mediation has been included in the curriculum as an optional credit in the majors. In partnership with AUF, the Association of French speaking Universities, we are offering training in other universities in Lebanon, but also in Jordan, Sudan, Egypt, as well as in the past, to Syrian students who have come themselves to Lebanon. Actually, currently with COVID-19, violence and tensions within families are reported to have increased because of promiscuity. Mediator students have the capacity to manage those conflicts.



**“With COVID-19, violence and tensions
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Outside of schools and universities, we have also developed some projects with UN agencies, for instance, a project with municipalities: we have established mediation units in municipalities, such as the Jdeide and Tripoli Municipalities and we have worked with the Union of Municipalities of South, North and Metn. Also, the Chamber of Commerce and of Arbitrage have set a center of commercial mediation, we had also set mediation unit centers at Hotel Dieu Hospital and at the Doctors' Order. Many of those projects have been a bit suspended after the “thaoura”. We work in different modalities: we have worked with organizations such as SESOBEL, helping the families of the disabled in the issues they face, but we also work with families on inheritance conflicts. Our services are remunerated, the rate was for instance, before the “thaoura” around 60 USD/

hour for a family mediation, but when the people can't afford it, we offer our services for free.

On another hand and on a matter that is very current, we reactivated a year ago, a partnership that we had initiated in 2009 with BEMO bank. And we are very proud to be at the origin of the law project that develops judiciary mediation and that was promulgated in 2018 - we had started working on it in 2009 with Minister Ibrahim Najjar. This law which restitutes to the Judge its executory force, will enable decongesting the tribunals.

The activities of the CPM in terms of Mediation and non-violent communication seem to address, not only institutional issues but also private and individual matters.

Can you tell us more about this?

Yes, absolutely. Pacification starts within oneself first. Many of the students who enrolled in the center don't pursue a career in it but say it has helped them in their personal lives. On a social level for instance, we have participated in the "thaoura" – October 2019 revolution – we used to go to Martyr's Square to listen to what is happening. We wanted to help people channel and listen to those emotions that were boiling, in a constructive dialogue - as we cannot build on violence.

**“We cannot
build on
violence.”**



Most of the students enrolled in the diploma at the center seem to be women. And in your interventions in mediation, how are you viewed as a woman? Does it make a difference?

I don't see any women issue. I myself as a woman, adapt. So, for me, the question is not a gender question. It is just a question of adopting a way of being which respects us in what we are. The posture is important, I don't come as a woman, rather as myself, beyond any gender issue. Women have an essential role. They are the bosses in the households, they are the ones who handle emotional intelligence, they train peace artisans.

With UN Women, we train women in various regions of the country on coaching, mediation empowerment and negotiation. They become trainers and if need be, referees in their communities. People can refer to them for instance in cases of

neighborhood conflicts, couples' conflicts. They are usually educated women who have access to their communities.

At the center, 80% of the people are women. In their way of being, women are the ones who will diffuse this culture of non-violence. Nowadays, they are more and more given an important place in political projects and there is even a Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, which I am a member of. On my side and in my projects, I would like to give women more space as well. For, in their way of being, they are the ones who will diffuse this culture of non-violence.





Learn more about the Initiative at

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