

political outlook fostered the creation of a supportive environment for both individuals and communities acting to undermine or attack state officials or other adversaries. Social structure was not irrelevant, as the production system dictated which issues (such as rent, wages, access to land) were paramount for peasants. Yet peasants were capable of offering each other active or passive support regardless of production system. Even while using legal forms of political activity or participating in rebellions, peasants exhibited an alienation from the state and an aversion to confrontation.

*Honorable Mention, Social Sciences*

**Women without Men:  
Gender and Marginality in an Algerian Town**

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*Abstract*

IN ALGERIA women are defined as socially, morally, economically and politically dependent on fathers and husbands. Sociological studies generally confirm this but seldom pay attention to situations in which dependency is ruptured and the consequences this may have for the women concerned. Widows and divorcees constitute 20 percent of the adult female population yet their special position has never been studied. Consequently, differences between women have been neglected.

Death, divorce, a protracted illness, a lengthy prison-term or very old age of the father or husband, turns women into "women without men." Such a life crisis modifies their economic position, social ties, rights and power. Being without a man sets them apart from other women. The ideal code prescribes that male relatives take over the responsibilities and the authority of the absent man. Although Algerian men generally try to live up to this ideal, few succeed in carrying this burden. Many women without men have to provide for themselves and their offspring, especially when their children are small and they are already living in a separate household. How do women without men cope with insufficient or nonexistent economic support? How do they survive in a country where the dominant ideology still is strongly against the participation of women in the labor market?

Absence of husband or father also changes the authority to which a woman is subjected. Moral control of men over women is closely linked with men's duty to provide for their wife and children. Male relatives more easily take on moral control over women without men than economic control, but if they are not financially supportive they can hardly enforce obedience. What is the impact of this change in direct male authority on a woman's life? Does it lead to greater freedom, and if so, does this reduce sexual inequality?

Because of their special position, women without men often go against the rules for proper feminine behavior: they do not stay home and avoid contact with male strangers, nor do they produce children. Their morality is not subjected to male protection. How does this affect notions of gender and the gender hierarchy in Algeria? Can a study of women without men shed light on the cultural construction of gender and on mechanisms that reproduce or change patterns of dominance between men and women?

These are the main issues addressed in this thesis. Fieldwork was carried out from June 1981 till June 1982 in a large town in northern Algeria. Through the networks of three families, about fifty women without men were interviewed. The information they provided during repeated and often lengthy contacts was supplemented with data obtained through talks with their relatives, friends, and employers, both male and female, through participant observation and the use of sources such as songs, newspapers, statistics, archives, letters, and a diary.

The opening chapter goes into the statistical importance of women without men, including the reasons why they outnumber single men, and the sociological relevance of this phenomenon, hinted at in Algerian novels, films, and scientific works. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the living conditions and the historical, economic, political, and social context in which the main characters live. Subsequent chapters each discuss occupations of women without men and how these express and influence notions of gender and gender dominance in specific domains. Special attention is paid to emic classification and key notions to uncover both the formal and informal activities and remunerations as well as the practical ideology of gender.

An analysis of workers in the bathhouse illustrates the different meaning of purity for women and men. Religious ideal and practice is further elaborated by discussing how washers of the dead gain power over the fate of the soul and why women in general, and women without men in particular, revert more often than men to Sufi practices and related possession trance. An analysis of sorcery shows how women without men use magic to modify gender relations, especially in the domain of sexuality. Widows and divorcees often play special roles in the ordering of sexuality as performers of virginity rites, guards of the bridal room, advisers on fertility, or as midwives. Prostitutes impinge on the sexual order in a different way. Their deviancy helps to delineate the norms for proper sexual conduct. The proxemics of prostitution are discussed as a special case in point, as spatial conduct is a powerful metaphor for sexual behavior in Algeria. Songs about women without men, by musicians who find themselves in the same position, reveal the stigma attached to these women.

The remaining chapters deal with miscellaneous occupations, including housemaids, peddlers, smugglers, service workers, careerwomen, and politicians. In making economic adjustments, women without men increasingly

come to depend on market relations rather than on patronage and kinship, and on their daughter's career instead of their own labor.

To sum up the main conclusion. Women without men are marginalized in varying degrees. They have lost their status as wife or daughter and their male provider and by consequence are often forced to trespass the boundaries of proper feminine behavior. Their marginality makes them fit for certain work. Women without men often assist in the rites of passage of birth, marriage, and death. In their occupations they mediate between impure and pure, earth and heaven, private and public space, the legal and the illegal market, and between feminity and masculinity. Many of these activities make them even more marginal. They are avoided when their services are not needed. because they handle taboo substances such as body residues, corpses, spirits, hymens, afterbirth, or contraband.

On the other hand, they exploit their marginality and stress their stigma in order to maintain a monopoly over their activities. They manipulate symbols of shame to increase their income. They accentuate the cultural opposites to make their work as mediators meaningful and necessary. While bridging the opposites, they will at the same time work to maintain the gap between them. In their marginality they break gender norms, but by being unfeminine, they help to set the boundaries of feminity.

Women without men do indeed derive power from their strategic position as mediators. They may be marginal, but they are at the same time the pivots of the cultural order. They gain power from the monopoly they have over functions that others are unable or unwilling to perform. Although they lack some of the power resources of married women, they have more access to the labour market and money, extra-domestic organization and information. Because of their extra power they are seen as disturbers of the social order and gender hierarchy. But despite their potential for personal power, the influence of women without men on the overall gender hierarchy is limited. In fact, they often help to maintain the status quo because their positions depend on the persistence of power differentials between the genders. Moreover, the stigma attached to women without men limits their function as paragon in an emancipatory process. More can be expected of the younger generation, the daughters of widows and divorcees, whose wages are rather based on education than on shame.

#### BOOK FUND IN MEMORIAM PETER KILBURN

IN APRIL 1986, shortly after the U.S. attack on Libya, and apparently in direct reprisal for it, a U.S. citizen, Peter Kilburn, was murdered in Lebanon. He had been taken hostage sixteen months previously and, since he was an invalid, it was assumed, at least by some of his friends, that he had not survived long in captivity without his medicines. The news of his death came as a double blow to his family and friends.