

PAID WORK FOR CONSTANTINE WOMEN: AN ACCESS GATE TO PUBLIC SPACE

S. MERABET¹ L. RIOUX²

Abstract: *In Algeria, paid work was once a manly business all that happened outside the house being reserved to men. The independence of the country has triggered profound socio-economic changes, which contributed to the insertion of women on the labour market. However, the attitude of the government towards the defence of women's rights remained reserved, considering the weight of conservative and fundamentalist trends which reinforce the honour code in force and maintain the women in a minority status. Paid work has triggered a change in the Man/Woman and Inside/Outside report, although the outside behaviour of women is rapidly readjusted by man when it may violate the honour code. Today, in a modern Algeria, nothing justifies the minority status of women.*

Key words: *Paid work-Women-Men-Interior (Inside)-Exterior (Outside)-Constantine.*

1. Introduction

In most countries, the individual or group relations were governed by honour codes which often remained valid across centuries. For example the duel in Great-Britain and in France, the custom of bandaging the feet of girls belonging to the higher classes in China, the murders of honour in Pakistan, are all practices which were encouraged by specific honour codes [3].

However, particularly in the Mediterranean societies, honour remains a central value, being at the same time social, sexual, economic and political. It conditions the social behaviours which are defined reported to the sex and the social status of the individual inside a group.

Thus, the honour of man is defined by protecting his family and is based on courage, honesty and loyalty, all symbols of virility, whereas the honour of woman is of sexual order only. Because she goes along the line, any form of misconduct reflects on the family and on future generations. In other words, the woman is the warrant of purity inside the family, while the man is the warrant of its reputation.

In Algeria, ever since the Islamic conquests, the honour code is still very visible, shifting the Muslim religion in its favour. It is common knowledge that the Muslim religion interferes with the socio-cultural and institutional process of the country and directs the thinking and acting

¹ University of Constantine 2, Algeria, sam.mer25@yahoo.fr;

² University Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, Irioux@u-paris10.fr

system of the Algerians. Thus, the Quran dictates ‘important codes connected to the regulation of the personal status (marriage, divorce, heritage, etc.), to the means of application of justice and of the lawful and unlawful acts’ [9]. In spite of the fact that the moral equality of man and woman in the face of God is formally mentioned in multiple texts of the Quran [20], certain verses, such as Surah Al-Baqara suggest the domination of man and induce confusion: interpreting them in a simplistic manner, without considering complementary verses, the *Idjtihad* and the *Snna*, allows ‘the attribution of an unequal status to women, according to the customs and traditions of a patriarchal society [20]. In other words, despite the fact that the Quran dictates the complementary self-development of woman and man alike, the confusion in understanding those verses and the cultural halt which results from it profoundly mark the couple relations [4]. Furthermore, the Algerian law, which is based on the principles of the Islamic Sharia has always condemned women to a legal inferiority status, which has allowed men to preserve their privileges.

We have chosen to concentrate on the city of Constantine, a city which lays at the heart of the history of Algeria. It has accommodated numerous civilizations, which explains its rich historical and architectural heritage. Constantine has its own identity due to the fraternal connections and to the role of the *Zawiya*'s³, but also due to its own tradition, based mostly on a city culture, heritage of a crossbreed of Arabic-Muslims, Andalusians and Turks. The

³ Muslim religious buildings. They promote social life and redefine the Islam according to the popular needs. Spiritual practices and burial ceremonies of the founding saints of the fraternal connections are held here.

popular mentality is based on the respect and conservation of traditions dictated by old and powerful families named ‘*Beldia*’.

2. The women of Constantine traditional Algeria

More than in other regions of Algeria, the women living in Constantine have interiorized and respected since their early childhood all the codes and rules which governed the very conservative society of the region. Their life was traced, shaped in and limited to a precise space: the house. The space structured the social life of the age. The women lived quasi-exclusively in *Eddar*, the so-called traditional house, the architecture of which respects a territorial Arabic-Muslim context, while the exterior spaces close to the *Eddar* were controlled by the men, who would only return home during certain time intervals, generally to eat and to sleep.

2.1. The women-invisible guards of the family honour

Eddar is a closed space, surrounded by high anonymous walls ensuring the privacy of its inhabitants; only a half-open door gives access inside and can attract the attention of a stranger. Nonetheless, the house is not conceived as the living space of the family but more as a place of retreat for the woman, where she must live sheltered from the profane look of strangers [21].

The traditional house is centred on the patio (*Wast Eddar*). It is a sky-open space which is subdivided into various sub-spaces covering the ground and defining frontiers. The organization of space presents a tidy and hierarchized structure in the definition and distribution of functional components [24]. The patio is at the same time a place where women can

conduct most domestic activities and a space of circulation to reach the different rooms of the house. As a space where all feminine activities take place (doing the laundry, washing the dishes, but also family vigils during the summer nights, the evenings of the Ramadan or discussions between female members dwelling the Eddar), it is the house within the house [12]. As a space of transition, it is much coded for men and women. They never cross paths. Thus, before entering the patio and different bearings of the house, the men have to announce their presence. They wait a bit on the doorstep and announce their arrival with a sound or a cough, to give time to the women to regain their rooms and protect their privacy, namely their body, the sacred object, the 'Horma' from the men of the family. Actually, the deletion and absence of corporal expression are the dominant norms when it comes to the education of girls [7].

The patio allows access to the other spaces of the house. It is next to the kitchen, which is the exclusive space of women and where a man rarely enters, with the risk of being disqualified. When doing that, there is a big risk that he might be considered effeminate [14]. The rooms cover the rest of the house and the men only go there to sleep.

Eddar is the interior space, the family house of the father or of the husband, consequently being a space invested by women, while men take the public space, the exterior, with its dangers and challenges, which men engage to face. The urban space as a whole was considered a domain of masculine investigation and expression [13]. In contrast, the house was not feminine in itself; it was feminine as compared to the public space invested by men [6].

2.2. The impossibility of investment in the exterior space of the Constantine women

The threshold (Atba) of Eddar constitutes the frontier that the women can only trespass for socially accepted reasons, such as visits from the parents, the weekly toilet in the Hammam, the accomplishment of certain rites or seeing the Taleb or the doctor. This invisible frontier results from a cultural act which consists in drawing a line which produces a separate and delimited space [8], and the women, dressed in the traditional black veil named 'M'laya' only cross it in the company of a parent of respectable age or of a man (husband, son, brother). The men watch over the 'Hormah' and their women only go out with their faces covered [16]. The marriage of the girl is based precisely on the frequency and the manner in which she goes out.

The men allow the women to go out on condition that they spend as little time possible outside and that they come back before the Maghreb, namely before nightfall⁴. The opposition between public/private, feminine/ masculine imposes a difference in the repartition of social roles and especially in the access to paid work.

2.3. Work, a forbidden social role for the urban women

Paid work for women was quasi-inexistent until the 60's. Only the women with no resources (death or work impairment of the men in the family) would go out to work, but under the surveillance of the men residing the neighbourhood. It is unacceptable in Constantine, as it is everywhere across

⁴ After 17, the shops and other administrative services close.

Algeria that a married woman should work outside [21], because it is men who should cater for the needs of their family [21]. Any search of a professional life was perceived as a lack of power or weakening of the husband's power. 'It is even a quasi-sacred principle of the collective unconscious which is expressed by the live Horma, namely the honour code' [9].

Therefore, apart from a moral, social and religious dependence, the women are also economically dependent on men, because they are deprived of any means of own subsistence [15].

Consequently, the power of men over their women becomes absolute. The women are enslaved to their father, son, brother, husband, which reinforces the Law of Manou, which states: 'the woman depends on her father during childhood, on her husband during her youth; if the husband dies, she depends on her sons; if she has no sons she depends on the next-of-kin of her husband, because a woman must never depend on herself' [16]. Thus, women remain forever minor.

Caught in so-called feminine activities (cleaning, cooking, child-breeding, education of children) and deprived of access to paid work, which is an essential source of social integration and personal development, the women 'are characterized by their passivity. Objectified, they lead their life as things, accept their destiny and are far from protesting against the complete power of man' [18].

Due to a phenomenon of social reproduction [8], the women reinforce a tradition based on learning to use interior space by imitation to the end of 'best preparing the young girls for their future status of married women, when they should be at the service of everybody and accept another, much worse, feminine domination, that of their mother-in-law' [15]. On the one hand, this allowed the young girls the possibility to picture

themselves as a mother-in-law one day, which constitutes a 'promotion' in this feminine world. On the other hand, it justified the massive lack of formal education among girls and it forbade them the access to the labour market. 'Zero education for the little girls, a closed life from puberty to old age, the confinement of the woman in her domestic role, the belief in fatal forces which cannot be countered. All these factors turn the woman into a minor intellectual being and consolidate her enslavement' [9].

It was necessary to wait for the reforms which followed the independence of Algeria for this vicious circle to progressively crack.

2.3. A feeble look on the social life of women in the rural area

In the villages close to the city of Constantine, the women could go away from home to pick-up olives or to bring water. Regardless of their status as young girls or mothers, they all participate in economic activities (working in the fields, increasing and exploiting animal farming, and craft industries) and wearing the veil is rare, which demonstrates a mixture which is better tolerated than in the cities [4].

The income resulting from these outdoor activities (daily for most women) contribute to the family budget, administered by the man.

In the patriarchal family, the economy and the territorial defence of the goods are manly prerogatives. Even if the woman participates in industrial or agricultural activities, she plays her main part in domestic activities. However, when the men are absent for various reasons (sickness, death, immigration to the city or to a foreign country...) for a medium or long duration, it happens that the women ensure transactions on the market to sell the products of the house.

This very relative permissiveness of the rural world is mostly explained by the fact that the inhabitants of the rural areas are often connected by blood relations or by alliance. They all adopt the same social conduct, based on the respect of the family honour.

3. The women living in Constantine from independence to today

Due to the fact that the country was devastated by the Independence War, starting from 1962, the Algerian government has implemented a series of reforms concentrating mainly on policies of self-management of the production units: the start of an emergency programme (1963-1966), focused mainly on consumer goods SME's, followed by three emergency plans: a three-year plan (1967-1969), a first four-year plan (1970-1974) and then a second one (1974-1977) [23]. The objective of these major reforms was to build on the industrial, agricultural and cultural revolutions in order to build a heavy industry. In this context, the formal education of girls, the decline of illiteracy, the socio-economical mutations and the demographic transitions are factors which have contributed to a revival of the labour market in general and of the feminine activity in particular [25].

In Constantine, for example, the institution which is dedicated to the employment of young people (ANGEM) seems to benefit housewives. The fiscal balance of 2014 reports 670.000 microcredits attributed to the acquisition of small equipment or destined to the acquisition of raw materials. Since the start of this institution, in 2004, more than 415 000 women benefited from it; this explains the fact that the microcredit now attracts numerous candidates who hope to develop their activities.

3.1. The place of women in the economic and social activity of the country

If the industrial and the agricultural revolution marked a progression in employment, the Cultural Revolution has led to a massive formal education among girls, going from 500.000 students in 1962 to more than seven million students starting from 1994 [The efforts made by the State in the field of education have sensibly improved the level of education of the population and have allowed the girls to benefit from higher-education and get jobs. The percentage of female education has grown from 36, 9% in 1966 to 92.1% in 2002, and the percentage of female literacy has grown from 35, 0% in 1966 to 85,4% in 2002 [17]. Between 1966 and 1998. Since 1966 until 1998 the illiteracy rate has dropped from 62% to 23%.

At present, 29,8% of the female population which has a professional activity, works in an intellectual and scientific profession, while only 6,4% of the men engage in such activities. This evolution is a synonym of a stronger insertion of women on the labour market. The report of the active population to the population having the legal age to conduct an activity (15 years old or more) was of 14,9% in September 2014 in Algeria. Although there is no statistical data available for Constantine, there are no reasons to believe that the percentages are not similar.

Of the women who work, more than a third (36%) have an activity in administration, 27% in industry and 22, 3% in agriculture. In 2004, from the totality of positioned occupied in administration, 23, 8% were held by women. They are particularly present in education, 35, 6% of them teaching at primary-school level, 32, 3% of them teaching at secondary-school level and 25, 4% teaching at higher-education level.

They are also present in the health sector (56, 4% of the medical staff and 45,9% of the paramedical staff) [23]. Access to managerial positions (managers, senior management, managing directors) is however lower in the case of women namely 1.6% as compared to 2,9% in the case of men. On total, in the time span going from 1962 to 2014, the number of women having a professional activity was multiplied by 20 approximately, going from 90,500 (5,2% of the workers of both sexes) in 1962 to 1,722 million (16,8%) in 2014. The decline in the average age of marriage and birth spacing have naturally contributed to facilitating the insertion of women on the labour market and to their effective participation in the economic and social activity of the country.

3.2. The Algerian politics concerning women's rights

The Algerian government has sustained and defended the rights of women, but in a relatively shy manner, considering the threats of fundamentalism. In fact, ever since the independence of the country, conservative trends have imposed a set of social norms confronting the running code of honour which went as far as the equality of sexes. The Algerian women (particularly the educated ones, the Moudjahidetes and the feminist movements in general opposed and fought against this code despite the incurred risks. 'The women who request their emancipation would be women of promiscuous morals, who wish for the harmony of the traditional family' [14]. We mention here the street meetings organized by women in 1965, 1971 and 1981.

The silence of the State lasted for more than 20 years⁵. In 2004, certain

amendments to the family code which targeted the eradication of discrimination of women were voted, but the advancement is still slow, demonstrating the influence of different conservative trends. 'Sickened by a moralizing, short-sighted and irrelevant optic, the detractors of this wish to emancipate women from their infantile guardianship, lead to the idea that they only aim to trigger a relaxation of morals, according to the image of occidental societies. This threatens the superior interests of the nation [14]. According to the Algerian organizations dealing with defending the rights of women, the only progress registered in the text of the law limits itself to the attribution of lodging or the payment of the rent by the husband to the wife who keeps the children in case of divorce' [14]. A woman still cannot marry without the physical presence and the agreement of her tutor; thus, she is still subject to the guardianship of a man. The legal status of the woman in Maghreb is clearly still to be improved' [18].

The women now participate in the economic and administrative activities of the country, particularly due to the responsibility positions which they hold, but are still under the guardianship of men in all aspects that are not work-related. How do women deal with this discrepancy? Does it have an impact on the private and public spheres? (outside work)? The research that we conducted on a sample of Constantine women aims to answer the following two hypotheses:

- The honour code persists in the public sphere but is shaken in the professional and private spheres.
- The roles (feminine and masculine) inside the family evolve towards a share of responsibilities.

⁵ The Code of the Family [11], published on the 9th of June 1984, concerning the marriage, the divorce, and the parentale authority, decides that

the woman is forever under the authority of man and that she is legally inferior to him.

4. The point of view of Constantine Women

The women now participate in the economic and administrative activities of the country, particularly due to the responsibility positions which they hold, but remain under the guardianship of men for everything that is not work-related. How do they deal with this offset? Is the honour code shaken? Are we taking part in a transformation of the feminine and/or masculine roles inside the family?

To answer these questions focus groups centred on the investment of spaces (private and urban) were designed with 27 women divided into three groups according to their age (18-25 years old; 26-40 years old; older than 40). Ten of them are students, ten have a professional activity and seven are housewives. They have different marital statuses (married, single, divorced, and widowed) and socio-economic levels.

4.1. Family education, a halt to the students' going out

The students have to obtain permission to go out, which limits their outside life apart from going to class.

'I don't go out as I wish. First I have to obtain permission from my father or from my elder brother or from my mom and tell them the reasons why I am going out' (Nouha, 18 years old, student, single, medium socio-economic level)⁶.

Staying at home is dictated by their father :

⁶ Low socio-economic level (Cat. D) average monthly income= 27.300,00 DA (230 €).

Medium socio-economic level (Cat. B and C) average monthly income= 42.500,00 DA (350 €).

High socio-economic level (Cat. A) average monthly income =111.500,00 DA (220 €).

'My father often tells me 'you and your mother, you stay inside the house. The house is the place of the woman and especially of the girl' (Abir, 20 years old, student, single, medium socio-economic level)

but by society as well :

'Everybody keeps telling us: the woman is born to be in the house' (Nouha, 18 years old, student, single, medium socio-economic level).

They have integrated these norms because they also feel that it is the place where they feel safe

'For me, the house...is a secured space where I feel at ease, safe and protected' (Afaf, 22 years old, student, single, high socio-economic level).

However, the status seems to differentiate them. Thus, the married students

'When I was single I asked permission from my mother, from my father and sometimes from my elder brother. Now that I am married, with my husband working far from here, to go out I need two authorizations: one from my family and one from my husband. If my husband does not allow me to go out, I start crying and I don't go out' (Insaf, 26 years old, student, married, high socio-economic status)

or the ones who are engaged

'I have to ask permission from my mother and from my fiancé to go out. So, I need two permissions' (Nawel, 26 years old, student, engaged, high socio-economic level)

go out seldom, while the single students have more freedom

'I can sometimes only inform my parents, mostly when I don't go out of the neighbourhood' (Nouha, 18 years old, student, single, medium socio-economic level)

especially if they have a high socio-economic level

'I often go out during weekdays, in the morning and the afternoon, not only to go to class but also to buy things, go shopping' (Afaf, 22 years old, student, single, high socio-economic level)

But all of them pay attention to their reputation

'I go out to practice sports, go window-shopping, have some fresh air or go for a walk. I go out with a friend or a neighbour, only rarely alone, not to get bored and to be able to discuss intimate subjects with my friend, and to feel safe in case of exterior danger and to avoid foul language which hurts me and my family, as this reduces the chances to be proposed for marriage (Soulef, 18 years old, student, single, high socio-economic level).

4.2. Work, an open door to the outside world

Being employed has a very cleaving impact on the outgoing of women.

'We have plenty to do, either outside or inside the house. So, we go out' (Wahiba, 50 years old, head-clerk, married, medium socio-economic level).

'I live with my husband's family. I never go out alone. I go out with my husband or my mother-in-law and sometimes with my sister-in-law. When I was engaged I went out with my mother. I could only go out with my mother because my fiancé didn't want me to go out alone. But before being engaged, I went out alone with no problem' (Karima, 35 years old, married, housewife, medium socio-economic level)

This effect seems to be potentiated according to the marital status

'Nobody ever refused to let me go out and I don't ask permission from anyone' (Hayet, 35 years old, attorney, single, high socio-economic level)

'I risk repudiation or being locked up by my husband if I am outside all the time. I have to be careful for the others not to see me with bad eyes, talk bad of me and touch the honour and the Harma of my husband or of my family' (Darine, 23 years old, housewife, married, high socio-economic status).

4.3. Towards claiming a shared exterior space

We note that only the student women and the women who work bring into discussion the traditional repartition of space.

'For me, the exterior is for everybody, children, women and men, but in our society, it is 90% for the men and the other 10% is for the work of women' (Ranym, 27 years old, psychologist, single, medium socio-economic level) especially if they know other cities in Algeria

'After dark, specifically in Constantine, it's a catastrophe: the woman is seen with bad eyes' (Zhora, 50 years old, liberal profession, single, high socio-economic level)

'When you get out of Constantine you are completely dazzled: you can go to the mixt cafeteria, to mixed places...it's like you are no longer in Algeria'. In contrast, in Constantine, you have to wait for your turn, after the men' (Soulef, 18 years old, single, high socio-economic status)

4.4. Keeping one's prerogatives on the domestic space

On the whole, the Constantine women feel responsible for the chores and do not

go out until these chores are completed.

'When it comes to traditional food, we prepare it during the weekend. If I know that during the week I have to go out much, I prepare the wafer and put in the freezer. We prepare the rest of the traditional dishes only during the weekend' (Safia, 40, nurse, married, medium socio-economic level).

'I work and I don't have time to go out much.' On Friday I have to clean and cook, on Saturday I hardly go to the city centre to buy things for myself' (Hayet, 35 years old, lawyer, high socio-economic level).

The women see it as a duty to care for the house, even if they are employed.

'I do everything that is traditional during the weekend. During the week, I work. I hardly get to clean up and cook usual food' (Safia, 40, nurse, married, medium socio-economic level).

and maybe they care about the house even more, precisely because they are employed

'The housewives are those who cook more Chakchoukha⁷ as compared to those who work' (Nadia, 50 years old, liberal profession, single, high socio-economic level)

'It's about knowing how to organise yourself. The same with traditional activities. It's all about organisation' (Darine, 23 years old, housewife, high socio-economic level).

The women who avoid traditional tasks are rare

'I don't know how to do such things and I don't want to do them. It takes a lot of time and I don't have the time. They're telling me that I have two left hands (laughter)' (Lynda, 27 years old, student, single, high socio-economic status).

4.5. The premises of a shared domestic space?

But beyond a stereotyped discourse,

'For the men? The house is a hotel and a restaurant' (Lamis, 21 years old, student, single, medium socio-economic level)

'He is always outside and only comes in to eat and sleep' (Darine, 23 years old, married, housewife, high socio-economic status)

we see flourishing behaviours of sharing tasks between men and women in the privacy of the home

'My husband does everything with me inside the house' (Wahiba, 50 years old, head-clerk, married, medium socio-economic level)

'The relationship man-woman is a subject which brings discomfort to everyone. Some men help their women when they are alone, but never in front of their family' (Latifa, 43 years old, teacher-researcher, married, high socio-economic status)

5. Work – an emancipation tool for women?

Formerly, paid work for women in Algeria was something unconceivable, both in the popular spirit and in the collective unconscious. It was forbidden for it to touch the spirit of both men and women. They were all under the influence of an ancient culture based on a deformation and simplistic interpretation of some verses of the Quran. Women accepted their destinies: an order coming from above (God) which condemned them to life inside the house. As opposed to the man, whose primary space was outside, the woman was considered as born to stay inside the house, do the chores, give birth and take care of the education of children. This education was based on stereotypical

⁷ Meal prepared specifically for traditional dishes

roles for the girls and for the boys: when they socialised, the boys and girls had to assimilate their roles, not separately, but together, in social rapports of inequality. Children learned to behave according to the model of sex roles often presented by the mother, guardian of the social values and of the image of the man as the holder of ultimate power on women. If at other times the men used to brag about their superiority in the face of women, it is the women who kept the masculine status intact. The women have unconsciously maintained the image of men as ancient tradition would describe it. As Safia said in the focus group:

'When we were young, my mother made me and my sisters take care of my father and brothers. So the problem of women is...women'.

This state of mind had to change considering that the socio-economic and political shifts that Algeria has known at the beginning of its independence made the Algerian state want to engage in a modernisation process and take measures concerning the condition of women especially. Amendments regarding the evolution of the social and legal status of women were immediately ratified and agreed upon. Unfortunately, this desire to become modern has been limited by the adoption of a family code which rather follows the most rigid rules of the Islam, the sexist traditions and prejudices which keep women in a minor status.

At present, in Constantine, the women are allowed to exit the house more. The evolution of the family from a traditional structure to a nuclear structure has facilitated their integration in the global society. By conferring them a higher and higher place in the social [2], [22] and public [18], [14], [7], [10] sphere it induced a change in the rapport man/woman, inside/outside.

It is true that paid work and obtaining

university degrees have allowed women to partly escape from social control, affirm their personality, allow themselves to display a more poignant attitude and to access a spatial mobility which could help them promote. The economic power, resulting from paid work gives women not only economic independence but also a real societal power. We consider this to constitute the turning point in the process of emergence of the woman as an individual, a process which is essential in the elaboration of a change in women's social status [1].

Acquiring a certain economic autonomy and mobility has not affected the traditional and cultural values inside the house. The house is still considered a feminine space, only less selective and sexualised than before: the fact that women now also work outside has determined the men to go into the kitchen, space which was formerly considered exclusively feminine, to help their wife in certain domestic tasks (particularly in nuclear families). Thus, the enrichment of the role of women in society has brought a change; namely an enrichment of the traditional role of men inside the house and a diminishing of the sexual segregation at the exterior.

However, even though the spatial mobility seems to favour the social promotion of women and the emancipation of men and women alike, 'the condition of the woman rests entirely the creation of man. It is the father, the brother, the cousin, the uncle, the husband who dictates the law and the behaviour of the Algerian woman is only the reflection of the behaviour of man towards her [19]. This is why the associations fighting for the rights of women never have ceased to bring into discussion the complementarity of the two sexes, the woman's right to life, to respect, to work, to mobility, to freedom, just the same rights as men. Today, nothing

justifies the minor status of women in a modern Algeria.

Other information may be obtained from the address: sam.mer25@yahoo.com.

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