

## Notes & Topics

MALCOLM H. KERR AWARD WINNING DISSERTATIONS, 1987

*First Place, Social Sciences*

### **Peasants against the State: The Political Activity of the Egyptian Peasantry, 1882–1952**

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#### *Abstract*

THIS STUDY concerns the political activity of the Egyptian peasantry between the time of the 'Urābī Revolt of 1882 and the 1952 Revolution. Political activity is defined broadly to include not only revolution but also such actions as assassinations, land seizures, and petitioning. This broad focus is justified by the assumption—confirmed by this study—that peasant politics consists not of political passivity punctuated by rare rebellions but of a continuous struggle to defend livelihood and community.

First, possible influences on the political capabilities and motivations of peasants are considered. The goal is to understand when and why peasants are politically active. Two influences on peasant political activity are studied. The first influence is that of rural social structure. While preconceived stratification schemata are often employed (dividing peasants into small land-owners, sharecroppers, wage workers, etc.), the multiple economic activities of rural Egyptian households suggests that such schemata are not applicable. Instead, an inductive approach is adopted in the effort to understand rural social structure. This approach reveals the existence of three separate production systems: the commercial estate, the commercial smallholding, and the subsistence smallholding. The nature of each system is explored, along with its probable effect on peasant political capabilities. The second influence on peasant political activity is political outlook: that is, shared notions of the proper or expected state of things in the political realm. A study of contemporary writings suggests that the political outlook of Egyptian peasants included a resentment of the state, a desire to avoid rather than confront adversaries, and a tendency to cast political issues in concrete and personal terms.

The second half of the study tests these ideas on the effects of social structure and political outlook on peasant political activity. Four sorts of activity are considered: the actions of individuals and small groups, the actions of communities, legal and institutional action, and rebellion and revolution. This analysis reveals that political outlook (particularly resentment of the state) was more important than rural social structure in influencing the occurrence and form of political activity. A common

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?