

The Anthropology of Transition from Deprivation to Agency: Representations of Hardship and Pivotal Figures in the Life Histories of Women Entrepreneurs

Hassina Belouadah

¹ Human Resources Management and Performance Improvement Laboratory,
University of Mohamed Boudiaf - M'sila, Algeria.

E-mail hassina.belouadah@univ-msila.dz; <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2207-9392>

Mahfoud Handaoui

² Laboratory of Agricultural and Tourism Sector Development Strategies,
Ain Témouchent University, Algeria

E-mail Mahfoud.handaoui@univ-temouchent.edu.dz; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1135-865X>

Abstract:

This study aims to deconstruct the socio-cultural processes that transform women from domestic beings—or individuals experiencing deprivation—into active economic agents within the public sphere. It examines the symbolic role played by pivotal figures (such as mothers, fathers, siblings, and husbands) in fostering anthropological agency among female entrepreneurs, and explores how material and psychological deprivation is converted from a structural barrier into a value-based capital and a driver of entrepreneurial action. By uncovering the underlying mechanisms of this transition from a marginal identity to an entrepreneurial one, the study posits that female entrepreneurship, within its anthropological context, serves as a compensatory act and a continuous rite of passage. This process seeks to repair long-standing identity fractures caused by childhood material and psychological deprivation, wherein the image of the pivotal figure functions as a symbolic compass guiding economic behaviour.

To achieve these objectives, this study adopts a qualitative ethnographic methodology based on life histories, which enables the tracking of longitudinal identity transformations. The purposive sample comprised 14 female entrepreneurs selected based on the criterion of radical identity transformation. The primary data collection tool was the in-depth narrative interview, which allowed participants to spontaneously recount their life trajectories since childhood. This was supplemented by participant observation to capture material and physical symbols. Data were processed using MAXQDA software via anthropological content analysis and the deconstruction of life turning points, utilizing the concepts of liminality and habitus.

The findings reveal that female entrepreneurial identity is a narrative construct that reinterprets the past to serve the present. The study demonstrates that the pivotal figure (father, mother, siblings, or husband) functions as an intergenerational symbolic capital, drawing values of resourcefulness and authority from familial models. Additionally, the results reveal that entrepreneurial success represents an anthropological catharsis from past deprivation, wherein money is transformed from a mere exchange value into an instrument for psychological recognition and self-repair. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that kinship remains the hidden driver of entrepreneurial logic.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Liminality, Life Histories, Pivotal Figures.

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Introduction

Contemporary anthropology no longer views the economy as a technical domain distinct from culture, but rather as a practice embedded within systems of kinship, values, and symbols. Since Karl Polanyi's seminal thesis on the embeddedness of the economy within the social structure—conceptualizing it as an integral part of society's cultural, political, and social matrices (Lahera Sánchez, 2024)—economic action has been understood as a cultural product rather than a merely rational response to market incentives. In a similar vein, Clifford Geertz highlighted that ethnography involves the construction of texts, wherein daily practices are interpreted as cultural inscriptions; his concept of "thick description" is paramount for uncovering the multiple semantic layers embedded within these practices (Cash, 2024). Within this framework, female entrepreneurship in Algerian society is approached not merely as a productive economic activity, but as a symbolic process of self-reconstruction within a space governed by kinship networks, representations of dignity, and dynamics of recognition.

Despite the growth of literature on female entrepreneurship, the research field remains dominated by two primary trends. First, the economic-developmental approach, rooted in neoliberal ideology, interprets entrepreneurship as a tool for market integration and an indicator of individual efficiency. Second, the institutional feminist approach focuses on structural barriers and supportive policies, analyzing entrepreneurship through the discourse of empowerment and representation. Although both trends are significant, they share an implicit assumption that entrepreneurial action is primarily explained by economic structures or institutional frameworks, while the cultural dimension is reduced to a mere contextual variable. In the Arab context, the literature has been characterized either by descriptive statistical analysis or by normative, development-oriented approaches, without an anthropological interrogation of the structure of meaning within the life trajectory itself. This reveals an epistemological gap: the absence of an analysis of entrepreneurship as a cultural narrative of self-reproduction within a specific symbolic system.

To address this gap, this study deploys the concept of rites of passage as formulated by Arnold van Gennep and developed by Victor Turner. Van Gennep's three stages—separation, liminality, and incorporation—align with Turner's theory, where the liminal phase represents ambiguity and transformation, facilitating the transition from one stable state to another and ultimately reinforcing social structures and communal bonds (Turner, 1998). Both frameworks demonstrate the significance of transitional phases in individual and collective experiences during rites of passage (Horváth & Szakolczai, 2025). This theoretical lens allows us to interpret the transition into the entrepreneurial world as a liminal stage during which the actor's symbolic position is redefined. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*—a system of durable, transposable dispositions shaped by past experiences that structures perceptions and actions—and symbolic capital help bridge objective structures and subjective experiences. This facilitates the transition, passage, and dynamic interaction between individual agency and societal constraints (Sağlam, 2024), providing insight into how childhood experiences and deprivation are converted into cognitive and moral resources investable within the economic field.

In this study, the concept of agency is utilized neither in its liberal sense as absolute individual autonomy, nor in its structural sense as articulated by Anthony Giddens—which defines it as the capacity to act within a structure (Vorhoeelter, 2024). Instead, it is understood anthropologically as an interpretive-narrative capacity to reframe the past and imbue it with new meaning, thereby generating the possibility for action. Agency here does not signify an escape from structure, but rather a reinterpretation of its symbolic resources, transforming the experience of deprivation from a state of deficiency into a source of moral legitimacy for entrepreneurial action.

From this perspective, the central research problem revolves around understanding how female entrepreneurial identity is shaped in Algerian society as a symbolic process through which deprivation is converted into value-based capital that grounds agency. The primary research question is:

How is female entrepreneurial identity constructed as a symbolic narrative of passage, through which deprivation is re-codified and transformed into a resource for agency and recognition?

From this main question, the following sub-questions emerge:

- How is the discourse of deprivation constructed within the life trajectory as a foundational moment of the self?
- How are pivotal figures invoked as symbolic reference points that frame female entrepreneurial action?
- How is the transition to entrepreneurship negotiated as a rite of passage that redefines the symbolic positioning of the self?
- How is deprivation converted into symbolic capital and reinvested within the economic field?

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach based on biographical ethnography (the life history method), utilizing in-depth interviews with female entrepreneurs in Algerian society. Oral narratives are viewed as cultural texts through which the self produces its narrative and positions itself within the social world. The data were analyzed using a narrative-symbolic reading that uncovers patterns of codification, the structure of the passage, and the mechanisms by which lived experience is transformed into semantic capital. The analysis relies on several key references and sources, most notably Victor Turner's *Liminalität und Communitas* and Karl Polanyi's *The Place of the Economy in Society*.

The theoretical contribution of this article operates on three levels. First, it proposes a reading of female entrepreneurship as a continuous rite of passage rather than an isolated professional event. Second, it re-conceptualizes deprivation, moving it from an indicator of vulnerability to a raw material for the formation of symbolic capital. Third, it integrates the anthropology of life history with economic anthropology to analyze identity formation within the entrepreneurial field, situated in a local context that has rarely been subjected to interpretive analysis.

Consequently, this article defends the thesis that female entrepreneurship in Algeria is not merely an economic response, but a cultural practice of self-reproduction within the horizon of recognition. The entrepreneurial project thus becomes a space for rewriting life history and repairing identity fractures by converting deprivation into value.

1. Methodology

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative methodology grounded in biographical anthropology and ethnographic methods. It aims to understand how female entrepreneurial identity is constructed in Algeria as a symbolic process—a trajectory through which individuals transition from a state of deprivation to one of agency, navigated via representations of lack and the influence of pivotal figures.

The empirical research was conducted in Bordj Bou Arréridj, Algeria, a conservative region characterized by a distinct economic dynamism. The local context plays a central role in shaping the entrepreneurial experience, establishing an intersection where conservative cultural values collide and negotiate with emerging economic opportunities.

Based on the principle of theoretical saturation, the final sample comprised 14 female entrepreneurs, at which point subsequent interviews yielded no new semantic patterns or thematic dimensions for analysis. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria:

- possessing active entrepreneurial experience,
- having experienced forms of material or psychological deprivation, and
- demonstrating the capacity to narratively reconstruct their life histories.

The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 60 years, and their educational backgrounds spanned from secondary to university levels. Their ventures covered diverse economic sectors, including traditional crafts, manufacturing, healthcare, commerce, and education. Data collection involved both individual and joint semi-structured interviews (e.g., mother-daughter pairs or pairs of friends), which facilitated a deeper, multi-layered analysis of symbolic relationships and the role of pivotal social figures, as detailed in the table below:

Participant	Age	Educational Level	Marital Status	Venture Type / Business Activity	Experience (Years)
Participant 1	28	University	Single	Wedding and Event Decoration	5
Participant 2	60	Secondary	Married	Traditional Food Restaurant	2
Participant 3	50	Secondary	Married	Modern and Traditional Catering for Events	27
Participant 4	49	University	Married	Kindergarten / Preschool	17
Participant 5	40	University	Married	Pediatric and Female Physical Rehabilitation Center	19
Participant 6	28	University	Single	Speech Therapy Clinic	4
Participant 7	29	University	Single	Florist Shop	3
Participant 8	33	University	Married	Bridal Gown Rental Boutique	13
Participant 9	38	University	Married	Natural Cosmetics Store	10

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile and Venture Characteristics of the Study Sample



Figure 1: Illustration of interview coding (Example from Interview 2) within the MAXQDA software interface.

The accuracy of the narrative representation was validated through member checking; analytical summaries were presented to all participants during in-person meetings, and all respondents confirmed that the thematic interpretations accurately aligned with their lived experiences. Furthermore, comprehensive ethical protocols were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring absolute confidentiality, storing data in encrypted files, and guaranteeing the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without negative repercussions.

The researcher's positionality was also systematically documented through ongoing reflexivity. Being a native of the same city facilitated the cultivation of deep rapport and trust in the field; nonetheless, continuous critical reflection was maintained to assess how the researcher's background might influence the analytical trajectory. Finally, the study adhered strictly to the established criteria for methodological rigor in qualitative research, ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

2. In-Depth Hermeneutic Analysis of Interviews

2.1 Theme one: Deprivation as the Foundation of Identity

In the life histories of the participating female entrepreneurs, deprivation emerges as a central factor and a foundational component in the construction of entrepreneurial identity. It transcends mere economic or social scarcity to become a primary structure—an existential, cognitive, and cultural experience that reproduces the self and establishes agency. The findings reveal three distinct modalities of deprivation:

2.1.1. Direct Material Deprivation

This dimension manifests as limited financial resources for startup capital, the pressures of self-funding, or the necessity to innovate within rigid economic constraints. As Participant 9 recounted:

"I had saved up a little money, just over 10 million [Algerian dinars], which I was planning to use to buy a car. But the amount was too small..."

Similarly, Participant 12 emphasized:

"My husband had nothing; he was in severe financial distress..."

From a Bourdieuan perspective, this deprivation is not merely a deficit of resources, but rather a conditioning factor for the production of a *resistant habitus*. That is, it fosters a set of dispositions, practices, and values that enable the individual to navigate specific structural constraints while developing innovative solutions to bypass economic and social barriers (Noordhoff, 2025).

This material deprivation stimulates the accumulation of practical and cognitive expertise in financial management, long-term planning, and the capacity to make calculated risk assessments.

Furthermore, through the theoretical lenses of Turner and Van Gennep, this stage can be interpreted as a period of economic liminality. During this phase, women experience relative instability as they redefine their symbolic positioning between the domestic sphere and the economic marketplace. They do this by displacing existing roles, embedding new meanings, and enhancing cohesion through newly reconstructed functions, symbolic meanings, and material resources within a fixed geographical locus (Wright et al., 2024). Consequently, the material experience of deprivation becomes a symbolic rite of passage, equipping the entrepreneur for future challenges within the entrepreneurial field.

2.1.2. Social and Emotional Deprivation

This dimension pertains to the loss of social recognition and the absence of symbolic support from both family and society. Participant 10 noted:

"Our society does not support women; it belittles and undervalues them..."

Participant 13 shared a similar sentiment:

"For me, the greatest difficulty is when your own family does not approve..."

Here, deprivation shifts into symbolic deprivation—defined by Bourdieu as the loss of social legitimacy and recognition. This symbolic experience generates a compelling need to re-establish legitimacy through entrepreneurial achievement. Experiences of childhood and deprivation function as cognitive and moral resources, transforming entrepreneurial practice into a mechanism for demonstrating competence and resilience (Yang, 2023).

From a Geertzian perspective, this experience can be read as a "cultural text," requiring an interpretation of the layered social symbols and norms that govern women's status in Algerian society, such as familial expectations, traditions, and male symbolic dominance over economic resources. This symbolic deprivation generates a dynamic of strategic entrepreneurial action; women learn to interpret the absence of support as a culture of defiance and an opportunity for self-actualization. Thus, entrepreneurship evolves into a practice for reproducing social identity and reclaiming symbolic recognition.

2.1.3. Cognitive and Structural Deprivation

This dynamic is linked to institutional constraints, bureaucracy, and information asymmetry. Participant 3 explained:

"Sometimes we get scammed. Because of our specialization, we found that the training sessions we conducted ourselves were far superior to the ones they offered us..."

Meanwhile, Participant 9 recalled:

"I went to inquire about securing a loan, but we found the procedures to be incredibly convoluted and time-consuming..."

This form of deprivation reveals that the structural and institutional context itself constructs the experience of lack. Consequently, women are compelled to develop cognitive and adaptive strategies. This aligns with Giddens' structuration theory and concept of agency: actors do not operate entirely outside of structure; instead, they act within established norms and reinterpret them to their advantage rather than seeking absolute autonomy. This enables a gradual transition wherein practical knowledge is leveraged as a tool to overcome deficiencies (Dyson & Jeffrey, 2022).

By developing practical cognitive strategies—such as seeking alternative training, relying on self-directed learning, and circumventing bureaucratic hurdles—these women successfully navigate structural impediments. In this scenario, cognitive deprivation is converted into **cognitive capital**, characterized by the ability to navigate legal frameworks, decode market mechanisms, and mobilize symbolic and cognitive resources as part of a long-term entrepreneurial strategy.

The analysis demonstrates that the identified forms of deprivation are neither mere deficits nor absolute obstacles; they do not paralyze agency but rather reframe it as a catalyst and raw material for shaping entrepreneurial identity within the socio-economic field. This transformation occurs through:

- The Establishment of a Resistant Habitus: Developing practical, financial, and economic life practices—such as patience, creativity, and perseverance—within specific social and institutional constraints.
- The Reproduction of Symbolic Legitimacy: Turning the lack of social recognition into a tangible enterprise that proves competence and restores societal respect, thereby rendering deprivation a moral justification for entrepreneurial action.
- The Generation of Symbolic and Cognitive Capital: Accumulating practical expertise and strategic maneuvers that can be reinvested in the economic arena, enhancing women's capacity to manage their enterprises with awareness and autonomy.

From an anthropological standpoint, deprivation serves as both a symbolic and empirical rite of passage. Within this process, every experience of lack becomes substance for building a narrative capacity to rewrite the past and endow it with new meaning. Consequently, deprivation constitutes a cultural and linguistic foundation for economic agency, far surpassing its definition as a mere financial or social impediment.

2.2 Theme Two: Pivotal Figures as a Symbolic Compass

The study's findings demonstrate that family members and close relations do not merely serve as material or logistical support networks; rather, they occupy a pivotal symbolic position in reshaping women's entrepreneurial action and economic identity. These figures—comprising fathers, mothers, husbands, and siblings—engender what can be termed a "symbolic field" that expands or constrains the potential for individual agency depending on the availability of symbolic and moral resources. This aligns with Turner's understanding of transition rituals (*liminality*) and Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic capital* as a mediator for reproducing economic capacity.

2.2.1. The Father

Participant 14: "My father established the agency using his own personal funds..."

Here, the father is not merely a financial provider; he represents a model of economic commitment and responsibility. From Turner's perspective, the father's presence anchors a sense of symbolic security, enabling women to navigate the liminal phase with greater confidence. Conversely, his absence or lack of support can generate symbolic pressures (Zhou et al., 2024) that compel women to develop mechanisms of resistance and autonomy within the economic sphere. This demonstrates the capacity of agency to reconfigure symbolic resources.

2.2.2. The Mother

Participant 11: "My mother used to bake traditional sweets, and when I started out, she gave me all of her equipment, and I bought whatever else she didn't have..."

The mother functions as a values-based and ethical reference point, embodying a standard of commitment and hard work. She imbues entrepreneurial action with values of patience and mastery, positioning herself as a successful role model for her children to emulate. From Geertz's perspective, the relationship with the mother transforms practical knowledge into a cultural text that acquires meaning within the familial and social context (Pantoja, 2023), thereby becoming a source of continuous moral legitimacy within the market.

2.2.3. The Husband

Participant 1: "My husband was initially opposed to the project, which is why my family supported me at the beginning. But later, everything changed completely, and he started backing and helping me..."

The husband represents a balancing point between symbolic support and social pressure. His initial opposition acted as a symbolic barrier that prompted this participant to reformulate her strategies and seek recourse through her natal family. This underscores the importance of agency in resisting traditional gender roles by developing mechanisms of resistance and

independence, as women reshape their symbolic resources to achieve transition in the absence of support (Galindo Castro, 2024). Conversely, his subsequent support generates a symbolic privilege that legitimizes economic risk-taking and enhances agency. In this context, the husband is more than a material partner; he serves as a moral and cultural framework that allows women to assert their position within the economic field, aligned with Turner's mechanisms of symbolic reassurance during transitional rituals.

2.2.4. Siblings

Participant 6: "My brothers set up the shop for me..."

Participant 7: "My brother was a florist, and he opened a flower shop for me. When I arrived, I found it fully furnished and equipped with everything; I just started working right away."

The role of siblings emerges as a moral network spanning practical support and symbolic knowledge. They provide material means and practical expertise, creating a symbolic space that enables women to transcend socio-economic obstacles. From Geertz's perspective, this support extends beyond tangible resources; it constitutes cultural systems that mediate between deprivation and agency, thereby facilitating the production of tacit economic knowledge ready for investment (Ryo, 2024).

In conclusion, pivotal figures act as a symbolic compass that operates to:

- Redefine the moral legitimacy of entrepreneurial action.
- Reframe women's symbolic experience between familial obligations and economic positioning.
- Activate agency through psychological and cognitive stimulation—that is, transforming symbolic pressure into an actionable business strategy.

Consequently, pivotal figures are not mere supporters or resource providers; they are symbolic and cognitive drivers that reconfigure the experience of deprivation into productive energy. These dynamics reflect how familial and social ties can generate spaces for agency, empowering women to reinterpret their position within the economic field while integrating traditional values with economic innovation. Thus, pivotal figures serve as a symbolic compass guiding women through the liminal ritual of economic transition, aligning with Turner's conceptualization of symbolism in *liminality* and Bourdieu's theory of *symbolic capital*: pivotal figures provide a network of symbolic resources leveraged to reproduce economic capacity, enabling women to transition seamlessly from traditional roles into the economic sphere, as though undergoing a metaphorical rite of passage that redefines their social and professional status.

2.3 Theme Three: Entrepreneurship as a Rite of Passage

The findings of this study demonstrate that the transition from the domestic sphere to the economic marketplace extends beyond a purely professional shift. Rather, it constitutes a rite of passage characterized by *liminality*—as conceptualized by Van Gennep and Turner—wherein women undergo intensive symbolic and cognitive experiences that reconstruct their identities within the economic field. This transitional rite is characterized by three primary dimensions:

2.3.1. Gradual Transition and Identity Reconstruction

Participant 6: "I started out working from home, and I faced a lot of difficulties... but then later on, I managed to open my own shop."

Participant 2: "I used to cook at home and sell my food to supermarkets and restaurants. Once I accumulated enough capital, I opened my own storefront."

These experiences reflect the gradual transition that defines the liminal phase. According to Van Gennep, the formation of a woman's entrepreneurial identity progresses through three distinct stages: *separation*, *liminality*, and *incorporation*. This trajectory begins with a separation from traditional domestic roles, moves into an intensive phase of experimentation and testing aimed at fashioning a new identity, and concludes with the entrepreneur's incorporation into the economic domain with a redefined professional persona (Alzahrani et al., 2025).

From Turner's perspective, this liminal stage is characterized by ambiguity and symbolic fluidity, which allows women to reinterpret their social positioning and establish a new sense of legitimacy within the economic field. Throughout this phase, domestic expertise—whether in culinary arts, organization, cosmetology, or direct sales—is leveraged as the seeds of agency. This process transforms mundane daily activities into practical expertise endowed with both economic and symbolic value (Besson, 2024), aligning with Geertz's conceptualization of everyday practices as cultural texts embedded with multiple layers of meaning.

2.3.2. Transforming Obstacles into Strategic Resources

Participant 8: "I didn't have any money to start with. I had to sell my gold and borrow money just to launch the project."

Participant 10: "I highly advise young women to complete their education and establish their own businesses."

At this juncture, socio-economic obstacles are recast as cultural trials. Financial shortages, social opposition, and information deficits are not viewed merely as structural constraints; instead, they are converted into leverageable cognitive and symbolic resources. These resources include:

- Acquiring marketing and organizational competencies;
- Cultivating robust relational networks within both the family and the wider community;
- Building practical expertise and developing the capacity to mitigate economic risks;
- Enhancing moral legitimacy and trustworthiness among customers and the local community.

In this manner, the liminal rite becomes a site for enacting narrative agency. It enables women to reframe their symbolic and material deprivation or constraints into opportunities for efficacy and social recognition (Nadhifah & Pramono, 2025). This aligns with Bourdieu's conceptualization of symbolic capital as a resource that can be deployed to reproduce socio-economic power. Through this mechanism, women generate a transformative experience that fundamentally shapes their entrepreneurial identity.

2.3.3. The Symbolic Rite as a Mechanism for Self-Actualization

The symbolic rite of passage is not restricted to material or occupational shifts; it represents a cultural process of self-representation and identity reproduction. Symbolic and economic obstacles are interpreted as shared symbolic trials.

Participant 5: "I dealt with a supplier who cheated and robbed me... but I kept going anyway."

Through such trials, a woman's resilience, capacity for innovation, and management of socio-economic relationships are tested. These challenges cultivate an accumulation of experiential knowledge that converts deprivation into symbolic capital, allowing women to confer credibility and moral value upon their enterprises, thereby firmly establishing their presence within the economic field.

From Turner's perspective, the liminal rite begins with separation.

Participant 5 (cont.): "On July 7, 2007, I went to work at the hospital only to find that my father had already submitted my resignation on my behalf... When I got home, he explained his reasoning, saying, 'I have set up a business venture for you.' Suddenly, I found myself deeply entangled in paperwork and administrative hurdles... until I finally opened the business in 2008."

This phase is followed by an incorporation stage that redefines the symbolic positioning of women in society:

Participant 5 (cont.): "We now employ 32 workers... and we receive children from all across the country."

At this stage, the entrepreneur becomes the custodian of an economic and cultural project laden with legitimate and cognitive significances:

Participant 5 (cont.): "Initially, my services catered to men, women, and children alike... but later, I shifted my focus exclusively to children, and that is how my specialization began."

This trajectory resonates with Geertz's emphasis on the production of cultural texts from everyday experiences (De Luca Picione et al., 2025) and with Bourdieu's framework regarding the investment of symbolic capital to consolidate economic capacity and achieve social recognition.

In conclusion, female entrepreneurship operating as a rite of passage manifests as:

- A liminal phase that facilitates the reinterpretation of deprivation, transforming it into a driving force;
- A gradual process requiring the confrontation of structural obstacles and their conversion into strategic resources;
- A transformative space for the reconstruction of personal and economic identity;
- A mechanism for enacting narrative agency in the face of symbolic and material constraints;
- A convergence point where symbolic rites, symbolic capital, and social networks intersect to serve as the foundation for self-reproduction within the economic sphere.

2.4 Theme Four: From Deprivation to Value-Based Capital

The findings of this study demonstrate that the experience of financial, social, and symbolic deprivation is not merely a structural constraint. Instead, through the entrepreneurial trajectory, it is converted into cultural and symbolic capital that allows women to reconstruct their identities and reproduce their moral and social legitimacy within the economic field.

2.4.1. Practical Experience and Cultural Capital

Participant 11: "I benefited far more from my pastry-making diploma than I ever did from my degree in engineering..."

Participant 12: "There were times when people tried to defraud us, but we learned an immense amount from those difficult experiences..."

These narratives highlight how everyday practice and empirical experiences are reinterpreted as convertible cultural resources. From a Geertzian perspective, these daily practices can be read as "cultural texts" layered with multiple meanings; every obstacle, hardship, and financial or social failure is semiotically reconstructed to serve as an epistemological foundation for building the enterprise.

In Bourdieusian terms, this lived experience constitutes a transmissible form of cultural capital—manifested as technical skills, resource management capabilities, market familiarity, and negotiation and marketing acumen. This underscores the critical role of cultural and social resources in fostering transformative agency (Piša & Hruška, 2023), providing women with the instruments needed to exercise entrepreneurial action with confidence while asserting their symbolic standing in society.

2.4.2. Symbolic Capital and Social Recognition

Participant 2: "Society's perception of women has shifted... When I encounter people now, they offer genuine praise and encouragement..."

Participant 14: "People can be exhausting, so you must possess immense patience... That is the only way to remain profitable and truly leave your mark..."

The transition from deprivation to social recognition illustrates how the symbolic capital accrued from economic success is leveraged to establish moral legitimacy and social credibility for women. This recognition extends beyond mere pecuniary rewards; it entails anchoring the woman's symbolic position within the social value system, redefining her role from a passive recipient of resources to an economic agent endowed with moral authority.

According to Polanyi, the economy is not merely a sphere of commodity or financial circulation, but an action deeply embedded within the socio-cultural system, wherein entrepreneurial behavior becomes part of the symbolic order of values and

recognition. In this context (Karl Polanyi: *The Place of the Economy in Society*, 2022), Bourdieu similarly notes that symbolic capital derived from prestige and reputation can subsequently be reinvested to expand social and economic influence. This converts individual success into an institutionalized force within networks of support and knowledge acquisition (Hisyam et al., 2024).

2.4.3. Relational Networks as Added Social Capital

Participant 1: "When I launched the project, I was completely on my own with just my friend. My family did not support me and were completely absent... So, when I opened my business, I surrounded myself with all the professionals I needed, like photographers and wholesale suppliers..."

This case exposes the absence of the kinship network as a direct form of social capital. Anthropologically, however, this absence triggers a *liminal* moment in the Turnerian sense, where the actor detaches from traditional kinship structures and reproduces her subjectivity outside the realm of familial recognition. This aligns with the testimony of Participant 4:

Participant 4: "The landlord wanted to support our livelihood, so he rented the space to us at a very reasonable rate. He was, and remains, an incredibly kind man to us."

This participant emphasized the vital cooperation of the landlord who leased the premises for her kindergarten. Consequently, transforming deprivation into an epistemological and financial asset requires leveraging symbolic support networks: families, spouses, siblings, and social partners. These networks, as Geertz posits, constitute moral systems that intertwine symbolic resources with economic practice, enabling women to draw on cumulative experiences, safeguard their enterprises, and negotiate their symbolic standing within society.

Female entrepreneurs constantly navigate the tensions between traditional gender roles and their commercial pursuits, frequently projecting legitimacy onto patriarchal frameworks. Nonetheless, they find distinct agency within their localized experiences, converting them into valuable skills that drive their entrepreneurial success (Cunha et al., 2025).

We conclude that the value-based capital emerging from the experience of deprivation represents an intersectional nexus between agency, the liminal ritual, and cultural/symbolic capital:

- Narrative Agency: Empowers women to reinterpret deprivation, transforming it into an epistemological and moral resource.
- Liminality (The Symbolic Rite of Passage): Offers a transformative space to develop practical skills, test economic strategies, and reconstruct symbolic identity.
- Cultural and Symbolic Capital: Outlines the foundation for social recognition and moral legitimacy, serving as an instrument for the reproduction of economic and cultural power.

Consequently, deprivation shifts from an indicator of vulnerability to a symbolic and epistemological lever for the reproduction of an entrepreneurial identity. The economic enterprise thus becomes a site for asserting competence, legitimacy, and dignity. This reinforces Polanyi's conceptualization of the economy as a cultural field, Geertz's reading of everyday practices as symbolic texts, and Bourdieu's theory on the investment of symbolic and cultural capital to enhance socio-economic positioning.

Conclusion

Based on an interpretive anthropological analysis of life histories, this study reveals that female entrepreneurial identity in Algeria is shaped not merely as a professional identity, but as an ongoing cultural, symbolic, and moral process. Entrepreneurship does not emerge as an isolated economic choice; rather, it manifests as a process of self-reproduction within a social space governed by kinship systems, moral legitimacy, gender expectations, and the logic of recognition.

First, the findings confirm that deprivation—in its material, moral, and symbolic forms—constitutes the foundational structure for the formation of entrepreneurial identity. This deprivation is not experienced as a passive, static condition; instead, it is reinterpreted through individual agency to become a resource for generating efficacy. Within the participants' narratives, financial hardship, the absence of direct family support, and societal constraints that undervalue women's work are transformed into moments of consciousness that ground a resistant trajectory and redefine the self. Here, agency is embodied not as an act

of rupture with the structure, but as the capacity to transform constraints into possibilities, aligning with Anthony Giddens' concept of the duality of structure.

Second, the findings highlight the centrality of pivotal figures in shaping the entrepreneurial trajectory. Mothers, fathers, husbands, and siblings do not merely represent a supportive or hindering context; rather, they constitute a symbolic compass that endows the entrepreneurial act with its moral legitimacy. The mother embodies a familial role model and a value standard that compels women to reconcile family commitment with economic ambition. The father emerges as a source of material capital and a moral model of labor, while the husband represents a critical turning point in enabling room for agency. Siblings, meanwhile, form a primary social protection network. Rather than neutralizing agency, these networks frame and reproduce it within a system of symbolic guardianship that is continuously renegotiated. In this context, the redistribution of legitimacy within the family can be understood as a redistribution of symbolic capital within the field, according to Pierre Bourdieu's perspective.

Third, the results demonstrate that entrepreneurship is practiced as a process of symbolic passage from the domestic sphere to the economic space. This transition does not occur abruptly but unfolds through stages that intersect with Arnold van Gennep's conceptualization of rites of passage, later developed by Victor Turner. The separation phase often begins with domestic work or familial apprenticeship, followed by a liminal phase characterized by vulnerability, uncertainty, and a struggle for legitimacy. This culminates in the reintegration phase, where the woman's symbolic position is reformulated as a recognized economic actor. This liminality does not represent a mere professional transition, but a state of redefining social identity through which new modes of recognition are formed.

Fourth, the study reveals the formation of what can be termed "values-based capital," wherein experiences of deprivation are transformed into a source of moral and professional credibility. The emphasis on integrity, quality, meticulous work, patience, and persuasion is not an incidental moral discourse, but a calculated strategy for constructing market legitimacy. Here, the findings intersect with Karl Polanyi's conceptualization of the economy as an embedded cultural sphere, and with Clifford Geertz's interpretive understanding of culture as a system of meanings. The market is not experienced as a purely technical space, but as a moral arena in which identity and recognition are reformulated.

Consequently, the study concludes that female entrepreneurial identity in Algeria is an ongoing narrative of passage, in which social and symbolic constraints are converted into resources for generating agency and credibility. Entrepreneurship is not merely an economic activity, but a cultural practice of self-reproduction within a negotiable social field. It is an extended liminal process in which capital is redistributed, legitimacy is reformulated, and the meanings of work and femininity are simultaneously redefined. Despite the context-specific nature of the findings and the limited sample size, the strength of this study lies in its interpretive depth and its capacity to uncover the latent symbolic structures underlying economic action. These findings open new horizons for developing the anthropology of gender and economics in Maghrebi contexts by understanding entrepreneurship as a cultural and symbolic field that transcends purely instrumental approaches. In light of this, the study solidifies its central problematic: female entrepreneurship in Algeria is not merely a tool for market integration, but a complex cultural process of self-reproduction, where deprivation is converted into values-based capital, pivotal figures are transformed into legitimizing networks, and professional passage becomes a liminal rite that redraws the boundaries of social possibilities for women.

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Authors' biographies

Dr. Hassina Belouadah: holds a PhD in Sociology, specializing in the Sociology of Organizations and Work. She is an Adjunct Professor at both Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'Sila and Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University of Bordj Bou Arréridj. Her research focuses on female entrepreneurship, cultural studies, and economic institutions, with numerous published articles. Additionally, she is a research member at the Human Resources Management and Performance Improvement Laboratory and has participated in many national and international conferences.

Dr. Hindawi Mahfoud: is an Associate Professor of Business Administration and Director of the Business Incubator at Ain Témouchent University. He serves on the Ministry of Higher Education's National Committee for Monitoring Innovation and University Entrepreneurship. His research focuses on entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and artificial intelligence, with numerous publications in national and international journals. An expert in advanced research methodologies, Dr. Mahfouz is a certified international MAXQDA trainer for mixed-methods research. He also instructs globally in quantitative analysis, including SPSS, meta-analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS and SmartPLS.