

## Lycée Girl Students of Oran Between Tradition and Modernism<sup>(1)</sup>

The study prepared by Yamina Bentabet on «Lycée Girl Students of Oran Between Tradition and Modernism» raises two problems: the problem of acculturation and that of the social promotion of women. By acculturation, she means the modifications occurring in native culture as a result of contact with Western ideas, and constituting a central point in sociological problems of education in Algeria.

It is a fact that contact of Algerian young women with modern culture, offered by the official lycées where this study was carried out, is a powerful factor in the process of transformation occurring in the status of Algerian women.

An Algerian young girl receives her socialization from two major sources: the family and the school. The family represents a traditional means of education characterized by the persistence of the extended family system and the division of labor between the sexes. Traditional education imposes on young girls a number of values and virtues considered authentically feminine such as docility, chastity, obedience, modesty and self-sacrifice. On the other hand, the school education proposes new values like responsibility, initiative, competition, effort and success.

The two systems do not form two distinct entities dividing Algerian society into two separate groups, but rather an extremely complex interpenetration between two cultures, an interpenetration resulting from a long and intensive contact in addition to various borrowings effected by both systems.

Algerian Lycée girls are irreversibly led to undergo a change in their conduct, their plans and their models of consumption which are no more compatible with old social and economic values dictated by traditional stereotypes.

The present research has shown the willingness of Lycée students to participate in the economic life and development of Algerian society. Their answers regarding their future plans indicate a break with traditional norms. Out of 218 senior class students included in the study, a majority (91%) intend to take higher studies; a minority (9%) envisage entering professional occupations. In making their plans, the majority of these girls (78.5%) declare having obtained the approval of their families. The rest have met ambiguous or negative attitudes.

The favorable attitude of parents toward insuring for their daughters a wider range of future security depends on a number of factors like the educated milieu to which the student belongs, her urban origin (90% of those included in the sample come from urban districts), the impact of diffuse acculturation which is characteristic of the city of Oran.

The choices made by the respondents are motivated by their cultural and social environment. Twenty-four percent of them plan to major in literature; 29% in science; 13% intend to study law, while 4% have chosen medicine and 21% are yet undecided about the nature of their future studies.

The differences in the students' choices are easy to explain. Literary studies have always been considered as a woman's field. Scientific studies represent a break with traditional norms which require the formation of a submissive personality, entirely opposed to the pragmatic and critical attitude of scientifically trained minds.

Economic factors stand behind the students' evident interest in science. In view of the importance of scientific education for the economic future of Algeria, the school system has greatly contributed to motivate this interest by means of grants, scholarships, increased salaries and wider opportunities for work.

The reduced interest of students in medicine is due to economic as well as to cultural motives. The relatively long and costly effort required by this major, the competition waged by men doctors who consider medicine as their own field, are some of the dissuading motives, to which may be added the technological orientation encouraged by economic experts.

Economic and cultural conditions of the students are more likely to determine their access to their chosen careers. Daughters of upper and middle classes tend to prepare for university studies requiring the investment of intellectual and cultural values, (literature, law, medicine). Those whose parents do not practice intellectual activities are more inclined to choose science majors.

For Algerian Lycée students the process of change in the scale of values has not been limited to school programs and occupations. It has also affected their choice of hobbies and extracurricular activities. As a result, they show particular interest in practicing sports and they indulge in various cultural activities like reading, theater and movies. In choosing their dress, the majority of them : 94% for the upper class, 82% for the middle class, 89% for the rest, declared being free from their parents' control. Nearly the same proportion reported taking an autonomous decision concerning the choice of their future spouses.

In many instances, however, ancient cultural patterns still persist in the behavior of these students, particularly on the occasion of social rituals and ceremonies favoring the resurgence of traditional customs: feasts, weddings and the like. A majority of the respondents report their participation in housework (93%), in traditional handicrafts like embroidery, knitting and sewing. Some of them wear the traditional costume at home and the veil on certain solemn occasions. About 30% said they received religious training in Koranic schools, while others obtained it directly and in its modernized form from their family environment. A minority group, espe-

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(1) Abstract of a study on the above topic, by Yamina Bentabet, published in *Cahiers du C.D.S.H.* (Centre de Documentation des Sciences Humaines), «Actes des Journées d'Etude et de Réflexion sur les Femmes Algériennes», 3, 4, 5, and 6 Mai, 1980, no. 3, Oran, Algeria.

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cially from the working and commercial classes, are apt to experience the clash of modern and traditional pressures around them. In school, they enjoy complete freedom of adaptation, but outside the school, the impact of the past is more pronounced.

### Conclusion

The transitional period which Algerian society is presently going through, imposes on Algerian young women the confrontation of contradictory influences. The school education of Algerian girls does not affect them in a uniform manner. It tends to be modified by the cultural influence of their families.

Two categories are likely to emerge from this double confrontation. The first is the more westernized type represented by the daughters of the intellectual or mid-

dle intellectual élite. The second is the more traditional type including the daughters of those social groups who received a more or less exclusive Arab culture, which also has its own character.

The response of these girls to the complex cultural types to which they are exposed depends on the historical and socio-economic conditions surrounding their acculturation. Conservative groups like merchants, craftsmen and magistrates do not usually favor the modern economic system nor the ethics derived from it, while the working class is largely made up of an «up-rooted» population recently engaged in radical change.

In spite of cultural heterogeneity, the schooling of young Algerian girls marks a break with tradition and remains the most efficient and rational means for the emancipation of Algerian women which is a decisive condition of economic reconstruction.