

Women in the Global Culture

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For the last couple of decades southern Mediterranean countries have witnessed the blossoming of a pre-figurative culture, a classic anthropological phenomenon in which young people have been born with communication and information technologies unprecedented to their elders. Although major analysts speak of the birth of a generation of citizen journalists and activist bloggers, it is necessary to observe their practises in order to realise that youth in search of greater substance is not always disassociated from its predecessors, as in the case that we present in Morocco.

Forty years ago, Margaret Mead published *Culture and Commitment. A Study of the Generation Gap*, in which she constructs a typology of how the new and old generations interrelate. She identifies three kinds of society: the *postfigurative* or slow-changing society, where youths learn not only religion but also local cultural aspects from adults; the *configurative* or moderately-changing society, where new and old generations learn from each other; and the *prefigurative* or fast-changing society, where adults can learn from the young.

When the anthropologist wrote *Culture and Commitment*, American culture was in crisis owing to the economic and technological transformations and changes of mentality taking place in the 1960s. At that time, youths were becoming more activist than ever, the result of diverse factors such as the emergence of a global community, the scientific and medical revolution of the 20th century that increased the population and worldwide television and radio transmissions.

The *prefigurative* culture involves generational problems, and the key to overcoming them lies in finding real communication. I think that Mead's theory is useful as a reference on what is happening in Arab-Muslim

countries, in whose traditional model women and youths are subject to the patriarchy and lack of political representation.

However, two decades ago a *prefigurative* culture emerged on the Internet in which youths have had within their reach communication and information technologies unimaginable for their elders and in which we are witnessing the crisis of authority of some governments that have been unable to respond to citizen demands and even less so to the mass of youths with few hopes for the future. Although the main analysts talk of the birth of a generation of citizen journalists and activist bloggers, we only need to observe the practices to realise that youths are in search of more substance.

The case of Morocco can help us to reflect on the process of changing values. The national macro-survey conducted on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Moroccan independence shows the coexistence of archaic and modern values in the same people. The family is very important for the equilibrium of the individual as is the need for personal autonomy from the family. Traditional paternal authority is only represented by 7% while 74% of respondents prefer dialogue between parents and children



Fatima Mernissi at a conference, IEMed, 2002.

and 72% prefer decisions to be taken jointly by husband and wife. Education is valued as they confirm that some of their relatives have experienced social mobility thanks to school. Although experts judge the results to be mediocre, it is an institution that offers the possibility of favouring the autonomy of the individual.

This is also true for women: while rural areas have the highest concentration of illiterate women, it is quite the opposite in the urban areas, often with better results in the studies. The countryside-city relationship does not disappear and it is precisely from the 1990s when the pragmatic local development associations emerged, outside the political parties, created by individuals who have been professionalised and have immigrated to the city. They believe in the need for local development and in human and cultural rights.

This is the case of the founders of the Women Journalists Network. These women have studied in Morocco and come from the Arabic-, Berber- and French-speaking press and have several years of experience in printed, broadcast and online journalism. Today they edit successful magazines in Arabic or French. They are heads of section in well-

known newspapers and have received national and international awards, which does not stop them from writing in blogs and journals online. They are active in the association and social network, especially concerned with the visibility of women in the media. These women are around thirty and of urban origin but their family came from rural areas. For example, the editor of *Economie & Entrepreneurs*, Nadia Lamlili, was born in Casablanca of Berber origin and her father was a teacher and her mother a housewife.

I visited the sociologist Fatima Mernissi in Rabat last week. She laughed joyfully: she is writing a book with the network journalists examining the heart of the new Moroccan society. Mernissi's eagerness is not surprising as in *A quoi rêvent les jeunes?* she concluded that "despite the ferocity of a globalisation manipulated by the transnational networks and the technological changes that are eroding the authority of parents, such as the satellite channels and access to Internet in Internet cafes, dialogue between generations continues in Morocco." This explanation reflects *postfigurative*, *cogfigurative* and *prefigurative* culture in equal measure.