

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: NEGOTIATION AND TACTIC CONTRACTS OF COEXISTENCE BETWEEN SECOND GENERATION MAGHREBIAN¹ FEMALES AND THEIR PARENTS

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Résumé. Cette étude s'inscrit dans la dynamique des représentations sociales. A travers une situation de négociation des valeurs culturelles, on est amené à s'interroger sur la conditionnalité du système périphérique. Les maghrébines de deuxième génération, filles des familles immigrées du Maghreb, sont confrontées au biculturalisme dans la culture française. Les études supérieures représentent pour elles un enjeu important autour duquel s'établit un jeu de négociations. Chaque partie (filles et parents) peut conserver des privilèges en faisant des compromis entre la culture occidentale (française) et la culture traditionnelle (islamique). Afin de montrer comment s'illustre cette négociation, on compare deux groupes de filles d'origine maghrébine: les étudiantes (30 sujets) vivent toujours avec leurs parents et les non-étudiantes (28 sujets) sont en rupture. Le test des choix alternatifs (occidental versus traditionnel) révèle que les étudiantes font plus de choix traditionnels que les non-étudiantes tout en attribuant à leurs parents plus de choix occidentaux. Ceci renforce l'hypothèse d'une négociation des valeurs culturelles dans le cas des étudiantes.

Abstract. This study is concerned with the dynamics of social representations. In looking at the system of negotiation of cultural values, one is lead to question the peripheral system of conditionality. Second generation Maghrebian females, daughters of Maghrebian immigrant families, are confronted with biculturalism within the French culture. Higher education represents for them an important stake around which the game of negotiations takes place. Each party (daughters and parents) can maintain certain privileges while making compromises between the occidental culture (French) and the traditional culture (Islamic). In order to show how this negotiation takes place, two groups of Maghrebian females have been compared: students (30 subjects) still living with their parents and non-students (28 subjects) having completely broken with the family unit. The test of alternative choices (occidental versus traditional) reveals that the students make more traditional

¹ In France, this expression represents the people of Algerian, Moroccan or Tunisian origin.

choices for themselves versus the non-students while, at the same time, they attribute more occidental choices to their parents. This reinforces the hypothesis that students negotiate cultural values.

For nearly fifteen years immigration, in general, and more particularly Maghrebian immigration, have become a subject of concern. Immigration procedures, which have changed from the « man alone » concept to the « family » concept (Zehraoui, 1994), are today facing difficulties such as those expressed by the High Council on Integration. In its last report it noted a lessening of relations between the French and immigrant populations (February 1997).

Children of first generation immigrants who were either born here or who came to France at an early age, have been immersed in the French culture and are herein known as « second generation Maghrebians » or « Beurs ».

In the 1980's., this population imposed a more in-depth look at itself. Confronted by the crises of employment and racism, this new generation insisted upon a clean break from dominant practices and ideologies. It no longer wanted to be identified with the same economic functions nor the same social role which traditionally qualifies immigrant workers (Pastel, 1994).

Unlike their parents, children of first generation immigrants have been placed in a situation of intra-individual conflict tied to the presence of two cultures which can sometimes clash.

Women's problems are individual and accentuate the inconsistency with the French model; several researchers are concerned with this particular problem (Coslin & Winnykamen, 1994; Lacoste-Dujardin, 1991, 1992; Taobada-Leonetti, 1982). In the Arab culture, the women maintain cultural traditions. At the same time, they are the object of sexual discrimination since there are more restrictions placed on women than on men. By comparison, in the occidental culture male-female discrimination is much less noticeable because it is not dependent upon the patrilineal ideology still very alive in Maghreb.

NEGOTIATION AND CONDITIONALITY: A DYNAMIC ASPECT OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The results of studying social representation in higher education amongst Maghrebian students and non-students, showed that education is perceived by the two groups as an instrument of negotiation for cultural limits (Gaymard, 1995). One can illustrate this negotiation by tacit contracts of coexistence between parents and their children. In exchange for parental tolerance with regard to certain transgressions of cultural values, the children respect, or seem to have more respect for certain traditional values. Current research questions the representation of a negotiable situation in which education is the « stake ». Since the two groups have the same basic idea when negotiating, the stake is given worth and a common symbolic value is assigned. Doise insisted upon the importance of anchoring social representations within the symbolic dynamics which takes place during the interaction (1992).

The problem of the central core is not dealt with here because the system of negotiation appears salient. It may be thought that the central core is different for each group since the

two groups do not have the same educational experience. The students are directly involved in the practical aspect of education and it is highly probable that the non-students only have knowledge of the situation and not a precise representation; thus, one can not be certain that they have the same representation.

To shed some light on the problem of negotiation, one is particularly interested in the theory of conditionality elaborated by Flament (1989, 1994a, 1994b). Conditionality is characteristic of the peripheral system and in opposition to non-negotiable elements of the central core (according to the terminology of Moscovici, 1993). Moliner has done research on students' representation of higher education (1995) and it is probable that his student population also consisted of Maghrebians. In reference to his research, one can suppose that the central core items, as for example knowledge and personal enrichment, do not constitute the stake for negotiation contrary to valorization which is a peripheral item. When looking at the item « diplomas », which borders on the limits of the central core, one can say it has a symbolic significance in everyday life. In the research presented here, freedom (salient for the females) is accorded to Maghrebian daughters and the diploma (possibly salient for the parents) is the means of exchange. Thus, that which is given is central to the receivers but not to the givers. By using different stakes, it is possible for negotiation to exist without a community of representations. This has been shown in the works of Abric on the dilemma of prisoners and the games of mixed motivation (Abric, 1976, 1987).

The peripheral system plays a fundamental role in the dynamics of social representation. As mediator between the practical and the theoretical, it defends the central core in case of disagreement, as long as the contradictory elements can be accepted (Flament, 1987).

Preceding considerations lead one to formulate hypotheses which are concerned with the differentiation of cultural choices according to the situation of female Maghrebian students and non-students. In fact, the students are in a situation of negotiation with their family while the non-students have broken away and have no need for compromise. One submits the following hypotheses:

–the students give more value to their reference group and thus they make more traditional choices than the non-students.

–the parents of the students, in return for negotiation, are perceived as being more westernized than the parents of the non-students.

METHOD

THE TEST OF ALTERNATIVE CHOICES

To prove these hypotheses, the test of alternative choices was chosen (Appendix 1). This standardized tool was used for the studies of Malewska-Peyre (1982), and has also been used in comparative research studies between the French and the immigrants. It brings out once again the conflicts between the generations linked to the Maghrebian culture while questioning sensitive topics such as: inequality of women in society, virginity, religion and cigarette smoking.

Malewska-Peyre and Zalewska (1980) have shown the validity of this test to differentiate the French from the Maghrebians. According to researchers, attribution of choice is a good indicator of cultural identity, if one defines it as the adhesion to norms and values in a given culture. The procedure is simple since it consists of a questionnaire composed of eight binary statements of typical stereotypes. Each question is composed of a behavioral norm nearing that of Islamic tradition (A), while the second (B), nears that of occidental tradition. Thus, for example, the restriction of female sexual liberty, the lack of female autonomy and the importance given to religious practices are in opposition to permissive sexuality, equality between men and women, and indifference with regard to religion. The Maghrebian females must indicate not only their own opinion but also those attributed to their fathers and mothers. Each subject gives three replies to each statement: one for herself, one for her father and one for her mother.

SUBJECTS

Second generation female Maghrebians are of Algerian, Moroccan or Tunisian origin and were born or emigrated to France at an early age. They are included as part of the population studies if they have lived in France for at least ten years. It is most important for them to have been immersed in French culture. The population in question is composed of 58 young women divided into two groups. They are of like cultural origin and of modest background but their real-life experience is different.

–The first group is comprised of 30 female university students, average age 21, who live at home.

–The second group is comprised of 28 female non-students, average age 22. They left the school system relatively early (primary education²), having broken away from their family, and have been admitted into social welfare residences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

COMPARISON OF CHOICES ATTRIBUTED TO THE GROUP OF STATEMENTS

Parent-Daughter Differences. A final sum of the responses to the 8 statements, traditional (A) and occidental (B), has been calculated for the subjects and their parents. Since there were no statistical differences between the fathers and mothers, their answers were combined. It can be noted (Table 1) that in replying to the statements, both student and non-student subjects made more occidental choices. Second generation female Maghrebians seemed much closer to occidental cultural values.

On the other hand, they attributed more traditional choices to their parents (Table 2). The conflict between generations, in addition to cultural conflict, has led to the problems of identity experienced by immigrant children. To manage this ambivalent identity, they can oppose their parents (the case of the non-students), or they can adopt different coping skills such as the negotiation of cultural values (the case of the non-students).

² French educational system.

TABLE 1

Sum of A choices (traditional) and B choices (occidental) from the 8 statements on the questionnaire : student (S) and non-student (N-S) responses.

		A	B	
Subjects	S = 30	79	161	240
	N-S = 28	47	177	224
		126	338	464
		27,2%	72,8%	100%

TABLE 2

Sum of A choices (traditional) and B choices (occidental) from the 8 statements on the questionnaire : responses attributed to parents (fathers and mothers combined) by students (S) and non-students (N-S).

		A	B	
Parents	S = 60	308	172	480
	N-S = 56	346	102	448
		654	274	928
		70,5%	29,5%	100%

Non-Student - Student Differences. In comparing the traditional and occidental choices of the subjects (Table 1), one notes that the students are more traditional in their choices than the non-students ($\text{Chi}^2 = 8,343$; 1ddl, $p < .01$). If one compares the attributions of choice given to the parents (Table 2), one sees that the students attribute more occidental choices to them than the non-students (Mothers: $\text{Chi}^2 = 10,748$; 1ddl, $p < .01$; Fathers: $\text{Chi}^2 = 8,343$; 1ddl, $p < .01$). This tends to confirm the hypotheses of negotiation of cultural values amongst the students.

Because of the impossibility of family negotiations, the non-students have completely severed relations in order to avoid cultural conflict. It is much more difficult for the parents to accept their daughters' termination of studies which is interpreted as an end to upward social mobility and is often accompanied by a total disregard for societal conventions (out-of-marriage pregnancy, dating of westerners, running away from home). On the other hand, the students' perspective on success comes from their studies which are highly esteemed by their parents. They have not crossed the boundaries of social convention and conserve the image of « respectful daughter ». Their studies permit them to have more freedom and they are far less inclined to reject their culture than the non-students. The respect of traditional values which are non-negotiable is a condition « *sine qua non* » for having more tolerant parents; the students understand this very well. They perceive their parents as more occidental but in fact, the differences of choice attributed to their parents concern essentially three statements (Table 3). The parents of students would be more inclined towards equality of tasks in the home, equality of schooling for males and females and would be more open to mixing with people of other cultural origins (Appendix 1: statements 1, 3 and 8). In looking at the attributes of their

daughters, the parents of students seemed more open and more occidental than the parents of non-students for whom the attributes of choice are more strict and traditional .

TABLE 3

Results of statements 1, 3 and 8 (Appendix 1) : students' parents³ (S.P.) judged more occidental (B) , non-students' parents (N-S.P.) judged more traditional (A).

		A		B	
S. P. (N = 60)	1	Male/female equality at home	26		34
	3	Male/female equality at school	9	Sum=47	51
	8	Mixing with other cultures	12		48
					Sum=133
N-S.P. (N = 56)	1		42		14
	3		31	Sum=97	25
	8		24		32
					Sum=71

COMPARISON OF CHOICES ATTRIBUTED TO EACH STATEMENT

Subjects' Disagreement On Religion. Religious opinion is the only significant difference between the two groups (Table 4). The majority of students made a traditional choice while the majority of non-students made an occidental choice. Religion seems to be the key element around which negotiation revolves. One must remember that Islamic religion, as transcribed in the Koran, exists within the faith and the Code of Life. Without always conforming to religious rules, the people born or educated in France, consider Islamic reference a part of their familial and cultural heritage (Cesari, 1995). Also, when the students say it is important to respect religious practices, they show above all their belonging to this culture. They are conscious of the importance of avoiding transgression of certain limits within the Muslim culture if they want to maintain ties with the family and the group.

TABLE 4

Religious choices⁴ made by subjects : students (S), non-students (N-S), traditional (A) and occidental (B).

		A	B	
Subjects	S	22	8	30
	N-S	6	22	28
		28	30	58

If one compares these results with the choices attributed to the parents (Table 5), one observes that there are no significant differences between the students and non-students. The majority of choices attributed to the parents by the two groups were traditional. Thus, the students are in agreement with their parents, the non-students opposed.

³ Fathers' responses are combined with mothers' responses.

⁴ A « It is very important to follow the teachings of one's religion : praying, fasting, celebrating religious feast days »; B « One may not necessarily practise one's religion » (statement 7, Appendix 1).

TABLE 5

Religious choices attributed to parents (mothers and fathers combined) : students' parents (S), non-students' parents (N-S), traditional (A) and occidental (B).

		A	B	
Parents	S	51	9	60
	N-S	47	9	56
		98	18	116
		84,5%	15,5%	100%

TABLE 6

Cigarette smoking choices⁵ made by subjects : students (S), non-students (N-S), traditional (A) and occidental (B).

		A	B	
Subjects	S	28	2	30
	N-S	26	2	28
		54	4	58

TABLE 7

Sensitive topics in Muslim culture : total and percentage of traditional choices (A) attributed to parents (fathers and mothers combined) by students (S) and non-students (N-S).

	S Fathers and mothers (N = 60)	N-S Fathers and mothers (N = 56)	Total (N = 116)	%
Cigarette smoking (6 ⁶)	59	56	115	99 %
Virginity (5)	55	54	109	94 %
Religion (7)	51	47	98	84,5 %
Endogamy (4)	49	45	94	81%
Parental decision (1)	47	47	94	81%

Agreement on Cigarette Smoking: Traditional Choices for the Subjects.

There is only one statement where the majority of students and non-students made a traditional choice: « Smoking in front of one's parents shows a lack of respect » (Table 6). While their choices were mostly occidental with regard to endogamy⁷ and virginity (statements 4 and 5, Appendix 1), beliefs concerning cigarette smoking were firmly anchored in traditional values; even the non-students chose not to transgress this cultural restriction⁸. When looking at Maghrebian tradition, it is important to note that smoking

⁵ A « Smoking in front of one's parents shows a lack of respect »; B « If one is not too young, one may smoke in front of one's parents » (statement 6, Appendix 1).

⁶ Statement number; see Appendix 1.

⁷ Marriage with someone of the same cultural origin.

⁸ It can be noted that in further conversations with the women, not only did they wish to maintain the tradition of non-smoking in front of their parents, but they also expected their children and grandchildren to do the same.

for women is unthinkable. Even men show deference to older generations by abstaining from smoking before their parents and grandparents.

Thus, cigarette smoking appears to be a truly collective problem, whereas virginity and endogamy have a tendency more often than not to reflect individual opinions.

Concerning cigarette smoking, almost all subjects attributed traditional choices to their parents. One can see from Table 7 that for both groups cigarette smoking received the highest percentage of traditional choices attributed to parents (99%), higher than virginity (94%), religion (84,5%), endogamy (81%) and submission to parental decision (81%). There are no differences between the parents of students and non-students when one looks at the most sensitive issues in Muslim culture.

CONCLUSION

The results of the test of alternative choices show that the women in the two groups made more occidental choices, while they attributed more traditional choices to their parents. This conflicting situation between French and Islamic cultures is the cause of the breakdown of relations in non-student families. By employing strategic tactics of negotiation, students are continually tempering this conflict. They made more traditional choices in comparison with non-students and perceived their parents as more westernized than parents of non-students; these results reinforce the hypothesis of negotiation of cultural values by the students.

It is plausible that the two groups do not have the same representation of education; however, there is a meeting point for the two groups within the peripheral system. This idea of negotiation which they share can exist independently of the central core. Whatever the identity of representation, one can imagine negotiation with something salient for the parents, e.g. diplomas, but not for the daughters. Bargaining in relation to higher studies permits each party to benefit, i.e. freedom for the daughters and the respect of traditional values for the parents. The flexibility of the periphery permits one to imagine that two different representations may interact. Non-students know that higher education could have been an asset but they ended their studies at an early age. Thus, they find themselves in a competitive situation while the students are in a cooperative situation and obtain maximum gain (Abric, 1976). One can question nevertheless whether negotiating relationships can be properly established when the meaning is different.

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APPENDIX 1

Alternative Choices:

Directions: In the following statements, you are given two choices. Choose the one which best corresponds to your beliefs, a second for your father's and a third for your mother's. The interviewer will check the answers.

Subjects		Fathers		Mothers		
0	0	15	22	11	20	1A- Women should stay at home and men should work in order to take care of their families.
30	28	15	6	19	8	1B - Men and women must share the same tasks at home and have the same rights at work and for pleasure.
9	3	25	24	22	23	2A - Young people must not make important decisions such as marriage without parental agreement.
21	25	5	4	8	5	2B - Young people must make important decisions for themselves even if their parents do not agree.
0	0	6	16	3	15	3A-Boys and girls need not have access to equal education.
30	28	24	12	27	13	3B- Males and females must be given the same opportunity to attend university without parental sexual discrimination.
9	4	26	23	23	22	4A- One should not marry someone of a different nationality.
21	24	4	5	7	6	4B- Nationality need not play an important role in marriage.
11	8	28	28	27	26	5A- The daughter who does not keep her virginity until marriage dishonours her family.
19	20	2	0	3	2	5B- It is not important for a daughter to be a virgin when she marries.
28	26	30	28	29	28	6A- Smoking in front of one's parents shows a lack of respect.
2	2	0	0	1	0	6B- If one is not too young, one may smoke in front of one's parents.
22	6	25	24	26	23	7A-It is very important to follow the teachings of one's religion: praying, fasting, celebrating religious feast days.
8	22	5	4	4	5	7B- One may not necessarily practise one's religion.
0	0	6	12	6	12	8A- One should only associate with people of the same culture.
30	28	24	16	24	16	8B- One is open to relationships with people of other cultures.

-Students (30)

-Non-Students (28)