

## Is Teaching in Algeria an Ideal Female Profession?<sup>(1)</sup>

The aim of the study, as presented by the author, is to grasp a vision of what may be called an ideal female profession, as well as to find out whether the various points of view regarding the question are so divergent as to be irreconcilable, or sufficiently congruent to create a single concept.

The work is made-up of 145 stencilled pages, divided into three parts: Dominant opinion; practice of the profession; and vision of the teachers, followed by an annex on holidays and absences.

The social representation of women's occupation in Algeria is studied under three headings: 1) The contents of school reading books; 2) the press; and, 3) the investigation of general opinion.

School reading books tend to eliminate women from extra-familial activities or to restrict their activities to teaching.

In the press can be distinguished three conceptions of the Algerian woman's emancipation. The first, influenced by socialist principles, considers woman as an equal participator in general development. The second, derived from the declarations of political leaders and leading journalists, presents certain reservations regarding woman's role and tries to circumscribe it within Arabo-Islamic limits. The third, emanating from religious circles and seminars on Islamic thought, represents woman as the guardian of tradition and the spinal cord of the family. To this group, the basic domain of woman's activities should be the home.

**Al-Jazairiyyah**, the magazine sponsored by the National Union of Algerian Women, focuses on legal reform and the handling of family problems created by present social changes. Its articles deal with the specific work problems in a general manner and are often limited to recommendations and warnings addressed to working women.

The inquiry about public opinion which tried to cover the largest possible number of social strata, aimed to disclose the interviewees' opinions concerning woman's work and the profession which fitted her best. The teaching profession was often pointed out as an ideal feminine profession.

The reasons lying behind this idealization are, first of

all, the identification of the teaching profession with the domestic activities, including child rearing and family direction. "The teacher considers her pupils as her children and her profession as an extension of domestic work or a preparation for motherhood". In corollary, those who believe in the existence of a "feminine nature", requiring a particular orientation and treatment, approve of teaching as a type of work which does not require the exertion of excessive physical activity. From the social point of view, it keeps women in contact with innocent creatures, the children, and prevents their exposure to harmful influences. "Teachers are expected to have an exemplary conduct, above suspicion. This is a source of ease and satisfaction for their families".

Another reason for the idealization of the profession, is the relatively reduced number of work hours that a teacher is required to spend in the classroom. In addition, the teacher may ask for a work schedule adapted to her home duties, thus allowing her an adjustment between outside and domestic work. The long vacations which are a teacher's privilege constitute a further reason for making the teaching profession attractive to homemakers.

### Professional practice:

#### The Practical Aspect of Teaching

According to recent statistics (1966-1977), women teachers are preponderant at the primary level and their number in this sector continues to increase.

This condition does not apply to the intermediate and secondary stages except in Oran (1975-1976). But on the whole, there is a sizable proportion of women in each of the two categories.

The author of the study tried to check the veracity of the belief that the relatively shorter work periods are a factor in the popularity of the profession. The inquiry showed that the lump number of hours required of women teachers, including the classroom hours and the additional ones, revolves around 44 per week, which means that it is not different from that of other categories of employment except in the fact that the teacher spends less time in her center of activity, i.e. in the classroom.

Another factor already referred to is the availability of family duties to the teacher. In most cases, it is possible for her to intermix two types of work, for example the preparation of a course and the cooking of a dish. This divided activity, however, brings about an additional amount of nervous fatigue.

### THE TEACHERS' POINT OF VIEW:

#### Is teaching an ideal profession for women?

To this question the majority of primary teachers replied that they considered teaching as a suitable

(1) Abstract of a study prepared by Zineb Guerroudj, as a requirement for the "Diplôme d'études approfondies", University of Oran, Algeria, 1979.

profession for women because every woman is a potential mother. Moreover it is approved by society.

For teachers of intermediate and secondary classes, teaching is one profession among many. Since it is widely practiced by women, it is apt to be depreciated by society.

### **How do they assess their work?**

All the teachers think that their profession interferes less than any other with their family duties.

Those of the secondary classes are satisfied with the particular organization of their schedule which insures harmony between two types of activity.

Intermediate school teachers complain of the monotony and closed atmosphere in which they live. Secondary school teachers, on the other hand, enjoy the totally different ambiance which, in the higher level courses, constitutes for them a change from static family life.

All of them complain of nervous fatigue, of the extra-curricular duties, of the large number of hours spent in preparing courses and grading papers. They all consider the long vacations as an advantage and a well-deserved privilege.

Group activities and projects planned to maintain the vitality of the institution, are very rare. This state of stagnation is partly due to the division existing between men and women teachers, and between Arabophones and Francophones.

### **What is their outlook on the future?**

Primary and intermediate school teachers do not envisage any change of profession in the future, first because they are not academically prepared for the change. Secondly, they are accustomed to their work and are encouraged by their family circles to continue it.

Most of secondary school teachers would like to change for a more interesting and better remunerated career, but they have little chance for it because of financial reasons, family dependence, influence of habit, and inadequate preparation for other types of work.

### **What do they think of the feminization of the profession?**

To some of them, feminization of the teaching profession would mean its devaluation. "A woman's job is a marginal job".

To the majority of them, feminization of the profession would be a result of prejudices against other professions for women. Other causes are family pressure and easy access to teaching.

### **Conclusions**

To summarize the result of the inquiry concerning the teachers' assessment of their work, we may say first that primary school teachers are generally satisfied with their profession which they consider as an equivalent to motherhood. They represent the static conventional group of teachers and they form the majority.

Teachers of secondary classes do not consider teaching as an ideal feminine profession. They all would have made another choice but circumstances did not help.

As to the intermediate category, they oscillate between the other two groups and do not show a unified opinion.

In conclusion, the vision of the teachers, as compared with the prevailing or dominant image, emerges as a conventional one, but liable to contradictions. If it does not confirm the dominant image, it does not invalidate it, nor does it elaborate a new one, which would make a counter-image. Those who complain of certain disadvantages do not take any steps to change the situation or to propose any reforms. Their little faith in the possibility of change makes them cling to their work and accept it as it is.

### **Final remarks**

The conventional attitude shown by the interviewees does not apply to the entire teaching body. A certain deviation appears which, by further study, might reveal unexploited reform potentialities. In this connection, the following points remain to be investigated:

1) Is the conventional behavior of the women teachers a reflection of their social behavior as a whole? Their behavior reveals their inability to play a leading, or pioneering, emancipatory role in Algeria. The problem would then be to know which other category of women could play an active role in women's liberation.

2) Algeria is presently facing a channeled evolution of the feminine condition, in which the commanding word belongs to working women. What activities are open to an intellectual class locked within its own contradictions?

3) Is conventionalism a characteristic of women teachers or of the whole teaching body? Regarding the attitude being revealed by middle class individuals, is it applicable to all middle class society in Algeria? Or, is it a resultant of conjectural phenomena at the social level?