

Morocco: Maghreb Bloggers Search for Common Ground

Posted By [Hisham](#) On 2010-02-27 @ 14:55 pm In [Algeria](#), [Arabic](#), [Cyber-Activism](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Media](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#), [Morocco](#), [Photos](#), [Tunisia](#), [Video](#), [War & Conflict](#), [Weblog](#), [Youth](#) | [3 Comments](#)

A three-day workshop for bloggers from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco was held from 15 to 17 February 2010 in the Moroccan capital Rabat. The meeting was funded by [Search for Common Ground](#) ^[1] (SFCG), a non-governmental organization based in Washington DC, promoting collaborative approaches in dealing with conflicts. Participating bloggers who reported the event on their own blogs and live-tweeted it under the [#mab10](#) ^[2] hashtag, shared their blogging experiences, engaged in lively debates openly confronting their views on contentious issues and were encouraged to reflect on ways to find grounds for mutual understanding.

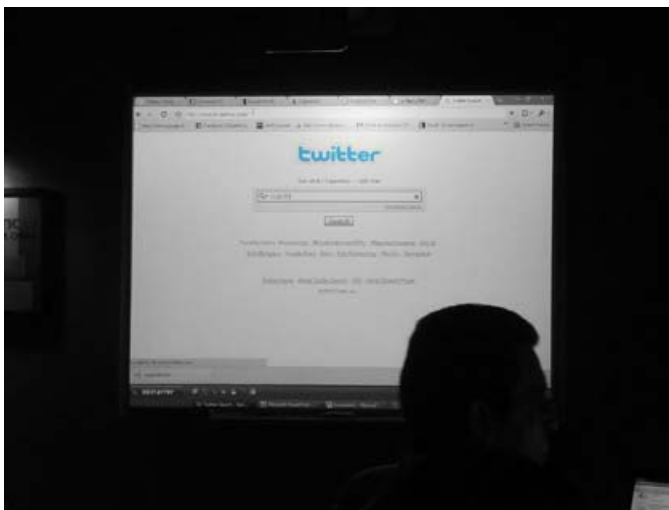


Leena El-Ali and Lurna Strikwerda, respectively Director and Program Assistant with SFCG's [Partners in Humanity](#) ^[3] programme, together with the organization's local team and a group of distinguished trainers conducted and moderated the debates.

Magda Abu-Fadil is director of the Journalism Training Program at the American University of Beirut (AUB). She's also [blogger](#) ^[4] for the Huffington Post and former foreign correspondent and editor with major international news organizations. She insisted among other things on the ethics of journalism and (by extension) blogging, exploring the legal and political difficulties facing bloggers in the region and ways to confront them.

Mohamed Daadaoui is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Oklahoma City University. He writes on [Maghreb Blogs](#) ^[5] where he comments on issues related to the Maghreb region. Mohamed's intervention focused on the perceived limits of freedom of speech online and the impact bloggers think they have on ongoing local or regional conflicts.

Rachid Jankari is a media savvy Moroccan journalist, [blogger](#) ^[6] and founder of [MIT Media](#) ^[7]. His energetic intervention covered a wide range of tools for online activism and advocacy, cataloging and offering an invaluable tutoring of some of the most effective websites and services online.



When asked about the top conflicts bloggers have to deal with in the region, most recurrent themes were socioeconomic, cultural and political issues. Some stressed the need for a more "common ground" approach, as opposed to either a biased or neutral kind of media, so as to highlight mutual values, contextualizing and exploring roots of conflicts. Others protested that bloggers are "opinion providers" and are not supposed to follow unwieldy rules in their writings as opposed to professional journalists.

In an interesting free writing exercise, bloggers were asked to push their limits and try to come up with texts they deem unpublishable in their own blogs for fear of being censored. Bloggers were then invited to edit their texts adopting a more common ground style so as to make their text less censurable but still be able get their messages across.

Hind is a Moroccan blogger present at the workshop. [She writes](#) ^[8] [Ar]:

واهم ما لوحظ خلال هذه الدورة الانسجام الكبير بين كل المشاركين من مختلف الدول والجنسيات رغم وجود اختلافات في وجهات النظر وقد كان أهم ما طرح خلال هذا التدريب أن يكتب كل مدون ويعبر بحرية تامة بدون أن يفكر في الرقابة و المنع فكانت النتيجة أن البعض استطاع التعبير بكل سهولة ويسر بينما البعض الآخر خائنه الكلمات وغابت عنه الأفكار خاصة أن المدون بالعالم العربي مازالت سلطة الرقابة والمنع تتحكم به وقد صدم المشاركون من وضعية حرية التعبير المتدهورة جدا بتونس الخضراء والرقابة الصارمة على الانترنت ومنع الكثير من المواقع مثل يوتيوب وغيره

The most remarkable thing noted during the workshop was the great harmony between all participants from various countries and nationalities, despite differences in views. And one of the most important things put forward during those sessions was a free writing exercise, encouraging bloggers to express themselves freely without thinking about government control or censorship. As a result, some have managed to express themselves with ease, while others lacked ideas and words, unsurprisingly, especially as bloggers in the Arab world are constantly under the influence of censorship and control. Participants were most shocked by the status of freedom of expression in Tunisia, where tight state censorship over the Internet prevents access to many websites like YouTube ...

Sarra Grira, a Tunisian blogger, journalist and author for cross-regional online news magazine [e-Marrakech](#) ^[9] [Fr], attended the workshop. Regarding freedom of speech in the region, [she writes](#) ^[10] [Fr]:

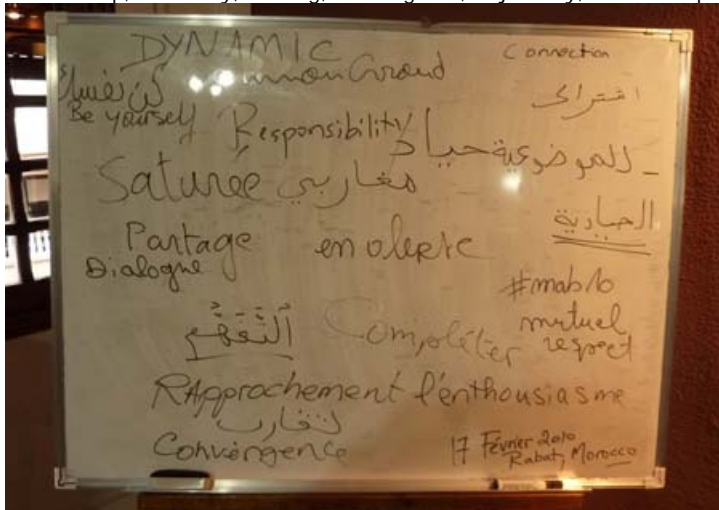
Si j'étais dans un monde libre et démocratique, je n'aurais pas à parler de la censure qui nous assomme tous les jours et qui s'incruste tant et si bien dans nos vies qu'elle devient de l'auto-censure. Je n'aurais pas à en parler parce que, dans ce monde-là, toutes les personnes pourraient s'exprimer librement.

If I were in a free and democratic world, I would not have had to talk about the censorship that stuns us every day and encrusts so heavily in our lives it becomes self-censorship. I wouldn't have talked because in this world, everyone could speak freely.

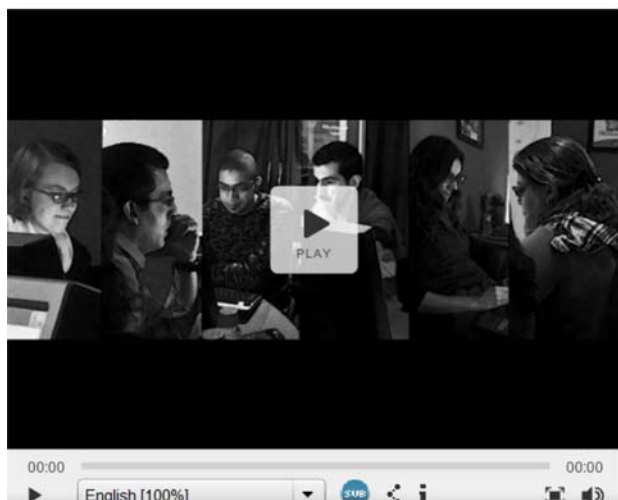
After three days of intense interactive training, bloggers embarked on a final brainstorming session, trying to think big and come up with novel ideas based on what they've learned. Three groups came up with three different projects, participants say they will try to materialize in the future:

- A cross-posting day throughout the Maghreb of "words that upset" so as to overwhelm governments' censorship capabilities.
- Creating a visual, "wordfree" system using exclusively icons and colors to benefit the large illiterate and disenfranchised population, with the ambition of providing interfaces for the most useful and popular tools on the Web.
- Creating an online group of reporters throughout North Africa, focusing on Common Ground journalism, monitoring blogs and giving help and advice.

In the following picture a whiteboard displays notes left by bloggers at the end of their three-day interactive workshop. It reads: "Partnership, Neutrality, Sharing, Convergence, Objectivity, Mutual Respect, Understanding, Responsibility, Be Yourself..."



The following video shows interviews [Ar, Fr] with some bloggers and journalists present at the workshop:



Article printed from Global Voices Online: <http://globalvoicesonline.org>

URL to article: <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/02/27/morocco-maghreb-bloggers-search-for-common-ground/>

URLs in this post:

- [1] Search for Common Ground: <http://www.sfcg.org/>
- [2] #mab10: <http://twitter.com/#search?q=%23mab10>
- [3] Partners in Humanity: http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/humanity/programmes_humanity.html
- [4] blogger: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/magda-abufadil>
- [5] Maghreb Blogs: <http://maghreblog.blogspot.com/>
- [6] blogger: <http://www.jankari.org/>
- [7] MIT Media: <http://www.maroc-it.ma/blogs/mit-media/>
- [8] She writes: <http://hindapress.canalblog.com/archives/2010/02/25/17034671.html>
- [9] e-Marrakech: <http://www.emarrakech.info/>
- [10] she writes: <http://courantalternatif.blogspot.com/2010/02/exercice-de-style-si-jetais-dans-un.html>

Licensed Creative Commons Attribution, 2008 Global Voices Online. See attribution policy for details: <http://globalvoicesonline.org/about/global-voices-attribution-policy>