

# THE NORTH AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE: FROM COLONISATION TO THE CURRENT ALLEDGED ISLAMIST THREAT

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**Abstract** – *This paper focuses on the reproductive role of education in colonial and post-colonial North Africa, especially in the three main French-speaking countries, namely Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The training of a bicultural élite was one of the main consequences of French colonisation. It will be argued that after independence, the framework of the ‘colonial’ educational system actually remained in place. It even became a ‘national’ system which, by the end of the twentieth century, produced, in each country, a very narrow national élite, which for decades kept State power and economic governance in its hands. After the 1980s, this situation led to deep political and social crises.*

## Introduction

This article presents a summary of my thesis in contemporary history, *Des Nationalistes aux Islamistes: La Formation des Élités Tunisiennes et Marocaines de 1920 à 2000*, which has been published in France and in Morocco, but has not been translated into English (Vermeren, 2002). The thesis argues that, in order to understand how the governments of the region’s post-colonial nations reached the situation they are presently in, and the challenges they have to face today, one must first focus on the ideological and historical context of the building of colonial élite’s education system. We will therefore show how, after independence, nationalism failed to build a new, democratic high school system. We will also try to understand the main challenges facing North Africa today, related to overcoming the profound educational crises, and to addressing the social consequences of the regional élite’s reproductive system.

## The ideological and historical context of the creation of the colonial élite’s education system

Education was not a major preoccupation of early French colonisation. In the 1830s, when the conquest of Algeria began, and for some decades after that, the policy regarding ‘indigenous’ people centred on matters of control, diplomacy and

war. Over this long period, amounting to almost 30 years, education was only a concern for the families of the French military and civil servants.

As the French began to control the tribes through a policy of indirect rule, 'indigenous affairs' officers were primarily interested in being able to communicate clearly with Berber and Arab leaders. Officers learnt indigenous languages, and gave a few 'Muslims' some basic training to enable them to understand what was expected of them, and to be facilitate obedience from the locals.

Colonising settlers soon dominated the political scene. They supported the Second Republic in 1848, and obtained the creation of three '*départements*'—i.e. French metropolitan administrative districts—in Africa. Algeria formally became a part of the French Republic, which meant that French laws also applied in Algeria's civil territories. During the Second Empire (1851-1870), some officers and counsellors convinced Napoleon III to set up a specific policy for indigenous populations. The first indigenous schools, with French curricula and modern teaching methods, emerged in North Africa, though there were also some Christian schools. In 1865, indigenous people, who had been French by law since 1848, were granted the possibility to obtain French citizenship if they accepted to renounce their personal (i.e. religious) laws. Only a few of them did so over a period of one hundred years.

With the final reinstatement of the Republic in France, in the 1870s, the settlers obtained the permission to extend so-called 'pro-indigenous' policies. In the 1880s, complete 'assimilation' with the French population and administration was granted, rights which were not shared by the '*indigène*'—the locals. For example, the education laws promulgated by the Jules Ferry, which imposed '*une école laïque, gratuite et obligatoire*' (a secular, free and compulsory education for all), were also adopted in Algeria. However, these laws only applied to French citizens. The 'indigenous' schools that existed subsisted as if by chance.

One has to wait for the '*Recteur*' Jeanmaire in Algiers, who, at the end of the century, promoted a new educational policy for 'Muslims' in Algeria. He set up 'indigenous schools', created four '*medersas*' for the instruction of both Muslim and Republican civil servants in Islamic affairs, and a University was created in Algiers after 1895. But the latter, while in principle open to all, was in fact reserved for European students. By 1914, fewer than 2 % of Algerian children were attending school, even if this lack of access was in complete contradiction with assimilationist policies.

Consequently, at the turn of the century, there was no intellectual élite conversant in the ways of the metropole and of the colonizer among native Algerians. If a lot of Algerian people did speak French in urban business, in the army, or on the farms with settlers, they were far from able to compete on an equal footing with the French colonial élite, whether educated in France or locally.

The situation in Tunisia was quite different. Here colonization took place at the time of Ferry's laws (1881-1883), and consequently, the colonial system was heavily influenced by these developments. A small, indigenous graduate élite emerged before 1914. It was easier for 'Tunisians' than for Algerians, because Tunisia was not France, and the Protectorate treaty was supposed to pave the way for the self-government of Tunisia by its élite. Tunisia had moreover introduced some school and administrative reforms in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, initiated by the Ottoman régime. In the beginning of the Protectorate, several young, brilliant subjects of the Bey went to Paris to study. They returned to Tunisia, where they worked to develop the local administration and education (e.g. the Khaldounia Association). But it is only after 1918 that a second wave of student migration to France took place, beginning with the future President, H. Bourguiba.

Algeria's colonial history shows that, as we can read in the classical French historiography about this period (Turin, 1983), there was no global approach to education. Academic education was reserved for the European pupils and students, and there was no public conception of education of and for the locals. We can thus observe three different points of view concerning the objectives and systems of colonial education in French North Africa.

The first group interested in the education of the locals was made up of army officers. The way the educational project was conceived is similar, whether we refer to the first decades of colonial Algeria, or to the cherifian Empire (Morocco), when the French Resident General Lyautey embarked on the task of setting up the Protectorate's administration. For General Lyautey, as for General Bugeaud—who had created the '*Bureaux des Affaires Indigènes*' (Bureaus of Indigenous Affairs) in Algeria eighty years before, the main questions were: how to use the traditional élite to control society, and how to recognize an honorific role to this élite in order to keep it peaceful and respectful of the new authorities (Azan, 1948).

The second group that articulated a view on the education of the locals is symbolized by the settlers, representing the views holding sway in Europe at that time. In their view, the indigenous population had to be controlled. Given that the function of the locals was to constitute a working class providing manual labour, the settlers considered that education was not necessary for them. Indeed, schooling could even be dangerous if it taught the democratic principles of freedom and equality, or promoted mastery of French language, rhetoric and history. In the view of the settlers, therefore, the locals—and mostly males—had only to be educated to respect some rules, to understand a few French words, to comply with sanitary laws, and to learn some technical skills (agriculture for men, and dress-making for women).

The European settlers, who were a minority among the indigenous population, had always been afraid of the 'Arab threat'. They were physically afraid of being

submerged, and politically threatened by the principle of democracy. If the Muslims claimed their right to equality, the settlers would lose their leadership. It was therefore necessary to exclude the locals not only from French citizenship, but also from state schools. The best the locals could hope for was vocational schooling.

A third view on the question of the education of the locals was promoted by Republican and Socialist school teachers – or ‘*moniteurs*’, as they were then known. For some of these, there was no contradiction between their mission of state school teaching and the colonial principle of assimilation. As civil servants, they were often sent to Algeria for some years by their Ministry – as was the case, for instance, with the young Fernand Braudel, and then Pierre Bourdieu. At the end of the century, an increasing number of local teachers were trained in the ‘*Ecole Normale de la Bouzareah*’ in Algiers. Among them were an increasing number of Muslim teachers who, during the 1920s, created a magazine called ‘*La Voix des Humbles*’ (‘The Voice of the Poor’). Several contributors to this magazine tried to reconcile French republican values with their own origins, personal history, and bicultural identity.

This evolution took place in a faster and more vigorous manner in Tunisia than in Algeria. In the former country, some schools for Muslim pupils were set up as ‘franco-arab’ institutions as from the very first years of the Protectorate. Like European people in their own schools, after passing the primary certificate, these young Tunisians were able to enrol in ‘*Sadiki College*’, a former Ottoman school which became a French Arabic ‘*collège*’, or high school. By the First World War, Tunisian professors and teachers had succeeded in securing a beneficial educational policy for the indigenous local population, building on it right up to the time of decolonization.

Nevertheless, the French colonial system tried to maintain the indigenous upper class – i.e. the former élite – under its domination, a fate that upper classes rarely submit to willingly. This may be the reason why this project failed at the end of the colonial period. In fact, the main result of the French colonial legacy in North Africa is probably the constitution of a small native élite base which was essentially Francophile. The colonized forgot their own aristocratic and pre-modern model, and instead looked up to the settler élite of French Army officers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and journalists. At the end of the day, what they seemed to be interested in doing was copying them.

The public service was out of bounds for indigenous people, in Algeria because only French citizens could be employed in it, and in the Protectorates because these were foreign countries. The young élite was trained in ‘*Sadiki College*’ in Tunisia, in the *medersa* in Algeria, in the two ‘Muslim Colleges’ in Morocco. But these institutions only led to such subaltern employment as translators, clerks,

junior officers, and so on. So, step by step, the ‘independent professions’ became considered as the only way to social promotion and autonomy. But these careers were reserved for a very few of the locals, which explains why a lot of parents and families thought that independence would promote a new order, since the school would be open to their sons.

To recapitulate, therefore: France built in North Africa three different educational systems, each one bearing the mark of its colonial model and its local actors. The first model is the Algerian one. Here two separate systems subsisted after several experiments. On the one hand, some children of Muslim high society, of Muslim soldiers lost in action, or of Muslim civil servants were incorporated with French pupils and students in French schools. Before WWI, only a very few of them obtained the *Baccalauréat*, and went on to the University in Algiers or in Paris (Pervillé, 1999). On the other hand, some other Muslim children were admitted in bilingual schools, and after the obtaining the *Certificat* at the end of lower secondary schooling, they became civil servants or students in the *medersas*. Here, therefore, we have a double model of schooling, even if very few of the Muslim children actually went to school – less than 8% around WWII.

The second model is the one we find in Tunisia, where two sections cohabited. The first was the Arabic section. The best graduates were accepted in Sadiki College (Sraïeb, 1994). Until WWI, this *Collège* was an important place for the reproduction of élites. But since this period, an increasing number of students came from the ‘*Sahel*’ (South of the capital), allowing some promotion for the ‘Sahelian’ and Tunisian small bourgeoisie. At the same time, Tunis’s aristocracy sent its sons to the French ‘*Lycée Carnot*’, a state High School where the European and the Jewish élite prepared for the *Baccalauréat* to study in Paris or Marseille.

The third model is Morocco, where General Lyautey tried, as much as possible, to separate the European and the Muslim ways (Rivet, 1988). He created some ‘*filis de notables*’ schools for locals in the main cities. After obtaining the primary school certificate, students could go to the ‘*Collège Musulman*’ in Fes or Rabat (Merrouni, 1983). After six years, they could get a Certificate in Islamic Studies pass an Islamic Studies certificate, on the basis of which General Lyautey tried to allocate some honorific positions. However, if families were ambitious and realistic, they understood that the only way to gain access to University was by obtaining the ‘*Baccalauréat*’. Some rich and powerful families therefore enrolled their sons in the ‘*Lycée Gouraud*’ in Rabat, the French High School in Morocco.

After some years, the Protectorate created a special education section for the sons of tribal and Berber leaders and chiefs. This was the Berber College of Azrou in the Middle Atlas (Benhlal, 2005), which prepared a few students for the Military Officer’s School of *Dar El Baïda* in Meknes. This case was unique in the

French colonial Empire, preparing a real competition between the Arabic and nationalist élite in the cities, and the Berber officers at the head of the colonial (then national) forces.

### **Why did nationalism fail to build a democratic educational system?**

When nationalist movements took to the street to fight against the colonial power, in Algeria as elsewhere, a key aspiration was to gain not only independence, but also the right for young people to gain access to school and to the university, thus facilitating social mobility. National independence was equated with the promise of mobility, and ‘hope’ was the key slogan that drove the movement towards independence.

When independence was secured, the new national élite that filled the top positions vacated by the colonizers considered that the French educational model was the one to be preserved. While they had promised citizens and militants a return to Islamic and Arabic education, they had themselves been completely transformed by their own Francophile education, and by their experience of study in Paris or some other city in France. For the new political class, therefore, the French system of education, from which locals had been excluded during the colonial period, had to become the new national model. Most of the new leaders entertained strong feelings of identification with – and gratitude for – their former colonial school teachers. Both Habib Bourguiba (Lacouture, 1961), the Tunisian President, and Hassan II, the King of Morocco (Ganiage, 1994), for instance, expressed such feelings about their own school teachers.

For twenty years after decolonization, the educational policies led by ‘nationalist’ governments produced the largest francophone generation North Africa had ever seen. Under colonization, French or Arab-French education had only concerned a minority. When, in 1955, France left Morocco and Tunisia, and Algeria’s War of Independence started in earnest, only 12% of Moroccan children were enrolled at school, with the corresponding figures for Algeria being 21%, and 33 % for Tunisia (Ganiage, 1994). These averages reflect the three different points of view concerning the objectives and systems of colonial education in French North Africa that we considered earlier, and which, like a complex alchemy, had an impact on each country and on the whole Maghreb region. Tunisia was more affected by the school teachers’ point of view, Algeria by that of the settlers (Ageron, 1968), and Morocco by the military.

A turning point in colonial educational policies took place after the Second World War. For ten years, an effort was made to develop schooling quickly in the three countries. Independent régimes in Morocco and Tunisia pursued with

such voluntarist plans, attempting implementation at an even faster rate. After fifteen years, towards 1970, the average of those attending schools came near to 50%, and was even higher in Tunisia thanks to the efforts of Mahmoud Messaadi, who served as Education Minister for a whole decade (Sraïeb, 1974).

It was quite different in Algeria, where the eight-year-long war between the French army and the 'FLN' (National Liberation Front) changed the deal. In an effort to convince the Algerian people to keep their French nationality, the army developed education as it had never done before. In a few years, two million Algerian children and young people learned the French language, in civilian as well as in military schools (Branche, 2005). For a long time, Algeria became the most important francophone country in North Africa, all the more so since Arabic culture was very weak after 130 years of French colonization.

After some hesitations by nationalist governments, colonial educational policies were extended, this time towards 'all' children. Nationalist governments in Morocco and Algeria could not implement alternative policies because in both countries had very few Arabic teachers and graduates. To avoid being in contradiction with their ideology, first Morocco, then Algeria, imported hundreds of Arabic teachers and imams from the Middle East—with General G. Nasser exploiting this opportunity to send members of the Society of Muslim Brothers to the Maghreb. Despite this, however, the number of such Arabic teachers could never compare with the thousands of French teachers who had been sent to secondary schools during the 1960s and 1970s.

At this time, educational policy regarding élites was very similar to the model prevailing in France. In two decades, new national Universities and some selective 'Grandes Écoles' were created in North Africa. Their professors were mostly French, and, with the exception of Islamic departments, the curriculum and teaching methods and models were French. Some Schools, such as the French '*Ponts et Chaussées*' for civil engineers, were completely integrated with small sister schools, such as the 'Hassania School of *Ponts et Chaussées*' in Rabat. In other cases, the French administration received a lot of students from the newly independent countries, offering them short-, mid- or long-term specialist training.

Consequently, for a long time after independence, the new administrators and leaders in science, industry, university, research, trade, administration, security and so on, worked according to French standards and usually spoke French at work. In France, this new political model became known under the name of 'cooperation', which followed on from 'colonization'.

For many political and social reasons, the turning point of cultural decolonization took place after the mid-1970s. In a few years, educational

policies changed completely, and this had a long-term impact on the training system of the élite.

Three years (1976-1979) marked the end of educational ‘cooperation’. Lesser qualified Islamic graduates replaced foreign francophone teachers everywhere, particularly in Mathematics and the Sciences. At the same time, the Arabic language became the language of instruction in all subjects except the natural sciences and some postgraduate courses (Grandguillaume, 1983). However, the changes are not reducible to just language. During the 1970s, the new nationalist and Islamic conservative approach is supported, or symbolized, by Mohamed Mzali in Tunisia, Taleb Ibrahim in Algeria, and Azeddine Laraki in Morocco. Islamic culture generally replaced philosophy, sociology and French literature in high schools as well as in Universities.

At this time, the Islamic traditional approach was considered by governments and leaders – such as King Hassan II, President H. Bourguiba, and President H. Boumediene – as the best way to eradicate the revolutionary threat. After a deep crisis caused by Socialist contestation and demonstrations, the pacific and traditional role of Islamic religion appeared as the best way to eradicate the modern, revolutionary and political roots of youth movements. Arabization was the cultural face of this religious movement. And last but not least, the old Islamic school methods of memorization – what the 2008 World Bank Report refers to as ‘outdated methods of teaching’ – became the dominant pedagogic paradigm. The French ‘*esprit critique*’ had become a synonym for subversion in North Africa. It had to be eradicated by all means, even it meant destroying the élitist model left by the French. Mass university education also signalled the end of such a model.

The effects of this academic revolution slowly gained ground with the new generation. By the mid-1980s, the worldview of young students and graduates had changed quite radically. While this is not the place to discuss the language question in North Africa – a central issue in relation to both education and society more generally – it is nevertheless important to highlight the fact that Arabization, in this region, is not only a question of words and symbols, but a fundamental question concerning the very conception of the world (Krichen, 1986), the place of religion, and political behaviour (Grandguillaume, 1983).

Mass higher education and Arabization are, however, not the only ways by means of which society is reformed. Everywhere, and specifically in science, the élite has maintained small and selective ways aimed at reproducing the existing model. This is the case with medicine, engineering, business administration, and international law, for instance. In each country, francophone high schools became the best way to succeed in these professional careers.



All the prestigious and selective schools or sections still use the French language – and occasionally English or Spanish – in contrast with the rest of the educational institutions, which use Arabic. As human science researchers have consistently observed for a long time, linguistic competence is a social, economic and intellectual privilege. This is a reality everywhere, but perhaps especially so in North Africa, given that here linguistic discrimination is very strong (Anonymous, 1989). It is necessary to speak three or four languages at least, if one wants to succeed in your higher education and your professional life (Benrabah, 1999).

In North Africa, a student speaks his or her mother tongue, which is frequently the North African vernacular version of Arabic. Both French and standard Arabic are used as languages in teaching. Then, students typically learn English or Spanish as foreign languages. As for the Berbers, who are a strong minority in Algeria and Morocco, there is one additional linguistic hurdle. In conditions such as these, it is quite impossible for most students in Morocco or in Algeria to be truly fluent in French and in Arabic if they attend ordinary state schools. For such students, there is practically no possibility to succeed at University, since all the scientific disciplines and medicine are exclusively taught in French. And yet, despite this situation, Medicine and Engineering faculties have been, as in the Middle East, the main areas where the Islamist opposition started and grew during the 1970s and 1980s.

Each country has its own élite schools. In Algeria, the most prestigious field is oil engineering (National school of Petroleum Engineers), followed by the military Academy (Kadri, 1992). However, new Business and Management schools have recently appeared. In Tunisia, the main schools are Engineering Schools (such as the National school of Engineers of Tunis – ENIT). However, Medicine and Management also rank highly. Since the Ben Ali régime, the '*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*' (ENA) has seen its role and importance increase.

In Morocco, engineering is still the most important way to attain high positions in administration and corporate management, in the government, and in state agencies. King Mohammed VI is even more deeply interested than his father was in a technocratic vision that gives pride of place to engineering and technology. The '*Makhzen*' – i.e. the head of state, composed of families and counselors around the King – seems to consider that, because they have graduated in Law, these technocrats are far from politics. In addition, they generally know how the *Makhzen* functions, and they understand that their career strictly depends on their fidelity to the Throne.

What is certain is that, in Tunisia as in Morocco, the most prestigious and powerful engineers are graduates from the French '*Grandes Écoles*', and sometimes from North American universities (Benhaddou, 1997).

## Which way out of the deep educational crises and the social consequences of the reproduction élite?

During the 1990s, the political and cultural make-up of the new generations changed radically. After the Islamist ‘avant-garde’ of the 1970s, the new generations were more homogenous in their Islamic conformism. Furthermore, young people were competent in new computer technologies, which are now part of daily life in North African cities. This contradiction resulted from the impact of international dynamics, though it was also a result of local and specific educational trends.

The fact remains that a separate élite was part of this generation, or more exactly, lived next to it. Only a small tranche of a generation – probably less than one per cent of an age group (Wagner, 1998) – was able to reach notable corporate and state positions, or to work outside Morocco. With only around 20% of a generation obtaining the ‘*baccalauréat*’, the majority of young people were disqualified from further opportunities due to inadequate studies. The situation was worse than in the 1980s and, with the exception of Tunisia, resembled that which had prevailed in Western Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 1960s and the 1970s, independence provided a great opportunity for urban youth to enrol in high schools and universities. At this time, the social reproduction of the former pre-colonial and colonial élites was able to constitute the new state class. After independence, as in all the new independent states in the developing world, there was a significant dearth of military and civil servants, engineers, doctors and executives. As the pre-colonial élite was very small, and as the colonial power structure tried for a long time to reserve key positions to its own élite, the children of these groups were far from constituting the majority of the emerging state class. Indeed, these first decades constituted a big opportunity for young, urban, literate men (Ben Salem, 1968). They were the ‘independence generation’. In modern North African History, there had never been such a favourable period for social mobility.

At this time a mixed élite emerged, incorporating ‘*héritiers*’ (inheritors) from the former pre-colonial élite (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970), some from the colonial élite, and some new elements. The former pre-colonial élite was more important in Morocco than in Tunisia, where the colonial élite had replaced the pre-colonial one. In the Kingdom of Morocco, for instance, the new state administration had, in one decade, grown from a few thousands to 200,000 civil servants, while the number of corporate executives rose from a few hundreds to several thousands. This fact helps explain why revolutions failed during this period in North Africa.

From the mid-1970s onwards, the effects of this massive recruiting, together with the economic crises, led to a halt in state employment policy. At the same time the social effects of the new school policies started to be felt.

After 1978-1980, the new configuration was an explosive one: state administration was reaching saturation point, and a whole bevy of reforms had transformed the élitist school system into a mass institutional one. The turning point for graduate unemployment in Morocco was 1979. But social conditions were deteriorating in the whole region: in Tunisia and Morocco since 1978, and in Algeria after 1986, due to the collapse of the price of gas. In a few years, the social situation led to a political change in Tunisia (1987), to a revolution and a civil war in Algeria (1988 and 1992), and to riots (1981-1984-1990) and then to a political liberalization in Morocco during the 1990s (since 1991).

North Africa is now confronted with a divided society, with on the one hand one group looking to the Middle East and its fundamentalist ideologies, and on the other hand, a small élite addicted to a Western way-of-life and culture. It may not be too far-fetched to talk about an intellectual and social rift segregating the majority of young people on the one hand, and a globalised élite minority on the other.

Is there any alternative to this situation for governments? If they want to safeguard their societies from subversion and violence, they are obliged to use violence themselves. In this way, they will perhaps preserve the present system, which works in favour of their own children. However, if they want to uphold their societies in the long term, they have to rebuild educational systems, or at least, they have to provoke debates about educational reform. Up to 2008, Tunisia really tried to rebuild its school system. Morocco and Algeria, however, seemed to balk in front of this Herculean undertaking.

Educational reform was tested at the beginning of the 1990s by Ben Ali's government, at a time when he was still supported by the Francophile and open-minded élite. Between 1989 and 1994, the Minister of Education was Law Professor Mohammed Charfi (1936-2008), a Francophile intellectual. Charfi's reform tried to fund a new educational pact. He supported a reform in philosophy, in literature, and in the approach to policies regarding language and culture. His clear intention was the eradication of the roots of cultural Islamism. Even before this reform, which strengthened bilingualism, Tunisia had a diversified school system which formed its own élites. In Morocco, however, élites are formed outside the system—especially in French schools – while Algerian élites are formed outside the country.

Since 1999, with the ascent to the throne of King Mohammed VI, educational reforms seemed to be the order of the day in Morocco. However, despite that, as in Algeria, the government understands the necessity of such reforms, there is a fear of the political consequences of such change. The governing élite refuses to

appear as if they were supporters of the West or of the French, because the general expectation is that they uphold the nationalist and Arabic programme. They are moreover afraid of the reactions of the conservative élite, whose influence largely exceeds that of the Islamists.

The civil war in Algeria did not provide a promising context for such educational reforms. Since the end of the war in 2001, the government and its institutions have remained under the ideological pressure of the Islamists. Algerian society has increasingly adopted conservative and religious behaviours. On the political scene, the Francophile camp (*'hizb's frança'* for its enemies) has been weakened.

Benjamin Stora (2001), a French historian of contemporary Algeria, underlines the fact that the civil war began by attacks against French high school pupils. During the war, francophone and French schools were closed, and a lot of young students from the 'best' families were enrolled in selective schools in France, Switzerland, England and elsewhere. During this period, state schools in Algeria were an open field for Islamist propaganda.

Since the end of the conflict, a lot of francophone private schools have reopened in different cities. As in Morocco, and then in Tunisia, the main target of this free school movement has been to offer a French alternative, as a response to the policy of Arabization. Just by way of example, in the year 2000, there were more than 1,000 private schools in Casablanca alone. But such private education alternatives were not as easy to establish in Algeria, where nationalism consists in refusing French culture and its symbols. Following his re-election, President Bouteflika decided in 2004 to close all the Francophone private high schools. This, of course, does not prevent some rich young people from pursuing the studies they want in the country of their choice. Nor does it stop thousands of young pupils from learning French at home, as their mother tongue, which is the best way to prepare for their economic future. In such a context, however, there is no chance of voting for deep reforms.

Since the mid-1990s, Morocco has become the new frontier of high school and University reform in North Africa. In 1995, a World Bank report underlined the catastrophic situation in Moroccan education: the illiteracy rate approached 60% of the adult population, and only 1% of the youth were university graduates. Furthermore, the new UNDP international rating, i.e. the Indicator of Human Development, which incorporates the educational level attained by different countries, ranked Morocco last in North Africa.

Similar indictments of Morocco's educational system have been made by internal reports, such as the one commissioned by the Royal Cabinet. Engineer Abdelaziz Meziane Belfqih, counsellor of King Hassan II, headed the Orientation Commission for Teaching and Research (COSEF) and, working with a large panel of experts, drew up a report on education in the Kingdom, delivering the outcome of its deliberations

some days before the death of King Hassan II. The Commission concluded that education was the main weakness in Morocco. A 'National Council for Education' was established in order to propose concrete reforms, and to enforce them.

The period between 1999 and 2002 saw the failure of the 'alternation government', which was in charge of the proposed educational reforms until 2002. Changes were restricted to small or symbolic reforms, such as the introduction of the Berber language in the initial years of the primary school, or the reinstatement of Philosophy at high school and university levels. The claim was that such reforms had helped Moroccan children obtain improved scores at school, though it seems that there was little evidence and substance behind such claims, which served a political purpose in the main.

The next government, led by Prime Minister Driss Jettou (2002-2007), was more interested in economic and investment affairs. The main objective in the educational camp was to adapt the Moroccan University to the new European model, thus triggering an important reform in 2007. This reform, however, was more technical than intellectual in nature, and while representing new challenges for the special counsellor, engineer A. M. Belfqih, the central problems in education persist. More than a reform of the higher education system, the *makhzen's* main concern seems to be to adapt it to the economy – a fact that is reflected M. Belfqih's reform programme, titled '10,000 Engineers for Morocco'.

That the reform will not have a deep impact on Morocco's higher education system has been confirmed again recently. A private 'Governance High School of Rabat' was created in 2008, after an agreement with 'Sciences PO Paris'. This was in response to strong local demands for higher business administration courses, which were much in demand among the small upper class. However, it proved to be easier to create new and external institutions than to reform the system from the inside.

Again in the winter of 2008, the World Bank provoked a strong reaction from government when a new and controversial report on Arab education titled *The Road not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, drew attention to the fact that the Moroccan economy was still suffering due to a weak education system, and that reforms were urgently needed. Like thirteen years before, special counsellor M. A. Belfqih was once again called to the rescue.

## Conclusion

During the colonial period, the French colonial power relegated the former North African élite to the position of middle-men between the colonial authorities and the indigenous population. With this purpose in mind, they set up a new education and training system – including such institutions as the Islamic

*colleges*—to develop a subaltern élite. The new young urban and educated élite (*'les évolués'*, as the French said) and the *'héritiers'*, however, refused this relegation. On the one hand, they tried, and obtained, the right to access the French University, and on the other hand, they built a long-term political movement, nationalism, to re-appropriate State power.

In Paris, the 'AEMNAF' (Muslim North African Students' Organisation in France) combined both approaches, from 1932 until the granting of independence. When this new, narrow, composite élite came to power in 1956 and in 1962, it had to recruit a lot of civil servants and Army officers to build the new State administrative apparatus. As the French had implanted a new selection process for the élite, schools, high schools and the University had become the keys to land a leadership position in administration, in government, or in a corporation. During this first period immediately after independence, i.e. during the 1960s and 1970s, social mobility became a reality in the region for those who were capable to take up this challenge.

However, after two decades, and due to the saturation of posts within the State apparatus, as well as thanks to the global economic crises, this period of opportunities was over. A new period began, marked by educational reforms, the process of Arabization, mass Higher Education, and graduate unemployment. The crises marking this period are cultural, social, and educational. The meritocratic school model was eclipsed, with the system being transformed into a dualist and closed one. In the 1990s, a large part of the graduates, especially those in the best Universities and aiming for the most prestigious careers, hoped to reproduce the fortunes of their parents, who had graduated and taken up key posts in different sectors in the 1970s. For the post-1990 graduates, however, the era of meritocracy was over.

Who really wants a democratic reform of élite education and class formation in North Africa today? And how can one reunify the higher education system, which, right now, looks like a caricature of the French one, but with more danger if we consider the political risks at stake? For three decades, the new educational policy has completely transformed the young generations. The cultural contexts they are living in, together with their intellectual and linguistic make-up, have provoked a complete change in mentalities, in worldviews, and in qualifications.

Today, North African graduates, up to the age of 45, while less francophone than their elders, and less fluent in any language, are nevertheless more connected with the rest of the world through the new technologies. Despite this, they experience feelings of fear and helplessness in front the world, a situation which tempts them to retreat into their Islamic culture. The only exception to this is a small, internationalized élite who have left the region: more than 2,000 former Moroccan students from the *'Grandes Écoles'* live in Paris, while thousands of Tunisian graduates live in the Western world.

In these persistent conditions, the challenge is crucial for North African élites and their Northern partners. Either they are capable of changing the ideological and practical substance of the educational policies, or they have to face a radical change in their societies, a permanent risk of Islamist subversion and an increasing gap with European societies.

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