

## FRENCH INFLUENCE ON NORTH AFRICAN EDUCATION 1880-1962: AN INTRODUCTION

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French domination in the Maghrib lasted 132 years in Algeria, 76 years in Tunisia, and 44 years in Morocco. In each of the three cases, that was long enough to leave obvious traces. There were, before and after France finally allowed the Algerians to achieve independence in 1962, an impressive number of Maghribi authors who wrote and continue to write in French, rather than in Arabic, which is the mother tongue of the majority. The various Berber dialects of North Africa are not really written languages, although various transcription systems have been developed, so the fact that no author writes in any Berber dialect is not too shocking. There are, of course, North African authors who write in Arabic. But the purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of French colonial education on the non-European population of North Africa from the end of the nineteenth century to the achievement of Algerian independence in 1962.

Obviously, the dominant education system in French colonial North Africa was French education. There were, of course, some indigenous schools that survived, even in Algeria where the imperial hand was heaviest of all. There were Qu'ranic schools on the primary level known as the msid, and on the secondary level, the madrasas. Except in Algeria, where the colonial government took over control of madrasas in order to assure itself a constant supply of loyal native administrators, msid and madrasas remained free of foreign interference. Tunisia and Morocco also had independent universities that remained free from direct French control. More modern free schools (free in the sense that they were not government schools) also developed in all three Maghribi countries during the period of French domination. Perhaps most amazing of all was the creation and development, in the 1930's, of the Algerian Ulama schools that refused a French content in their curriculum. There were also free schools organized by various Jewish groups, schools such as those of the Alliance Israelite. But all these exceptions aside, French colonial schools dominated education in all three Maghribi countries. This was certainly true during the first half of the twentieth century. And it was in French colonial schools that the Maghribi authors who write in French were educated.

During the nineteenth century, Algerians had generally refused to send their children to French colonial schools. In fact, French efforts to "civilize" Algerians during the century

met with such disastrous results that the central government finally turned the whole business over to local European settlers, the colons, in 1880. Colons cared little, if at all, about native education. Settlers were likely to think that educate a colonized person would simply create a potential trouble maker, a person who would use his French education to attack the French presence in the Maghrib. As a result, several decades were to pass before renewed efforts to educate colonial subjects would once more occupy the attention of French government officials in Algeria.

Algerian resistance to French education was based, in part at least, on public opinion among Arabs and Berbers. Muslim religion and culture, they could not comprehend the French insistence that state and church were somehow separated. This was certainly not the case in Islam. Hence, most were quite certain that French schools would proselytize their young Muslims. No doubt the same thoughts and fears affected Moroccans and Tunisians who, in the twentieth century, organized French schools in support of which they spent private funds. Colonial schools were free, an important consideration in lands where most people were poor.

Attitudes changed slowly, but after World War I the refusal of Algerian parents to send their children to colonial schools became a demand that places be made for their children in the same schools. Fear that Muslim youth would be converted to Christianity had been replaced by the realization that, as in France, as France was mistress of the Maghrib, colonial schools offered the best path to better jobs in the slight but developing modern sectors of the local economy. These schools also opened doors to official bureaucratic positions in the imperial administration. Finally, with a modicum of modern (i.e. French) education better jobs could be obtained in France where hundreds of thousands of Algerians had begun to go during World War I. In fact, it was the thousands of Algerians--joined by Tunisians and Moroccans--who molded the new attitude. They had crossed the Mediterranean Sea either as draftees in the French army to fight the Germans or as laborers who replaced drafted Frenchmen in factory lines. In France they learned new lessons about education and about the immediate dividends of a French education on the labor market in France and in the Maghrib. Since they were deeply attached to their home land, workers who migrated to France almost always went back home; when they did they came back with their new ideas. The original migrants were then joined by thousands of others after the war; the needs of post-war reconstruction kept French needs for labor at high levels, and North Africans who wanted work that was simply not available in the Maghrib were eager to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Keeping pace with the migration to France, and then back to the Maghrib, government officials were forced to react to the demands for Muslim access to French education.



At first, European settlers and their allies in the colonial administration resisted attempts to introduce educational reforms in favor of North Africans. Often the central government in Paris had neither the will nor the power to do much. Sporadic efforts, however, led to some improvements, and school enrollments of North African children in French colonial schools gradually grew. In Algeria, for example, the figures jumped from 33,000 Algerian primary school students in 1907, to 104,000 in 1938, and 307,100 in 1954. By 1954, however, there were some 2,072,000 children ages 5 to 14 in Algeria; all of these children should, by French law, have been in school. Having neglected native education between 1880 and the outbreak of World War I, French officials now faced an immense task. To catch up with population growth and correct past errors and failures, even admitting that Algerian subjects had helped bring about the situation themselves, would require fantastic investments in building schools and for the training of teachers. Therefore in 1944 on a 20 year plan that would provide one million places for Muslims in French primary schools in Algeria by 1964. This objective was drastically increased in 1958 when the goal became 2.5 million by 1966. The target dates were too late, since the revolution broke out in 1954 and Algeria achieved independence in 1962. But one must also notice that the staffs of French schools taught more Algerians between 1958 and 1962 than they had between 1830 and 1958.

Absolute school enrollment figures are frightening by themselves, but not as terrifying as the attitudes that led to these educational figures. Throughout French North Africa, practically all the children of European settlers got a primary education; these same children were also much more likely to get into high schools and eventually into universities. But the higher the educational level, the lower the percentage of North Africans in the total student population. The various French claims about their "civilizing mission," about their wish to assimilate North Africans into the body politic of France, or at least to follow associationist policies that would make Muslims more like the French, all sound hollow in retrospect. It is also clear that North Africans have done much more for themselves than the French ever seemed willing to do. In Tunisia, for example, school enrollment at the primary level jumped from 200,000 in 1956, the year independence was achieved, to 735,000 in 1966. Even the fantastic advances achieved by the French during the last several years of French imperial control in Algeria seem poor: these advances were achieved as counterinsurgency efforts and were not based on the conviction that Algerian children deserved the same treatment as the offspring of European settlers.

One need not use hindsight to make such judgements. Thoughtful Europeans observed and described the sad conditions and attitudes long before the outbreak of revolution in 1954.

Albert Camus most effectively described the misery of Algerians and kept calling on his fellow European settlers to help Algerians rise out of their misery. But at the same time, Camus himself never suggested that, for historical reasons, it was these same Europeans who should bear the burden of guilt. It was their very presence, their exploitation of the dominated Algerians that explained the latter's poor economic situation. But this the French could not admit. Even Camus, who described the two worlds of Algeria more effectively perhaps than any other European, could not see that Europeans were relatively well off because they exploited Algerians. The realities of the dominant/dominated relationship between European settlers and Maghribi natives had to be described by someone else, by the French educated Tunisian, Albert Memmi. He naturally attacked liberals such as Camus who, although they were appalled by the plight of the Muslims, could not see to the root causes. In any case, only a few of the colons were liberals, and even they were sometimes racists.

If education is a means of gaining economic upward mobility then most colons would oppose educational reforms in favor of Maghribians. The history of legislation in French North Africa and most particularly the history of the application of reform legislation in favor of the Muslims, is quite clear on this. Europeans were dominant, they controlled a system that clearly favored them, and they used the system to keep the North Africans in their place. It is therefore not surprising that, as late as 1954, only one in nearly six high school students in Algeria was non-European. At the university level, things were even more discriminatory as only one in ten students was Algerian. Adding to that number those Muslim students who pursued their university studies in France does not improve the picture by much. Indeed, what is most surprising is that so many first rate artists who are North Africans but write in French managed to get through the system and learn enough while doing so to emerge as real intellectual elites.



### SUGGESTED READINGS

Fanny Colonna. Instituteurs algeriens: 1883-1939. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques. 1975.

Abdelkader Djeghloul. Elements d'histoire culturelle algerienne. Algiers: Entreprise Nationale du Livre, 1984.

Mohamed Cherif Sahli. Decoloniser l'histoire. Paris: Maspero, 1965.

Aboul-Kassem Saadallah. La Montee du nationalisme en Algerie. 2nd. ed. Algiers: Entreprise Nationale du Livre, 1985.

Ali Merad. Le Reformisme musulman en Algerie, 1925 a 1940. Paris: Mouton, 1967.

Yvonne Turin. Affrontements culturels dans l'Algerie coloniale: ecoles, medecines, religion: 1830-1880. Paris: Maspero, 1971.

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Raymond F. Betts. Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory: 1890-1914. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.

Elbaki Hermassi. Leadership and National Development in North Africa. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1972.

Marnia Lazreg. The Emergence of Class in Algeria: A study of Colonialism and Socio-Political Change. Boulder (Colorado): Westview Press, 1976.

John D. Ruedy. Land Policy in Colonial Algeria: The Origins of the Rural Public Domain. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

Finally, I have written a few articles or chapters in books that are directly relevant. See, for example:

Alf Andrew Heggoy. "Colonial Education in Algeria: Assimilation and Reaction." In Gail P. Kelly and Philip G. Altbach., Ed., Education and the Colonial Experience. 2nd. rev. ed. New Brunswick (USA) and London: Transaction Books, 1984, 97-116.

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and Paul J. Zingg. "French Education in Revolutionary North Africa." International Journal of Middle East Studies, 7 (1976), 571-578.