



AMERICAN
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MOROCCO GOES BACK TO SCHOOL

A Letter from Charles F. Gallagher

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Rabat
September 15, 1958

In these pleasantly warm days of mid-September, known here as ar rabī' al ākhar, the second spring, nearly 700,000 students, aged five to twenty-five, have been getting ready to enter or return to some form of educational institution in Morocco, from the kindergarten year of the state primary schools to the new Moroccan University at Rabat, with its gleaming white University City nestling between groves of pine and eucalyptus trees.

The figure is only some ten per cent greater than last year's attendance, but the over-all total does not accurately reflect the strain being put on educational facilities by the greatly increased number of pupils, principally in the lower grades of the primary schools. A better view of the almost unbelievable progress in education in this country can be had by noting that in 1953 there were 190,000 Moroccan Muslims in educational establishments. The number has tripled in five years. Under these circumstances it is natural that the problems of education--the budgetary burdens, training of teachers, new school construction, language instruction--have become a major preoccupation to a government which realizes that the future of this appallingly under-educated country (there are about 1,800,000 Moroccans who are of school age and could be under instruction) will be decided by the quality as well as the quantity of public instruction available in the next decade.

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PHILLIPS TALBOT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the race for modern learning, which has become one of the background imperatives to most under-developed countries in recent years, Morocco was left at the post for almost the entire first half of the twentieth century. It is difficult to know just how far back in history to go to assess the blame, but both French governmental policy toward education of Moroccans during the protectorate and Moroccan society as a whole must share responsibility. Certainly no apologies can be made for the deliberate soft-pedaling of education by French authorities from 1912 until the end of World War II; Moroccan nationalists are basically right when they complain about the "heavy heritage of the occupation." But no one can deny that so-called education in pre-colonial Morocco, at the end of the nineteenth century, was engulfed in a decadent stagnation which expressed itself in the rote learning of theological dogma at a few religious colleges in Fez, decorated with the study of Arabic grammar and rhetoric and the remnants of medieval versions of the few sciences, such as astronomy, which were essential to the practice of religion. These medersas of Fez in 1900 were considerably behind their own standards of 1300, and although French specialists of the beaux-arts restored their crumbling architectural glories for the benefit of admiring tourists, no wave of internal reform came along to inject life into their souls. The msids, for young children, were far from primary schools; in them often ill-equipped instructors, or the village fqih, caused the Qur'an to be read aloud and partly memorized, while sometimes teaching the rudiments of counting. This progressive sclerosis of its mental faculties had gone on for over three centuries in Morocco, apace with its retreat into hostile isolation and an internal political anarchy which ended with the collapse of the state and the setting-up of a foreign protectorate over the country in 1912.

The relation between education and political control was not forgotten by the most alert elements among the protectors and the protégés. It was apparent to many protectorate authorities that a modern, liberal,

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French education would be the root of new evils, and they did their best to discourage it. As late as 1938, more than a quarter of a century after the arrival of the presence française, the budget for the instruction of six million Moroccans was half that allotted to 300,000 Europeans. And, on the other side of the fence, the first manifestoes of the Istiqlal Party in the early forties decried the lack of education, the insignificant place given to the national culture in what education there was, and the attempt to gallicize the country through the use of French as the sole language of instruction.

It was not until 1944 that the new currents stimulated by the war forced a change upon the system in Morocco. In that year the thirty hours of weekly schooling were divided, for the 33,000 pupils in the Muslim primary schools, into twenty hours of French and ten of Arabic. Even this concession was not fully carried out. In the rural areas, considered "Berber" by administrative fiat, French remained the only language used. Also in 1944 for the first time Muslims were allowed to enter the European schools (much superior, and to which Moroccan Jews had long been admitted). Previously they had needed the assent of the political control authorities, who investigated the tendencies and thoughts of their families to see if their "attitude was correct."

Although little can be said for this "parsimonious and discriminatory system" as the Istiqlal called it, the faults were not entirely on the French side. There was no overwhelming rush of the Moroccan masses to school in those years, in part because the new system of the foreigners was kāfir, impure in the religious sense, and likely to wean the child away from the righteousness of Islam. Also the inertia of past centuries had not yet given way to the new nationalist spirit. Very few native teachers were competent in Arabic, and between the lack of instructors and the scarcity of pupils, the vicious circle continued with slight progress. Thus, after forty years, the protectorate had put only 190,000 Muslims into primary schools, and no more than 2,000 into secondary schools as far as the baccalaureate (approximately the equivalent of the first or second year of college).

Figures revealing the educational void in Morocco under the protectorate are shocking in their detail. In an unsigned article in Politique Etrangere, 1955, No. 4, it was reported that: "The total number of those /Moroccan Muslims/ who passed the complete baccalaureate from the beginning of the protectorate is 530, the examinations of October, 1954, included. (There were 625 Moroccan Jews and 7,353 French of Morocco.) Qualitatively the French represent 95% of the higher echelon personnel of the country as the following figures testify: 875 French doctors and 36 Moroccans (19 Muslims and 17 Jews); 180 French dentists and 5 Moroccans (2 Muslims and 3 Jews); 350 French lawyers and 48 Moroccans (27 Muslims and 21 Jews)...Among

5,500 higher functionaries of the neo-Sherifian i.e., modern central⁷ administrations there are 165 Moroccans."

And in 1954, the last full year under the old protectorate system, there was not much improvement: 575 French were received in the second part of the baccalaureate as against 112 Moroccans (55 Muslims and 57 Jews). Perhaps the most interesting sidelight of these figures is the incidence of Jewish participation in education. Nothing should be taken away from the admirable efforts of the Alliance Israelite, which had functioned in some cities of Morocco since the 1860's, but the systematic discrimination of the protectorate against Muslims and in favor of Jews cannot be denied.

Then, early in 1956, came independence. And that changed the whole problem by giving a new, patriotic reason for going to school, not only for children but for adult men and women who were swept up in the rush to attend the first classes in literacy and the night schools which gave a basic education combining the abc's with lectures on hygiene, political activity, civics and morality. For the rest of the year the flame burnt bright but it was finally dampened by the improvised quality of the program, by the impossibility of finding enough volunteer teachers to continue the experiment, and by the realization of many neophytes that there are no miraculous shortcuts in adult education. And finally the government, faced with multiple educational problems and insufficient human resources, gave the death blow to the program by deciding to sacrifice the older generation and concentrate on the youth of the nation.

Number of Students Enrolled in Primary Schools as of November 10 of year indicated			
	1953	1956	1957
Moroccan			
Muslim	180,719	307,631	481,000
Jewish	31,023	29,310	30,861
European	59,458	64,126	49,000

To meet these new conditions, the Moroccan government, hard pressed for funds in its first year and compelled to reduce expenditures in most fields, increased the education budget by three billion francs--20 per cent more than was allotted in the 1956 budget. But this far from covered the urgent needs and it

was necessary to solicit voluntary public support.¹

The response was great. Cooperative efforts, pushed by the political parties, built many schools in the countryside and among the tribes primitive buildings made with walls of adobe clay sufficed (a few rooms around a central courtyard, a blackboard and a picture of the King to inspire). Between the end of 1955 and May 1957 more than 1,500 new classes were begun and another 1,000 were made ready for the return to school in the fall of 1957. The hunger of Moroccans to learn was the most striking phenomenon. It was a complete contrast with their indifference toward the special "added attractions" (distribution of food and clothing to the children and gifts of sugar and tea to the parents) necessary to stimulate interest in the protectorate schools.

Muhammad V was certainly an instrumental factor in supporting and shaping this rage to learn. Going about the country writing the letter alif on rural blackboards right after independence he emphasized everywhere the need for schooling and literacy. And, partly owing to the example of his own emancipated daughters, for the first time substantial numbers of young girls were sent to school by families other than the higher bourgeoisie of the large cities.

When schools opened in the fall of 1957 with 150,000 new pupils in them--compared to an average annual increase of about 25,000 under the protectorate--a certain feeling of satisfaction was felt. The number of children reaching school age each year in Morocco is in the neighborhood of 150,000; if only the pace could be maintained at this rate, the goal of putting every child into elementary school theoretically could be attained. But as reports drifted in during the first months of the school year, it was clear that the school system had been overstrained to the breaking point. It had come up against formidable problems of overcrowding, with as many as 110 children in some classes, difficulties of arabization of teaching materials and the lack of instructors qualified to teach in Arabic. All of these helped to undermine seriously the quality of the instruction and led the Ministry of Education to begin re-examining the fundamentals of education in Morocco.

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¹ The budget for education was in 1955 Frs. 11,700,000,000 (\$33,400,000); in 1956 Frs. 15,700,000,000 (\$44,800,000); and in 1957 Frs. 18,700,000,000 (\$53,400,000) out of a total budget of some Frs. 110,000,000,000 (\$314,000,000). Expenses for education amounted thus to about 17% of the total budget expenses.

Arabization of the modern, technical aspects of Moroccan culture had long been a foremost demand of nationalist leaders in the years of the protectorate. (In 1944 the Istiqlal wanted 25 hours of Arabic instruction and 5 hours of French.) But they finally have come to realize that, like its neighbors Algeria, and to a lesser extent Tunisia, this country, with a dual society and a dual economy, has a split intellectual personality which does not permit facile solutions to its problems. Although many Moroccans will deny it, it is almost safe to say that there is no national language--in the sense of one vehicle of spoken and written communication understood by people on all levels and in all areas. Several languages vie with each other--the modern Arabic on the radio, in newspapers and government documents; the Moroccan dialect; French as a technical and commercial language and as the tongue in which most of the Moroccan elite are at home; and Berber (a kind of local patois, something like Gaelic in Ireland), spoken but not written by from 30-40% of the population. There is little doubt but that Morocco will finally accept a modern "international" kind of Arabic, already used through the Middle East, but it will take time. And to the new government, intent on forming a truly "Arab" country, the concept of a national culture in the national language was a point on which they could make no concessions, all the more because of the precarious position which good Arabic held in Morocco. There were soon serious difficulties.

The first of these was whether Moroccan Arabic was the national language. It is the one of all the dialects of Arabic most remote from classical sources, as different from the Arabic of the Levant as Portuguese is from Italian. Middle Easterners, particularly those who have never heard Moroccan Arabic spoken, contest this, but I have seen far too many of them completely baffled by conversations in the Moroccan dialect to accept their glib assurances that "Arabic is one language." If mutual intelligibility is the test, Arabic is not "one language."

Thus the Arabic used as a language of instruction and written in textbooks is not the tongue heard by the child at home or in the streets. The French, under the protectorate, had encouraged some teaching with textbooks using the dialect, in an attempt to keep North Africa separate from the rest of the Arab world. Their efforts were not successful; the lack of terminology in the dialect hindered teaching, and they were, in any case, tarred with the brush of colonialism. For Moroccans, who have a great respect for proper Arabic in spite of their ignorance of it, nothing but the real thing would do. (Moroccans are probably the only Arabic-speaking people who do not tell one that the Arabic used in their country is the best Arabic.)

It was not simply a matter of the pupils' understanding. It was also a question of finding enough teachers who were linguistically or professionally qualified. Even in pro-

tectorate times, paradoxically, French teachers who were Arabic scholars had to be recruited to teach in Arabic, and many of these were now leaving.

Haphazard recruitment of local Moroccans began on a large scale in 1956, and poor results were inevitable. The new monitor (munāẓir) was not graced with the title of schoolteacher (muderris), was usually mediocre in reading and writing and not capable of much more than elementary arithmetic. One recent critique of education in the newspaper Al 'Alam complained of one monitor who could not distinguish between 24,000 and 24,000,000, when asked by a student. Jokes about the quality of the monitors are legion. But it should be remembered that they were selected from those who had finished the third year of secondary school, i.e., the ninth grade of an American school, after which they were theoretically given nine months' additional pedagogical training, often being taught by instructors whose own foundations were none too secure. In practice the new recruits had only five months' supplementary teacher training, so that by doubling up six hundred of them could be turned out per year instead of three hundred.

This much can be said for the monitor, however: despite the deficiencies of his intellectual background, he has a place in the school system, particularly in the back country (and he is usually required to teach in his own province). There his knowledge of local conditions and customs, his interest in the daily lives of his pupils and his ability to understand them, make him uniquely useful in a society which is trying to become a homogeneous nation at the same time that it educates itself.

The danger remains, though, that too many instructors of this kind will inevitably bring down the level of the entire educational framework and perpetuate their own weaknesses among the younger generation in their hands.

The Ministry of Education came to this conclusion at the end of the 1957-58 school year, after it saw the results of the year's final examinations. For example, the percentage of students who passed the C.E.P. (the Certificat d'Etudes Primaires), the examination given at the end of primary school studies, was:

1952	77.80%
1956	55.00%
1957	53.80%
1958	50.70%

and this, in spite of the fact that, according to one Ministry official, the examination in recent years has been made as easy as possible. It was suggested that in an examination of the difficulty of the 1952 C.E.P. only about 20% of this year's crop would have passed.

The growing dissatisfaction had already resulted in a shift of education ministers when the cabinet was reshuffled in May this year. Mohammed Al Fassi, incumbent in the post since the first government was established late in 1955, had been widely criticized for his overtraditional approach and his insistence on rapid arabization. He was replaced by Hajj Omar Abdejelil, considered by many observers to be one of the most outstanding and forward-looking figures in Moroccan public life.

The accession of the new minister galvanized the Ministry of Education, and after studying the results of the 1957-58 session through the summer, Abdejelil took a bold initiative this month. Just before the return to school in October, he announced a series of reforms designed to put quality clearly before quantity. The main points of his program were:

- 1) A return to the use of French as the language of instruction in mathematics and the sciences.

- 2) An increase in the number of years of primary school from five to six, the first year being a preparatory class taught entirely in Arabic. From the first regular year of primary school, French is restored to 15 hours per week, and Arabic, in which history, geography and social subjects are taught, is also allotted fifteen hours a week.

- 3) A limitation of admittance for new students. Only 60,000 (instead of last year's 150,000) will be taken in--the number that can be handled adequately by the teaching staff with its projected enlargements. Classes will be limited to 50 students, but no students now enrolled will be turned out. It is not clear how this will be done, and rumors spreading through the country in past weeks that students who had no place to sit (incredibly, some students stood all year for their classes) would be refused this year, had to be denied by the Ministry. It has also been promised that as soon as a new batch of monitors is available, more students will be admitted on a continuing basis after the term begins.

- 4) A further accelerated program to form teachers: 2,000 additional are to be turned out this year, but on a more intensive and thorough basis; also there will be continued training after school hours for a good number of beginning teachers.

- 5) A request for increased help from the French Ministry of National Education in teachers and training materials.

It can be imagined that this program was not an easy one to get accepted. The Minister, by persuasive arguing, had

to convince the Royal Commission on Education, which has its share of tradition-bound members who believe in arabization as almost a divine necessity. The reforms also strike at the principle of universal education, which the authorities were reluctant to deny, and impose new hardships on pupils and instructors. With the extension of the primary school to six years, all students in the first and second year, having learned little or nothing of mathematics in Arabic last year, will have to repeat the year, this time doing their deux et deux font quatre in French. Nevertheless the argument that it was "better to sacrifice one year than to let the children of the country go on in ignorance" finally won the day.

The problem of weeding out inefficient teachers is a delicate one. There will be a surplus of Arabic-language teachers particularly in mathematics and science. (The word "science", used by the Ministry, refers to something like the elementary natural science courses in America, i.e., nature study, collecting, and a general getting acquainted with the physical world.) As a result of the switch-over to French about 2,000 teachers will be out of jobs in the primary schools. Of these the best 400 will be used in the secondary schools as instructors of Arabic. The other 1,600 will be given an examination early in October, consisting of a composition in Arabic and a "verification" in mathematics. The worst of the lot will be quite brutally fired. There are plans to work the rest into the new kindergarten year in which their social talents will be more necessary than their intellectual achievements.

Morocco has thus opted for bilingualism from the beginning of its educational system--something that will be of far-reaching consequence to the country as a whole. It has taken steps to insure a higher quality of instruction by limiting the number of students who can attend school and upping the number and the quality of the teachers. These moves should point the way to a really adequate educational system, in place of the incoherence which has prevailed for the last two years.

A description of the Moroccan educational system would be incomplete if no note were taken of a unique form of cultural cooperation which provides massive outside help to education here. This is the existence of a parallel, but almost completely independent educational system which operates in this country (as in Tunisia), the Mission Culturelle Française.

The Mission Culturelle Française was originally created to serve two purposes. The most important was to respond to the unusual needs of the nearly 400,000 Europeans of Morocco (overwhelmingly French) who feared that their children would no longer have the kind of education they had been receiving under the protectorate--a completely French education with accreditation for entry into higher institutions of learning in France. It was established as part of the cultural convention signed

between France and Morocco in October, 1957. (The first school year following independence had convinced many European residents here that their fears about the thoroughness of the new Moroccan system were well-founded.) Under the terms of the convention, the Mission Culturelle had the right to open schools of its own, and it leased four lycées and two colleges on the secondary level and a number of primary schools. These were designed primarily for the Europeans, but they were open without segregation to all students. In practice, by means of requiring a personal interview with the parents to assure the cultural level of the student's home, a kind of segregation of the elite can be practiced.

The establishments of the Mission do serve in part as elite schools. All courses of instruction are in French (except for emphasis on Arabic as a foreign language) and it is generally admitted that the level of instruction in Mission schools is much higher than in most state schools. (In commenting on schooling under the protectorate, it should be mentioned that it was only political expediency which dictated the policy of limited education for Moroccans. Whenever the protectorate was pressured into educational activity, the usual top-grade French instruction was provided, and that is as excellent and as exacting as any in the world.) Accordingly the tendency exists among many upper-class Moroccan families to send their children to the Mission schools rather than to take a chance on the local state school which may be good, indifferent or appallingly bad.²

In addition the Mission deals with French teaching activities in Morocco, either through direct control of its own teachers or through liaison with the Ministry of Education for those French who have signed contracts with the Moroccan Government. Mission personnel total nearly 1,600, and the Ministry employs 3,247 French teachers in Moroccan primary schools and 852 in the secondary. About 500 more French teachers are arriving in Morocco at the end of this month to try to fill the pressing teaching gap. All in all there will be over 6,000 French teachers here for the 1958-59 school year, out of a total of 12,000. By this figure one can see the size of the role that France will continue to play culturally in this country for some time to come.

Since independence the domain of education has been the most fruitful field of Franco-Moroccan cooperation. Often during the days of political troubles during the protectorate the French would complain about the North African resistance to their civilization. They were sincerely hurt by what they considered the Arab refusal to take part in the humanistic enlightenment of French culture. But to most North Africans the French

² Of the 50,000 students attending Mission schools this year (estimated) 30,000 will be Europeans and 20,000 Moroccans.

presence was symbolized by the soldier and the political officer. Now that the troops are evacuating Morocco by stages that image may change. Last year when visiting the oasis of Rissani in the arid far south of Morocco, the King urged a classroom of pupils to "not only respect but love their French schoolmistress." Incongruous as it may sometimes seem to hear Molière and Victor Hugo being read aloud in a tawdry, date-palm grove on the edge of the Sahara, it is the sign of a presence française of which the French can be justifiably proud.

Charles F Gallagher