One Step Forward, Two Steps Back:
Education in Morocco in the Late 1960s and Today

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Abstract: The article compares education in Morocco today with the situation encountered during my fieldwork in the schools of Sefrou fifty years ago. The article concludes that the basic challenges then are still being faced today. Government responses to the challenges of multi-lingual education, overcrowding, staying back, and teacher training and recruitment are, as they were decades ago, often inconsistent and inadequate. And even though much progress has been made on the literacy front and the achievement of universal primary education, these achievements have not been enough to stem the tide of a host of new challenges, beginning with sheer demographics (a large youth population and an overall population 2.5 times what it was in the late 1960s), the lowering of respect for teaching as a profession, the issues of job security and equitable pay for teachers, and finally the role of internet and social media in fostering an increasingly universal culture of lower student attention spans, expectations of education as a consumer good, etc. The article suggests that as a partial response to these problems, more and more Moroccans are "voting with their feet" by taking refuge in private education, a phenomenon attested to by the rise in the number of private schools to over 20% of all schools in the country.

Keywords: Education, Education Policy, Education & Culture, Development, Literacy, Language Policy, Social Mobility, Science Education.

The title of this paper is a sad reflection on the position of many of the forty-seven countries ranked by the World Bank as "lower-middle-income economies," of which Morocco is one.[1] The World Bank's latest country classification lists a total of 218 countries and territories, of which 78 fall into two categories: lower-middle-income and low-income. They all have different histories and characteristics (how does one compare Haiti to Afghanistan or Nepal to Ghana?) but they share one thing: the challenge of moving from being what we used to call "underdeveloped" to "developed." Essentially that means "catching up" to the upper-middle and high-income economies. Yet in the three-quarters of a century since the world began a concerted effort to address "underdevelopment," surprisingly few have been able to do this (e.g., the four famous newly industrialized "Asian Tigers," Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) along with China, while only a handful are currently on the verge of a similar jump in status (e.g.,

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1. World Bank, https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups. n.d., Accessed August 14, 2019.

Indonesia, Vietnam, maybe the Philippines, perhaps Mongolia). For the majority of the others, though, a pattern of one step forward, two steps back (or at best one step back) seems increasingly evident. More precisely, within many countries, while there is advancement in key parameters (e.g., positive economic growth rates) the one step forward two steps back pattern shows up in the daily life of ordinary people – a general rise in inequality with its attendant chronic poverty, unemployment, insalubrious housing, discontent, shoddy educational attainment and the like. In Morocco this pattern is more evident in the educational arena than perhaps in any other. In part the phenomenon is a function of the fact that the development project is a much longer and more convoluted process than has usually been thought. But it is also a function of corruption and rent-seeking, and perhaps more important, the difference in speed between what policy makers and government can do to solve problems (when they are so inclined) and the speed and force of externalities that local and national governance can do little to mitigate: global trends in trade, climate change, and broad attitudinal shifts (driven by swift changes in technology and communication as well as worldwide urbanization) towards individualism, higher expectations, and a general thinning of traditional local cultures.

Had one been immersed in Morocco's educational system fifty years ago, as I was, it would have been reasonable to assume that the educational problems of the then newly independent nation would steadily be overcome. That optimism would have turned out to be misplaced, for, with a few exceptions, the problems identified then are present today; indeed, they appear to be exacerbated. This paper explores key unresolved educational problems, and speculates on the factors that have not only stalled progress but created the one step forward, two steps back phenomenon.

Between 1964 and 1966 I was an American Peace Corps English teacher, first at a traditional Islamic college (the Yussufia) in Marrakech and then for one year at the Lycée Moulay Idriss in Fes, arguably the most elite high school in the country at the time. Then, between 1969 and 1971 I did anthropological fieldwork in the primary and secondary school systems of the town of Sefrou, looking at the schools' role in culture change. In those years Morocco (and in particular its education system) was struggling, as were many new nations, with the challenges of modernization, at the heart of which were fundamental issues of identity and rights. The French-language-oriented system (*lettres modernes*) was in tension with the Arabic oriented system (*lettres originelles*) and access to higher education as well as government jobs. There was also a strong sense that one had to meet a higher more modern standard; people wanted "equal

access to high level civil service positions and for equivalent status with the diplomas issued by modern Muslim and French schools."[2] These tensions were part of the impetus for a series of strikes in the early 1960s as well as major nationwide riots in the spring of 1965 which I witnessed in Marrakech. French (and to some extent access to English) were viewed as pathways to modernization (if not synonymous with it), while Arabic was viewed both as a path to "Moroccanizing" the country after the colonial period which ended in 1956, and for some even as a symbol of backwardness.[3] The symbolism was strongly reinforced in the first government language policies after Independence – Arabic was to be the focus in the 1st and 2nd year of primary school while French was the language of instruction in math and science in both the primary and secondary schools (full Arabization of the public school curricula did not take place until 1989, thirty-three years after independence).

Fifty years later Morocco has succeeded in becoming in many ways a "modern" and for some, a booming, country with impressive infrastructure, a diversified economy, and an outward looking cadre of educated and talented people (many of whom live and work in a Trans-Atlantic diaspora). In the 1960s for Morocco as for most of the new nations the challenge of development posed many questions: Would its future economy emphasize agriculture and if so, how should it increase its irrigation zones as well as pasturage for animals? How much ought it to invest in raw material exploitation, and how much in creating a value-added economy? Ports, airports, railways, roads all needed to be built and/or improved. Should Morocco become a major tourist destination, and if so, what kind of tourist should it attract, and to where? Looking back for example at the Government's five-year plan for 1968-1972 one could feel nostalgic for a time when all such questions seemed to have rational answers – they were a matter of planning. The plan for those five years covered twenty-eight different sectors from Irrigation Zones to Youth and Sports, and laid out in detail what was to be done, and how much it would cost. In tourism development for example, 29,883 beds were to be added, 37% in four and five-star hotels and the rest in one, two and three-star establishments.[4] And in fact, much was accomplished in a great many areas (e.g., infrastructure, rural electrification, tourism, industry and mining).

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2. Douglas E. Ashford, *Political Change in Morocco* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1961), 389.

3. One of my informants in 1970 was a Moroccan man in his 50s who talked often about his high-quality technical education under the French in the 1930s. He ran an electronics repair shop, an auto repair shop and a "scientifically run" poultry farm. He refused to speak Arabic unless he had to.

4. Premier Ministre, *Plan Quinquennal 1968-1972*. Ministère des Affaires Economiques au Plan et de La Formation des Cadres. Premier Ministre, Royaume du Maroc 1968.

Yet almost all the problems the country's educational system faces today were present then, but without the current pressures of Morocco being on the one hand part of a globalized internet and social-media-connected world, with myriad outside influences not the least of which is the daily arrival of thousands of foreign tourists, and on the other, being still a developing nation with its youth bulge, urban in-migration, and high unemployment. This duality is reflected in the fact that while Morocco ranks relatively high in such broad statistics as GDP per capita, or in transportation infrastructure, it ranks unusually low in other areas such as unemployment, where one ranking puts it at number 143 in the world.[5] And in every sphere, including culture, the accelerated pace of change these days makes the 1960s and early 1970s look like a time when a slow and patient management of change was possible.

Back then, the task for Morocco's education system was to get children into school, to build schools, train teachers, enlarge the secondary school system and to create almost from scratch a university system. As sociologist Rahma Bourqia has put it, this was a time of Marocanization and massification.[6] Practical challenges were the ones on people's minds, and budgetary allocations were relatively generous: The 1968-1972 five-year plan called for 236.5 million dirhams (about $47 million USD at the time) for education, with 53% of it aimed at the secondary level.[7] This was one and half times greater than the budget for port construction or the budget for roads. Classrooms, books, blackboards, chalk, desks, and of course well-trained teachers were to be provided. But there were more problematic challenges as well: if rural kids were to go on to secondary school how would they be housed in the new collèges and lycées in the towns? How would rural Berber speaking kids be integrated into Arabic, not to mention French? To meet these challenges was a matter of political will, and to some extent harnessing the help of the international donor community (the World Bank put up the funds to build thirteen rural high schools in the late 1960s, one of which was the Lycée Sidi Lahcen Al Youssi in Sefrou, which opened a year before my arrival). More and more families made efforts to send their children to school as they came to understand schooling as a key to a secure future (with the common expectation of a government job). Soon, of course, other practical problems emerged, among them over-crowded class rooms, a deterioration in the quality of teaching, the limitations of rigid curricula

5. CIA, "Africa: Morocco," https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_mo.htmln.
6. Rahma Bourqia, *Penser l'école, penser la société, réflexions sociologiques sur l'éducation au Maroc* (Casablanca: La Croisée des Chemins, 2017).
7. Premier Ministre, *Plan Quinquennal 1968-1972*, 1968.

handed down from Rabat, and especially the challenge of managing the flow of students from one grade and cycle to another through unofficial "staying back" (*redoublement*) quotas.

A second layer of problems was essentially about access: who gets to go to school and to which ones; how do they/should they compete for places; how to attract rural kids to urban schools and not have them stay in the cities; who gets to go on to secondary and tertiary education.

A third layer of problems touched Moroccan social structure, history, and culture. The massive educational task raised fundamental issues of identity, not just for individuals but for the country as a whole. As an emerging independent nation, just a decade or so from independence was Morocco going to become a Modern Islamic nation, a secular modern nation? With which wider world would it transact its future? Europe (Spain and France in particular), its North African neighbors Algeria and Tunisia; its Middle Eastern cousins in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, its Sub-Saharan brothers in Mauritania and West Africa, and/or even distant North America? Would it need more French speakers, more people fluent with and conversant with modern literary Arabic; ought it to begin to focus on English as well? And how would its large Berberophone population fit into these language and identity conundrums, since logically Berber speakers would first need to be fluent in formal Arabic before beginning to learn French. As more and more girls went to co-educational public schools, how would traditional Moroccan Muslim concerns about the female gender; dress, modesty, adolescent sexuality, be addressed.[8] Would science and technology (what we today call STEM) be an elite track, or ought everyone be exposed to these subject areas? A 1970 article in the magazine *Lamalif* discussed a study by Moroccan philosopher Mohamed Lahbabi of what Morocco would look like 10 years in the future, in 1980. His view was rather pessimistic *unless* Morocco were to embrace science and technology:

> "Ce tableau a toutes les raisons de faire peur, si, comme le souligne l'auteur, la voie actuelle est poursuivie, car les problèmes déjà épineux et dramatiques aujourd'hui, se seront, n'étant pas résolus dans leurs fondements, évidemment multipliés et aggravés (…) la solution ne fait aucun doute: appuyée sur la révolution technique et scientifique qui a fait avancer le monde à pas de géants depuis un demi-siècle (…)."[9]

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8. When I taught English to a class of fourteen-year-old girls in Marrakech in 1964, they all wore veils and one of my challenges was being able to tell who was answering my questions and to correct pronunciation when I could not see the mouth of the person speaking.

9. Zakya Daoud, "les années 80 de notre jeunesse de Mohamed Lahbabi," *Lamalif,* 42, Octobre (1970): 7-13.

Were the humanities and the social sciences to be luxuries that a developing country could only think about at some vague later date, or something one could afford to do in the present?

While such questions were debated, the immediate challenge was that of literacy, linked obviously to getting more children into school. In 1963 11% of Morocco's population was literate (among women and girls the figure was 4%, and in rural areas 7%). In Sefrou, the 1960 census showed that 37.9% of Muslim males were literate, and 14% of Muslim females.[10] In 1953, in the last years of the French Protectorate there were only 6,000 Moroccan children in modern primary school (as opposed to the traditional *Qu'ranic M'sid* system or the Jewish schools), and 2,700 at the secondary level. In 1958, two years after Independence, out of a population of roughly 10 million there were 570,000 children in primary schools and about 50,000 in secondary.[11] In the 1960-1964 Five Year Plan, the government called for the construction of 1200 new classrooms per year and by 1963, the year education became compulsory for children age 6-13, one million three hundred thousand children were enrolled in primary school, 15% of whom were girls.[12] Morocco was beginning to catch up, and while students, teachers, and parents were already voicing doubts, worries, and even some cynicism about the system, in 1969-70 during my time in Sefrou, the general feeling was one of optimism, expectations were high, and schooling was taken seriously by all – it was the "golden road to modernity" to borrow a phrase from anthropologist Manning Nash.

Every kind of feeling and opinion seemed to be galvanized by the presence of a new school, to the extent that schooling seemed to bear an increasingly heavy load of expectations that went beyond the practical or philosophical benefits of education. Before television, before social media, the school provided a mental screen on to which one could project one's imaginary future. During the course of my research in three Sefrou schools (the Habbouna Primary school, Collège Moulay Ali Cherif and Lycée Sidi Lahcen el Youssi), I sat in on many classes in all three schools, interviewed (and surveyed) students, parents, administrators and teachers as well as personnel in the national educational establishment. From my observations in classrooms (where I often had to insist on sitting in the back of the classroom since I wanted to observe, not participate) I was also struck by how much school seemed exciting and fun to both students and teachers, even though the

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10. Geertz, Geertz H. and Rosen 1979, 473.
11. Ashford, *Political Change in Morocco*, 389.
12. Mark I. Cohen and Lorna Hahn, *Morocco, Old Land, New Nation* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1966), 196.

pedagogical methods, as was the case pretty much everywhere, emphasized repetition and rote memory. But the kids did not report being bored; instead for them just being in school conveyed newness and possibility, and for many the fact that one was exposed to a different language (French) seemed to be a means to borrow a higher status. And students at all levels clearly enjoyed toying with language, mixing French and Arabic in their speech. For many of the kids, and for many of the parents, school was a stage on to which one could create and act out one's own script. Especially for the children of rural origin, the school was an equalizer, a chance to overcome the self-image of the country bumpkin (Fr: *un plouc*).

In 1969 a team of ten researchers surveyed 296 young males between the ages of 14 and 18 in four rural villages (defined as having less than 2000 population) in four provinces, Beni-Mellal, Kenitra, Marrakech and Taza.[13] The first concern voiced by the respondents was that of proximity – how close was the nearest primary school, and then how close was the nearest collège, and second, a concern that the system be open to all, rich and poor. Many expressed the view that school provided a path to the city. But it was also a path to something else. Schooling was not seen so much as a road to riches; a guarantee of a better material future, but more as a means of acquiring "culture" and respect; to be "better than a donkey," as one young man put it. With that respect, "people will not be able to cheat you; you'll get along better in the world." Finally, of course schooling was seen as an escape from the life of manual labor in agriculture. "D'autre part, l'accès au savoir scientifique moderne, ou aux pâles et maigres clartés de celui-ci, est un puissant moyen d'évasion du monde fruste, jugé rétrograde par eux, dans lequel ils sont. Enfin, la scolarisation reste encore trop largement empreinte de l'apprentissage de l'écriture et de la lecture, telle qu'elle existait autrefois où le *ṭaleb* gardait ses mains propres du travail de la terre."[14]

As for my interactions with Ministry officials, school administrators and teachers, policies on a number of matters seemed muddled. For example, on the one hand there was an emphasis on old fashioned academic pedagogy, modeled after the French, alongside a recognition that more vocational training would be needed to develop the country, especially in the short term. Most lamented by the teachers and local administrators was the lack of consistency and constancy in policies. At the time it seemed that the government was speaking in, and listening to, different voices, past and present, at the same time.

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13. Paul Pascon, Mekki Bentahar, et al., *Ce que disent 296 jeunes ruraux: Enquête sociologique* (Rabat: Société d'études économiques, sociales et statistiques du Maroc, 1970).

14. Ibid., 32.

Perhaps the most telling of the issues to be faced was that of staying-back (*redoublement*), an issue where educational quality and educational access were inevitably at odds.

Nationwide, in 1970, at the end of the first 5 years of primary school, fully 50% of students had stayed back, and 25% had left school. At the end of the first half of secondary school 34% had stayed back and 27% had left school.[15] In Sefrou, at the Habbouna Primary school, of 912 students in the first five grades, 293 (or 32%) had stayed back, the highest numbers occurring in CP (*cours preparatoire*), the first year, and CM2, the last year.[16] My interviews with the school personnel showed the extent to which *redoublement* was a perfect storm of conflicting dilemmas. First there is the matter of age. In the 1960s many families who had not benefitted from schooling during the Protectorate wanted to catch up and this meant that some kids entered school well above the prescribed age for their class. In the CP year in 1970, 60% were the correct age for that class. But in CM2, because of the staying back phenomenon and the late entry phenomenon, only 14% were the ideal age. To pass on to collège level from primary school would mean putting pressure on the limited absorptive capacity in the collège, resulting in overcrowding. But since a school's "traffic" logically flows in two directions, to keep too many kids back risks a creating a bottleneck in the reverse direction. Intertwined with the traffic calculus is the classic dilemma of quantity vs. quality. Si Bennani, the enthusiastic and committed director of the Habbouna school at the time told me how pained he was to see those children who finish primary school at age 15 or 16, and because of their age do not go on to secondary school but are not educated enough to get a good job. On the other hand, he recognized that educational quality is at stake when kids who have not acquired the basics are passed on to the next level. In those days the universally accepted reason for holding kids back after the CP was that this is the year where the acquisition of a "*bonne base*" is essential, thus to have kids repeat the class here is to ensure success later on. Si Bennani told me that given the complexity of the *redoublement* dilemma he saw the problem as unsolvable. Still, looking back a half a century later one might have reasonably expected a demographic smoothing-out effect to take place so that at least this thorny issue might have disappeared. That has not happened.

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15. Thomas Dichter, "The Problem of How to Act on an Undefined Stage: An Exploration of Culture, Change, and Individual Consciousness in the Moroccan Town of Sefrou-With a Focus on Three Modern Schools," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1976, 7).

16. Dichter, "The Problem of How to Act on an Undefined Stage," 86.

In fact, over the years government has continued to wrestle with the *redoublement* problem, changing policies as well as unofficial quotas. In 2018, after a number of years of study, the Ministry of Education decided to suspend staying back in the 1st and 2nd years of primary school altogether. Statistics had shown a significant jump in staying back rates in the eight years between 2008-9 and 2016-17, going from 18.2% to 27.8%.[17] Again, the two-way traffic problem along with the quantity vs. quality problem came into play, exacerbated now by a more severe teacher shortage than was faced in the 1960s when teaching was seen as a good profession. And class size was growing. In my time in Sefrou, in the classes I observed at the collège and lycée, the maximum class size was 40, but now classes of 70 were common. Clearly the "traffic jam" problem was growing more serious.

On the expectational front, school, especially secondary schools, opened up the country to far greater mobility and its consequences. In 1969 and 1970 in Sefrou student mobility was both actual and aspirational. Of 77 Lycée students I surveyed, 40% were boarding students and only 30% were born in Sefrou.[18] Those who were boarders came from more than a dozen villages, the furthest of which was 160 km away. This mixing of rural and semi-urban populations was relatively new and was the tip of another set of tensions then emerging. A high percentage of the rural origin students came from Berberophone areas. Hildred Geertz' statistical analysis of the 1960 census showed that more Berbers arrived in Sefrou more recently than Arabic speakers.[19] Some of these students complained that they were being discriminated against by the government, and at the same time, urban residents I met in nearby Fes worried that with more young Berbers coming into towns for schooling, the "tribes" would again begin raiding the cities. Second, the now universal tendency of young people to want to leave the countryside and move to cities was clearly beginning among those I interacted with in the Sefrou Collège and Lycée. Some students indeed seemed to feel that the government wanted them to stay in the towns and not come to the cities and that is why they had been allowed to come to school in Sefrou, rather than Fes or a larger city. At the same time, when I asked a sample of 191 students at the Collège Moulay Ali Cherif and the Lycée, where they thought they would be living in 1980 (a decade hence), 61% said they would be living in a large Moroccan city, and fully 29% said they would be living in another country-28% of those said France and 25% said North America.[20] In short

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17. H24info.com 2018 and Leconomiste.com 2018.
18. Dichter, "The Problem of How to Act on an Undefined Stage," 159.
19. Geertz, H.Geertz and Rosen 1971, 402.
20. Dichter, "The Problem of How to Act on an Undefined Stage," 163.

if there was a hope among certain policymakers of keeping educated young people in their rural villages of origin, even then this was highly unlikely.

Not surprisingly this tendency had been rising consistently over the decades. For example, a survey done as early as 1939 and then repeated in 1949 among Moroccan secondary students in Rabat and Marrakech, asked "where do you want to practice your future profession?" In 1939, 94.3 % said they would do so in Morocco, with 5.7 % saying they would leave. In 1949 85.9 % said they would do so in Morocco with 14% saying they would leave.[21]

It is clear that a large number of Moroccans have indeed left the country, forming a classic developing country diaspora. Besides in France, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands, there are significant Moroccan communities now in the U.S. and Canada. According to the Migration Policy Institute there are over 84,000 Moroccan immigrants and their children (1st and 2nd generation) living in the U.S., and at least thirty-eight US based Moroccan diaspora organizations. The U.S. is the 8th largest source of remittances to Morocco with a figure of $215 million for the last year of data cited in the report, 2012.[22] For Morocco, as for other countries with a growing diaspora, the phenomenon has multiple advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, remittances add significantly to the country's economy and the existence of the diaspora relieves some pressure on government for reforms. On the minus side is the brain drain effect, depriving the country of many people with talent and energy.

None of this is to deny that Morocco has made some important progress in education; quite a few steps forward, to be sure. There is universal primary education, tens of thousands of new schools and classrooms have been built along with a tertiary sector with 15 public universities and a number of private universities that was unimaginable even 30 years ago. Most important, the residue of post-colonial inferiority appears to be gone. Three generations later, Moroccans, whatever their mix of feelings about the government and Morocco's many problems, are generally proud of their country and fully Arabized. Nonetheless, Morocco's education system has not overcome the key challenges of yesterday. Indeed, Morocco, which ranks as a lower-middle-income economy, and thus could be considered "second world" rather than "third world," does not match that status when it comes to international rankings such as the UNDP's Education Index, where it is number 129 of 187

21. Lucien Paye, "Enseignement et société musulmane: Introduction et évolution de l'enseignement moderne au Maroc," (PhD diss., University of Paris, 1957), 550.
22. See, Migration Policy Institute, "*The Moroccan Diaspora in the United States*," June, 2015.

countries ranked (n.b., Tunisia is ranked at 90 and Algeria at 93) (hdr.undp.org 2019). A UNESCO study from 2014 ranked Morocco in the 30th percentile on education.[23] USAID, which invests in education projects in Morocco, sums up some of the outstanding issues: "(…) Drop-out rates are still high and only 53 percent of students enrolled in middle school continue on to high school and less than 15 percent of first grade students are likely to graduate from high school. Low levels of daily attendance, teacher absenteeism, and a multi-lingual environment at school contribute to the low literacy rates in Morocco."[24] A study I led for USAID in 2012 on the state of civil society in Morocco, corroborated some of these lacunae in Morocco's educational progress. The single most common challenge leaders of civil society organizations said they faced is the low educational quality of staff applicants. In interviews with leaders of rural area associations many lamented the neglect of rural schools, not only by the Ministry of Education but the local communities themselves who do not feel ownership of their schools. Most striking was finding the presence in rural communities of a classic problem in countries much less developed than Morocco – the link between lack of sanitation facilities and female drop-out rates.[25] It is quite possible that the rural urban educational gap is widening rather than narrowing.

Finally, we are now seeing some of the problems in the primary and secondary school system mirrored in the relatively new university system. Perhaps the biggest issue today is overcrowding, with about 850,000 students in public universities, 80% of whom are in open-access institutions. These numbers are overwhelming the number of teachers, the infrastructure and equipment. Perhaps Morocco's reported drop from third place in 2005 to sixth place some years later in scientific production in Africa is one result.[26]

The widening gap between sheer numbers along with the pressures they put on the educational system, and the speed and nature of change from almost manageable, to hyper fast and increasingly chaotic, has also resulted in a widespread loss of faith in the public educational system. In Morocco the astounding proliferation of private schooling was simply not predictable 50 years ago and today it is both a symptom and a cause of the one step forward two step back pattern.

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23. See, uis.unesco.org.

24. See, usaid.gov/morocco/education.

25. Thomas Dichter and Nadia Guessous. https://www.developmentiscapacity.org/reports-findings/country-reports/country-report-series-2-morocco, August, (2012): 10.

26. Jalal Bounouar, "Challenges facing Higher Education in Morocco," *The New Arab* (2018): https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2018/12/6/challenges-facing-higher-education-in-morocco.

The Moroccan government's own data base shows almost 3,000 private schools in the country at all levels today. Compare this to 7,574 public primary schools and 2,757 secondary schools (collèges and lycées) – in short 22% of all the schools in Morocco are private.[27] This is a simple "vote-with-your-feet" indicator of the loss of faith in the public system. Despite the cost (which can reach as high as 50,000 dirhams (about $5,000 USD) for the elite French Collège Anatole France, tens of thousands of families choose to send their children to private schools.

Few countries, whether high, upper-middle or lower-middle income, have the luxury of grappling with educational challenges in a planned, purposeful, and effective manner (perhaps Finland, perhaps Denmark are exceptions). For the rest, and we see this in the U.S., parts of Europe, Latin America, and South Asia, educational problems tend to outpace the policies and solutions. We see a general lowering of quality, a steady move away from public to private schooling for those who can afford it (and even for those who cannot) and a consequent reinforcing of inequality, along with a steady decline in the societal value given to teaching as a profession. These things are happening almost everywhere, but in a still developing country like Morocco they are particularly problematic because they come on the heels of an initially steep climb to educational development, beginning with the fact of needing to incorporate three major languages, and two (now three) alphabet systems, plus dealing with the pull of a long (and distinguished) history of Islamic education – the tens of thousands of *M'sids* and the centuries old Qu'ranic universities, and facing the challenges of integrating masses of previously unschooled children. Moreover, during the first post-independence decades government policy amounted often to a juggling of different priorities and consequent inconsistencies in decision-making. Running the country through the newly created ministries and government departments suffered from a phenomenon common to many post-colonial nations – an acute shortage of mid-level personnel. As Charles Stewart, who wrote about Morocco's first post-independence years, put it, "(…) the logic of independence demanded that Moroccans be placed in top level policy positions (…)" but the cadres were "thin," especially at the middle levels, and necessitated recruiting people with business and other backgrounds but not necessarily policy or administrative skills.[28]

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27. There had been a private school movement in Morocco during the Protectorate. Cohn and Hahn note that at its peak in 1948 there were 50 "nationalist" private schools with a total of about 20,000 students. See, Cohen and Lorna Hahn, *Morocco, Old Land, New Nation*, 195.

28. Charles F. Stewart, *The Economy of Morocco, 1912-1962*. Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs XII (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964), 166.

Clifford Geertz' summary of the enormity of the development project helps greatly to put in perspective the steepness of the climb to educational development that Morocco had to deal with. Here is what Geertz says a new state (emerging from their colonial past) had to deal with, "from a standing start:"

> "It had to organize, or reorganize, a weak and disrupted, "underdeveloped" economic system: attract aid, stimulate growth, and set policies on everything from trade and land reform to factory employment and fiscal policy. It had to construct, or reconstruct, a set of popular (at least ostensibly), culturally comprehensible political institutions – a presidency or prime ministership, a parliament, parties, ministries, elections. It had to work out a language policy, mark out the domains and jurisdictions of local administration, elicit a general sense of citizenship – a public identity and a peoplehood – out of a swirl of ethnic, religious, regional, and racial particularisms. It had to define, however delicately, the relations between religion, the state, and secular life; train, equip, and manage professional security forces; consolidate and codify a thoroughly pluralized, custom-bound legal order; develop a broadly accessible system of primary education. It had to attack illiteracy, urban sprawl, and poverty; manage population growth and movement; modernize healthcare; administer prisons; collect customs; build roads; shepherd a press. And that was just for starters (…). It was a heady time. No wonder it was followed by ambiguous successes, precipitate turnarounds, sobering disappointments, and often enough, murderous disruptions."[29]

Sheer demographics also help explain what has been happening in Morocco. Today the population is about 36 million, two and half times what it was in 1970. Of that population 44% are under age 24, with fully 27% under age 14. In Sefrou in 1970 roughly 50% of school-age children were in school of which 18.6% in secondary school. Net enrollment figures for secondary school have risen pretty steadily since then nationwide but have not achieved universality or close to it. From 2009 to 2017 secondary school net enrollment went from 50.9% to 63.3%. And the number of out-of-school children dropped 55.6% between 2010 and 2017 for children, and 52.6% for adolescents. Literacy has also improved, but not enough. For example, 42% of males and 18% of females were literate in 1982. By 2015, 33 years later Morocco reached 80% and 60% respectively.[30]

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29. Clifford Geertz, "What Was the Third World Revolution?," *Dissent* 52, 1 (2005): 40.
30. See, uis.unesco.org.

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To dramatize the population growth issue, I look again to Sefrou. In the last 50 years, the population of Sefrou has tripled. Today with a population of around 80,000, the Moroccan Government database lists 70 public schools and 24 private schools (this total includes écoles maternelles or pre-schools) in Sefrou.[31] In 1970 there were seven schools in total, and no private schools. Yes, fifty years is a long time, but this kind of growth is exceptional.

It is clear that Morocco's public educational system is in crisis. In the last few years observers, journalists, and official reports on Morocco's progress note the public system's inability to match well-thought-out policy to its own growth,[32] hence the ad hoc nature of educational reforms, along with the issues of centralization, pension reform, and job security linked to the fact that teachers are part of the overinflated public sector, while at the same time noting a teacher shortage in part because it is not a rewarding profession, etc.[33] Some of these job-related issues came to the fore in a massive four-month long strike of "contractual teachers" between February and April 2019. The strike was a tip-of- the-iceberg indicator, since the contractual teachers, being relatively young, and not necessarily highly qualified, and having been hired as a stop-gap measure, brought out the larger questions of the status of teaching in Moroccan society, and again the issue of quality vs. quantity.

Finally, adding momentum to the "two steps back" part of my initial formulation are tendencies in Morocco that mirror those in the rest of the world. Morocco now suffers from what has become an almost universal cultural contradiction – everywhere parents and nations themselves embrace the rhetoric of education's crucial importance, while in reality, public education, as a subject of reform and research, as a profession, as a department of government, is a low status, low priority endeavor. In almost any government, were one to rank the various functions, the Ministry of Education ranks relatively low, after Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Health and others. And, of course, students today, wired as they are, have become more alike. Everywhere one complains of lower attention spans, less patience for the work of learning, more need for immediate gratification, a greater tendency to feel bored, a tendency to see schooling as a consumer good, with the student (and her parents) as customers.

31. See, data.gov.ma, 2019.
32. Bourqia, *Penser l'école, penser la société.*
33. Youssef Laaraj, "The Myth of Reform: Why is Moroccan Education Deteriorating?" *Morocco World News* September 14 (2014): https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2014/09/139548/the-myth-of-reform-why-is-moroccan-education-deteriorating/; Remy Pigaglio, "Morocco's Public Education System Sinks into Crisis," *International.la-croix.com* December 21, (2016); Humanium.org, "Education in Morocco-between forgetfulness and hope," November 1, (2018): https://www.humanium.org/en/education-in-morocco/.

The long-term trend seems clear – a universal culture is emerging; we are becoming more and more like each other. How could this not be? The engine of culture change is and has always been contact with others. Cultures that remain the same do so because they are isolated from others, but today isolation is no longer possible.

A half-century back, when Berber tribes of the Atlas were still just coming out of their long isolation from the rest of the world, anthropologist Ernest Gellner elucidated the complexity of their segmentary society to explain social order, noting the lack of social boundaries.[34] And Clifford Geertz, comparing Islam in Indonesia and Morocco, characterized the basic style of Moroccan life as "strenuous, fluid, violent, visionary, devout, and unsentimental, but above all, self-assertive"[35] adding that Morocco embodied "the radical intensification of individuality."[36] Or take my own interpretation of what was going on in the Sefrou schools as a theatrical play in which different cultural forms were experimented with.[37] Little of this makes much sense today. These distinctive and sharply etched features have blurred, if not disappeared altogether, leaving behind thinner reminders of their past force; certain habits, rituals and customs along with traditional music, dance and costumes.

In the school system of Morocco in 1969-70 I saw a laboratory of modernization, a place where elements of a modern universal culture were being incubated and tested. Fifty years later, the experimental stage is over. Moroccans want education and understand its importance but going to school is no longer new and exciting; it is not so much an occasion for a theatrical re-casting of one self as it is an increasingly necessary step up on the ladder of social mobility and material well-being. In that respect it resembles education pretty much everywhere else today. The sad part is that while Morocco is today facing the same educational challenges faced almost everywhere – how to create a system that redresses inequality rather than reinforcing it; a system in which the objective is learning rather than a diploma or certificate; a system that incentivizes bright young people to become teachers – these challenges sit on top of others that are peculiar to Morocco as a still developing nation.

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34. Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), 68 footnote.
35. Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). 8.
36. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 54.
37. Dichter, "The Problem of How to Act on an Undefined Stage," 269.

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خطوة إلى الأمام، وخطوتين إلى الخلف: واقع التعليم في مغرب أواخر ستينيات القرن الماضي وفي الزمن الراهن

ملخص: يقارن المقال وضع التعليم في المغرب اليوم ومكانته بالوضع الذي واجهته خلال عملي الميداني في مدارس صفرو قبل خمسين عامًا. ويخلص المقال إلى أن التحديات الأساسية وقتئذ لا تزال مواجهتها مطروحة اليوم. لقد استجابت الحكومة لتحديات التعليم متعدد اللغات والاكتظاظ، والهدر المدرسي، وتدريب المعلمين وتوظيفهم، كما كانت قبل عقود، لكنها غالبًا ما تكون أعمالها غير متسقة وتظل غير كافية. وعلى الرغم من إحراز تقدم كبير على صعيد الجهود المبذولة لمحو الأمية، وتعميم التعليم الابتدائي، إلا أن هذه الإنجازات لم تكن كافية لصد مجموعة من التحديات الجديدة، بدءًا من التركيبة السكانية المطلقة (عدد كبير من الشباب ومجموع السكان يتجاوز ضعف ما كان عليه في أواخر الستينيات بنسبة 2.5)، وانخفاض قيمة احترام مهنة التدريس، وقضايا الأمن الوظيفي والأجر العادل للمعلمين، وأخيراً دور الإنترنت ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعزيز ثقافة عالمية متزايدة تستجيب لاهتمامات الطلاب، وتوقعات التعليم باعتباره سلعة استهلاكية، وما إلى ذلك. وينتهي المقال إلى التأكيد على أن الرد الجزئي على كل هذه المشاكل، قد تمثل بوضوح في توجه مزيد من المغاربة نحو التعبير عن عدم الرضى باختيار اللجوء إلى التعليم الخاص، وهي ظاهرة يشهد عليها ارتفاع عدد المدارس الخاصة إلى أكثر من 20٪ من مجموع المدارس العمومية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم، سياسة التعليم، التعليم والثقافة، التنمية، محو الأمية، سياسة اللغة، الحراك الاجتماعي، تعليم العلوم.

Un pas en avant, deux pas en arrière: L'éducation au Maroc à la fin des années 1960 et aujourd'hui

Résumé: L'article compare l'éducation au Maroc aujourd'hui avec la situation rencontrée lors de mon travail de terrain dans les écoles de Sefrou il y a cinquante ans. L'article conclut que les défis fondamentaux sont alors encore à l'ordre du jour actuellement. Les réponses du gouvernement aux défis de l'éducation multilingue, de la surpopulation, de la rétention, de la formation et du recrutement des enseignants sont, comme il y a des décennies, souvent incohérentes et inadéquates. Et même si de nombreux progrès ont été accomplis sur le front de l'alphabétisation et de la réalisation de l'enseignement primaire universel, ces réalisations n'ont pas été suffisantes pour endiguer la vague d'une multitude de nouveaux défis, à commencer par la simple démographie (une grande population de jeunes et une population globale 2,5 fois ce qu'il était à la fin des années 1960), la baisse du respect de l'enseignement en tant que profession, les questions de sécurité de l'emploi et de rémunération équitable pour les enseignants, et enfin le rôle d'Internet et des médias sociaux dans la promotion d'une culture de capacité d'attention des élèves, des attentes de l'éducation

comme bien de consommation, etc. L'article suggère qu'en réponse partielle à ces problèmes, de plus en plus de Marocains "votent avec leurs pieds" en se réfugiant dans l'enseignement privé, phénomène attesté par l'augmentation du nombre d'écoles privées jusqu'a representer plus de 20% des écoles du pays.

Mots-clés: Éducation, politique éducative, éducation et culture, développement, alphabétisation, politique linguistique, mobilité sociale, enseignement scientifique.