

THE SHEEP SKIN EFFECT

Martin Rose

The kingdom of Libya became independent of Italy under King Idris in 1951. Just over a decade later, Algeria finally followed after its long war of independence with France in 1962. Between this period, the five countries of the southern Mediterranean coast each in different ways took control of their own futures. Amongst a sobering battery of challenges, one of the more pressing for all of them was education. A large proportion of colonial civil servants, businessmen, skilled workers and teachers left at Independence, especially from the francophone countries where settler colonialism was particularly dense. In Egypt the 1952 Revolution, followed by the Suez War and the expulsion of the *mutamassirin*, resident foreigners (Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Italians), had a similar effect, though Egyptian capacity was already far more developed than that of the Maghreb. In late Protectorate Morocco, for instance, there were three times as many French *fonctionnaires* as there were British civil servants in India, with its population forty times the size of Morocco's – quite apart from a large European commercial and artisan classes. Each country faced an urgent need for skilled manpower to fill the vacuum. Each country's educated local elite was both much too small, and mostly unsuited, to fill that need itself, and at the same time largely unequipped to train the next generation. Each government faced a pent-up demand for the social escalator that education represented, and from which the vast majority of the Muslim population had been excluded under French rule. Constructing a new education system was for each an urgent and absolutely crucial area of national development.

Libya and the francophone countries of the Maghreb started from a very low base. Egypt was better placed, with a proud legacy of elite education and the highest level of school enrolment in the region, at around 50 per cent. In Morocco in 1956 only 13 per cent of Muslim children of school age attended school, and the country boasted a total of 640 native

graduates. Tunisia, where 33 per cent of Muslim children were in school, counted 1,300. In Algeria the enrolment figure was 21 per cent (this reflected a recent growth from around 8 per cent during the Second World War). In the brand new United Kingdom of Libya more than 90 per cent of the population was illiterate and there were just over 800 students in secondary school. Girls were of course vastly underrepresented in, though not entirely absent from, schools across the region as a whole.

Education during the colonial period had resolved, in slightly different ways in the three countries of francophone North Africa, into a differentiated system of European and native instruction. Where it was available to Muslims, education was limited in scale and had an effective ceiling: with a small number of exceptions from the local elites, it was very hard for Muslims to become educated beyond what was necessary for the subaltern positions to which their institutions were carefully geared. In Algeria there was for many years 'no public conception of education of and for the locals,' and settler pressure led to virtual exclusion of Muslims from state schools. In Morocco, French schooling was closed to all but a few of the Moroccan elite; and only in Tunisia, where the system was the most open, with a *collège* or high school in Tunis open to native students, had some real progress at opening up the system been made. And as for employment, 'the public service,' in the words of Pierre Vermeren, 'was out of bounds for native people, in Algeria because only French citizens could be employed in it, and in the Protectorates because these were foreign countries.' With few exceptions, the best that most native Muslims could hope for was vocational schooling and artisanal employment. Of Libya, UNESCO reported in 1951 that 'few countries in the world are less advanced economically, have a higher proportion of illiteracy or have been longer under foreign domination than Libya,' which was made up of three disparate and very poor provinces brought together for the first time at Independence. Its largest exports were scrap metal and esparto grass.

The new governments urgently needed skilled administrators and industrial and agricultural workers in order to develop their economies, and producing this skilled workforce was the task of their education systems. Getting many more children into school and retaining them for as long as possible formed the central challenge. Many of the urban population certainly saw education as a way to open up chances for the

future from which they had hitherto been excluded; but in the countryside there was often more resistance, with attitudes conditioned, if at all, by the traditional experience of the Qur'anic *maktab*, *kuttaab* or *msid*. Extending educational opportunities into the poorer rural areas was a constant theme, though growing urban migration was shifting the balance in favour of the cities. Schools were built, scholarships were established, and the growing needs of the public sector as an employer made sure that there was a clear reward, in terms of secure jobs, for pupils and students who persevered. Vocational education systems were established to train skilled workers; secondary schools and universities were expanded to supply graduates to the public administration and particularly, in numerical terms, to its largest branch, the education system itself.

The result was a generation during which opportunity expanded dramatically, and the education systems grew to accommodate them. Graduates of secondary schools and universities found immediate employment, largely in the government service. School enrolment grew, reaching about 50 per cent by 1970 in all three countries. The first wave of expansion took the colonial education systems as its model, and continued to educate its young largely in French, though with a nationalist political urge to Arabise as that became possible. Egypt, the cultural giant in terms of Arab identity, played a special role in this process, setting the example followed across North Africa of offering free education as a constitutional right to all citizens, and at the same time supplying many of the teachers needed to fill the yawning gaps in Algeria and Morocco as Arabic became the medium of instruction. But French culture remained dominant in this first generation, with many more French than Egyptian teachers in those two countries.

In the 1970s, a corner was turned, and a tide of Arabisation swept through education in North Africa. It was a development with clear political and cultural motivation in a post-colonial world of pan-Arab sentiments, dominated by Nasser's Egypt. Seldom well enough planned or well enough resourced, the change proceeded in fits and starts, conquering primary schools first, pausing, and then sweeping through secondary schools and finally universities. Arabisation has never been entirely completed, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects at university being largely taught in French to this day and showing

little sign of lowering their barriers. Pushed forward for reasons of doctrinaire Arab nationalism, it also reflected a growing governmental unease at the political unrest seen as rooted in access to foreign-language teaching and teachers, Western ideas and subjects like philosophy. In this sense the rise of Arabic-medium teaching, often accompanied by Islamic Studies, has been a fumbling method of social and political control in several countries, of which Morocco in the 'leaden years' of Hassan II is an obvious case.

This development in North African education clearly needs to be judged on a number of different criteria. It may have reinforced national and Islamic sentiment (though the form of the latter, and the Islamist ballast that many of the Egyptian teachers brought with them do not perhaps seem quite as welcome today as they once did); but it has not been kind to educational achievement, and many would argue that the unruly speed of change, the linguistic confusion caused by generally poorly-taught Arabic and the requirement to change language in mid-education if pursuing the sciences, have all contributed to something approaching an educational disaster. Educational outcomes, as we shall see below, are generally very disappointing, and while Arabisation is not the only reason, it is clearly a major contributor.

This is the grand contradiction of North African education and its development since independence: how can a process so earnestly and expensively entered into have yielded quite such slender dividends? It has certainly not come cheap. The five countries have been amongst the biggest spenders in the world, fairly consistently putting some 5 per cent of GDP and about 20 per cent of government spending into education over the last half-century. This money has been spent on expanding provision in a highly centralised way. Ministries of Education have employed, contracted, posted and rewarded teachers and teacher-trainers. They have set targets, allocated funds and run national exams. They have built schools in accessible places, commissioned text-books and run school transport. The objective has been, very laudably, a consistent delivery of good quality education to students across each country. In a region that half a century ago was largely illiterate, this has meant some pretty basic things: universal primary education, education for girls and the massive extension of literacy.

These three things are of course also the components of the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG2), which is headlined as the achievement of universal primary education by 2015. The UNDP's 2014 MDG progress report shows North Africa as leading the developing regions of the world, with a net primary enrolment ratio of 99 per cent. This is certainly a big achievement, and quantitative measures are very positive. Apart from the net enrolment ratio, retention from first to last year of primary is a respectable 90 per cent plus, and youth literacy ranges from a low of 81.5 per cent in Morocco to a high of 99.9 per cent in Libya. Gender disparity is under 5 per cent in Libya, Algeria and Tunisia, 8.3 per cent in Egypt and 14.8 per cent in Morocco. Much has been achieved, certainly. And yet there are serious reservations.

Writing in the preface to *The Road Not Travelled*, the seminal World Bank report on education in North Africa published in 2008, Daniela Gressani, Vice-President for Middle East and North African (MENA) region, says: 'The modern history of education reform in MENA is a tale of brazen ambition, struggle against internal and external odds, unintended consequences, tactical error and success, accomplishment and unfinished business. It is also the story of the interaction of competing visions of the purpose and ends of education, pitching global trends in education strategy and content against age-old education traditions. Along this tumultuous path the region should be proud of its accomplishments. However ...' And that 'however' is the substance of the World Bank's report, as of any thoughtful critique of North African educational achievement. Summing up, Gressani writes, 'in particular, the relationship between education and economic growth has remained weak, the divide between education and employment has not been bridged, and the quality of education continues to be disappointing.'

King Mohamed VI of Morocco said in 2013, soon after the completion of a three-year, €2.7 billion Emergency Plan of investment in his country's education, 'I am indeed sad to note that the state of education now is worse than it was twenty years ago ... we still have a long, arduous journey ahead of us ...' Honest commentators in all five countries would probably say something very similar, and it is important to understand the nature of the crisis. It is rooted in the history, coupled with the sheer scale of the problem, and the failure to address satisfactorily a number of fundamental,

structural problems. These could be summarised brutally as demography, quality, the employability of those that it educates and – different but utterly central – the question of language.

Of demography it is important simply to note that the youth population of the region has been growing very fast during the whole period of educational reform, a growth whose impact on the educational systems of the region has been magnified by the steadily growing proportion of this steadily growing youth cohort that has needed educating. The proportion of the population under the age of 14 ranges from 23 per cent in Tunisia to 31 per cent in Egypt; and the next segment – aged between 15 and 24 – ranges from 27 per cent in Tunisia and Libya to 31 per cent in Egypt. Nowhere, in other words, is the proportion of the population under the age of 24 smaller than 50 per cent, and at the high end in Egypt, it reaches 62 per cent of all Egyptians.

The end of the crude demographic bulge is in sight: by the mid-century only Libya and Egypt will still have growing youth populations, the other three countries anticipating drops of between 13 and 20 per cent. But demand for education will continue to rise for some time to come, peaking earlier in Tunisia and Algeria than in Morocco and Libya where demand at the primary stage will peak only in 2020–30. Successful universalisation of primary education has devastating consequences as the pupils work their way up through the system. Each stage of education has significantly higher per capita costs than the ones before it, and the effect today on overflowing universities is clear across the region in ever-increasing numbers, vastly increased costs and inevitably imperilled standards. One simple vignette of scale is the reflection that the Egyptian school system has a population double that of Tunisia: adding tertiary students to the number makes it 90 per cent of the size of Morocco. And estimates of Egypt's population growth suggest that from 86.8 million today may reach as high as 140 million by 2050.

Quality has much to do with fitness for purpose, and a large part of the World Bank's argument is that the region has essentially failed to progress from an extensive, quantitative reform engineered from the centre, to a delegated, decentralised, incentive-driven, quality-orientated, child-centred education focussing on skills development, employability and international competitiveness. It has thus failed too in producing the kind

of skilled, versatile young people who are needed for the growth and prosperity of the region's economies in today's world. The problem – the static, even regressing, nature of education in the Arab world as whole – was recognised clearly by the Arab Human Development Report of 2003, which noted that 'the most serious problem facing Arab education today is its deteriorating quality,' and that 'curricula taught in Arab countries seem to encourage submission, obedience, subordination and compliance, rather than free critical thought.' This had much to do of course with the 'decolonisation' of education, the impulse to renationalise it, which gathered steam after the mid-1970s and of which Arabisation was only one aspect. It resulted in what Vermeren calls baldly 'the failure of nationalism to build a new, democratic high school system.'

The deterioration of quality is clear from international comparisons, but the truth is that there are relatively few of these that can be easily made. State-run systems are by nature generally non-competitive (in terms of inter-institutional competition), and across North Africa measurements have become largely self-referential. Tunisia offers the most extreme example of this, with school examinations that have no external component, all exams being set, marked and moderated within the individual school, until the Baccalaureate (and even this has an input of 25 per cent from the examinee's own school). Any notion of competition between public and private provision is blurred by the fact that teachers from the public system routinely moonlight in private institutions, not infrequently commercialising key elements of their public courses that have then to be bought by their own state-school students as private goods. This inwardness is reinforced by a rigid exam-based system relying heavily on rote-memorisation, in which each certificate is a cashable end in itself. An 'Integrity Audit' commissioned by the OECD in 2013 noted that 70 per cent of all Tunisian secondary school completers had taken private lessons at one time or another, and that 54 per cent of secondary students were taking private lessons from their current classroom teacher. In Egypt, CAPMAS, the national statistics agency, states that over 60 per cent of all educational investment in the country goes into private tutoring.

The standard international comparison tools are PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics

and Science Studies), regular assessments of basic skills that allow a good measure of international comparison. Only Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt have taken part in these, and the most complete participation is from Morocco. It takes a good deal of courage to submit to such comparisons. The results are not altogether positive – but as educational policy-makers understand, change can only begin with clear measurement of the problem. What these exercises show is very clear. In TIMSS (Science and Maths) 2011 Morocco and Tunisia ranked in the bottom three of the 45 participating countries, with only 26 per cent and 35 per cent respectively of Grade 4 pupils passing the lowest international benchmark (international median 90 per cent). On top of that, another 15-20 per cent and 25 per cent respectively scored so low as to be unassessable. There was no statistically significant score at the Advanced Benchmark (international median 75 per cent) by either country.

At PIRLS (reading and writing), where only Morocco took part in 2011, 21 per cent of Grade 4 students reached the lowest benchmark (international median 95 per cent) and again another 25 per cent of students scored so low as to be unassessable. Pausing for a moment to reflect on what these figures mean, we realise that in Morocco 79 per cent of Grade 4 pupils failed to reach the lowest international benchmark, of whom more than 25 per cent scored worse than the mark which a random choice of answers would have given them. It is hard in this case to understand how, in the same year, 2011, *Education for All*, records Morocco's youth literacy as 82 per cent. It seems unkind to single Morocco out, because it is the only country in North Africa to have put itself forward regularly for PIRLS. Tunisia took part in PISA 2012, and ranked 58th in reading out of 66 countries, its score unchanged since 2009. Yet *Education for All* lists Tunisia's youth literacy rate as 97 per cent. It is quite clear that the headline figures for literacy, and by implication all figures relating to educational achievement, need to be taken with a generous pinch of salt right across the region.

An alternative view is offered by the WEF, which in its *Africa Competitiveness Report* of 2013 places Morocco 105th, Algeria 131st, Egypt 139th, Libya 142nd and Tunisia 68th out of 144 countries in the world for 'Quality of Education System.' And it is worth noting that even Tunisia, apparently ahead of the pack, had been demoted to 68th from 12th in

2007, suggesting either a catastrophic decline in national education standards or – more likely – an access of serious doubt at the WEF about the reliability of the information and statistics being offered.

It is necessary therefore to look for other measures, and the next question posed by the World Bank – employability – provides one. One recent writer on Tunisia refers to ‘the Tunisian Paradox,’ whereby the more educated a young Tunisian is, the more likely she or he is to be out of work. But in truth it is not a Tunisian Paradox at all – it is a North African Paradox. In each country youth unemployment is a major problem, and in each country graduate unemployment is a greater one. It is all too clear that the labour markets of the five countries are unable to absorb the flood of school and university graduates that the systems produce each year; and equally that the systems themselves are unable sufficiently to adapt their curricula and ethos to the needs of a modern economy. Catch-22, in other words.

‘It seems,’ as one UNDP report drily puts it, of Egypt, ‘true that an educated person is at no advantage when it comes to finding his/her way in the job market. In fact the opposite seems to be true.’ The figures corroborate this. In Egypt those with secondary education make up 42 per cent of the population and 80 per cent of the unemployed. In Algeria those figures are 20 per cent and 40 per cent. In Morocco, 16 per cent and 30 per cent. Graduate unemployment – *le chômage diplômé* as it is known in the francophone Maghreb – is significantly worse. Only in Tunisia is the graduate employment rate a little below that of general unemployment (at 33.2 per cent to 37.6 per cent) but is still progressive in a very negative sense: Master’s degree holders, a mere 15 per cent of the Tunisian student population, make up 55 per cent of the graduate unemployed. In Algeria 20.3 per cent of graduates are unemployed against a global 9.8 per cent (though 24.3 per cent of Algerians aged 15-24 are unemployed); in Morocco 22.7 per cent of graduates are unemployed against 8.9 per cent globally (and 17.6 per cent of youth); in Egypt has 19 per cent graduate unemployment, as against a global 12 per cent and 17 per cent for youth. Libya is more difficult to call, though ‘World Bank estimates show that youth unemployment has remained at about 50 per cent, with the majority of unemployed holding university degrees’ (my italics). It needs noting, though, that grim as it is graduate unemployment is in many (but far from all) cases a luxury available to those who can afford to be unemployed,

often through family support, while they wait for public sector employment, so that 'those who can afford to spend time queuing for public sector jobs, with the expectation of relatively high pay for low productivity,' do so.

An even greater tragedy is hidden away beyond the statistics: the young who are not in education or employment – but are not registered as unemployed – and who make up 30-40 per cent of the youth cohort in all countries. Egypt has about 35.9 per cent of 15-24s (and 40.5 per cent of 15-29s) in this condition; Tunisia, 25.4 per cent (and 32.2 per cent). Young women are hugely over-represented: Egypt's 40.5 per cent breaks down into 9.3 per cent of young men and 49.5 per cent of young women. Tunisia's 32.2 per cent into 22.4 per cent of young men and 42.2 per cent of young women.

There is clearly therefore a mismatch between educational provision across North Africa, and the needs of the labour market. The fundamental challenge is of course the changing global economy. A globalised, knowledge-based economy demands 'a well-educated, technically skilled workforce producing high value-added, knowledge-intensive goods and services ... in enterprises that have the managerial capacity to find, adapt and adopt modern up-to-date technology and services in local and global markets.' A low-educated and inflexible workforce is no longer the answer to any country's developmental needs, and the education systems of North Africa are not yet producing anything like enough graduates at each level equipped with the transverse skills, the 'expert thinking,' and the 'complex communication' capacity that the world demands and their countries need. Low-skilled economies have not, and will not, produced the growth necessary to absorb the region's young productively.

A lot of this is the result of low literacy levels and educational outcomes which are discouraging of critical thought in favour of obedience, subordination and compliance. But there are also systemic problems which are worth noting, in the relative failure of the region's technical and vocational education systems, the destructive obsession with public sector employment and the failure of all countries to adapt educational provision and choices to the demands of the market. These three problems are closely interrelated. The public sector has traditionally offered jobs to graduates in the humanities and social sciences, and a shrinking public sector has left

many of these graduates stranded with skills that are not useful elsewhere. The academic route through education has been so overwhelmingly more prestigious than the technical vocational education and training (TVET) route, in all countries, that the latter has much more often been seen as a sign of failure than as a route to specialised employment. And none of the countries has created the conditions for a lightly regulated private sector, confident in its security and financing and the openness of its markets, able easily to hire and invest in staff and create wealth.

The Public Sector and its dominance both of employment and aspiration is universal, though it is beginning to be seriously addressed in most countries. Beside a private sector that is still largely informal and without security, the attractions of the public service are clear, with relatively high salaries, pensions and other benefits, a high level of job-security and – very often – low demands that allow secondary employment. By the first decade of this century, the 22 per cent of Tunisians in the government service were absorbing 63 per cent of the government's budget; the 10 per cent of Moroccans, 51 per cent of their government budget; the 29 per cent of Algerians, 31 per cent, and the 29 per cent of Egyptians, 29 per cent. In Libya, where comparable figures are not available, 66 per cent of the workforce was on the public payroll in 2000. These figures are beginning to change for the better, but the inevitable result is growing graduate unemployment and anger at the apparent breaking of the implicit bargain that the state would employ graduates – an anger clearly visible in the regular demonstrations outside the Moroccan parliament by unemployed graduates demanding 'unconditional and non-competitive absorption into the public administration.'

In a 2010 poll, 60 per cent of young Egyptians, 55 per cent of young Tunisians, 44 per cent of Algerians and 38 per cent of Moroccans expressed a preference for public sector employment, for which a simple degree is the pre-requisite. This, and the inflexibility of the region's higher education systems, helps foster a phenomenon which has been called 'the sheepskin effect,' whereby the degree certificate itself is more important than what it represents. 'The public sector,' as one commentator puts it, 'not only regulates the education and training system – with very little involvement of employers – but also is its main client,' and 'as a result, the education system has created signals for public sector hiring rather than equipping

graduates with the employability capital needed to succeed in the wider labour market.’ Since the public sector is only interested in the sheepskin, this tends to cluster students in the low-cost open-access faculties which provide a degree that is fine for the shrinking pool of public sector jobs, but of little relevance to the private sector.

It’s not easy to attribute unemployment to discipline studied, figures being hard to come by, though Algeria shows 27 per cent of humanities graduates unemployed, as against 29 per cent of social scientists, 18 per cent of science graduates and 15 per cent of engineers. Morocco’s leading authority on graduate unemployment writes that ‘unemployment affects principally those educated in Arabic Literature, Islamic Studies, biology, chemistry and physics, who in 2010 made up more than 80 per cent of the graduate unemployed recorded in the Prime Minister’s database.’ (The sciences feature here because they are studied for teaching in school, and for the majority who do not succeed in the competition for public sector teaching posts, are not effectively re-deployable in industry.) Governments are tackling this by reducing the size of the public sector, and – particularly in the case of Tunisia – by encouraging students into ‘applied’ courses with better employment prospects.

Vocational training, at school and post-school levels, should be producing skilled workers for the changing employment market. Unfortunately it isn’t really succeeding, anywhere in the region. All five countries have found it very difficult to maintain ‘parity of esteem’ in a context where the academic route is overwhelmingly prestigious, and where good public sector employment requires a degree. The World Bank in 2013 noted that education must be made ‘more inclusive, more directed towards learning, and less directed towards selecting and exclusively rewarding the academically able while leaving the rest behind.’ TVET is not only less prestigious, but is also (and partly as a result) the victim of serious under-investment. And it has become progressively less popular. Between 1999 and 2009 there was a 35 per cent drop (the highest in the world) in TVET enrolment in the Arab World. In North Africa, Egypt’s was the most dramatic drop, from 30 to 20 per cent; and Tunisia actually bucked the global trend by increasing TVET enrolment, albeit on a very low base, from 10 to 14 per cent. Employers cite lack of skilled workers as a constraint on business creation. It is grimly interesting to note a comment by the World

Bank on the Don Bosco Institute, a private TVET college in Egypt, which ‘offers three and five year diplomas that provide a path to employment, decent pay and career progression – the very elements lacking in most public TVET institutions.’ That is quite a comprehensive lack.

So the picture is alarmingly clear: a series of relatively inflexible education systems geared still, for the most part, to a phase of national development that is past, and finding great difficulty in adapting to the needs of a modern world economy. All this is a reasonably conventional analysis, and one which the World Bank, among other national and international institutions, has offered repeatedly. Some in the region feel that it seems unduly utilitarian, seeming to deny the humanising mission of a liberal education and the role that it plays in producing intelligent, critical citizens. The obvious answer to this is that that however humanising it may be, the first priority of a government must be to see food put in its citizens’ mouths, and this means that they need employment.

There is however, a nexus of important cultural issues which to a surprising extent escapes utilitarian discussions. By far the most important is that of language, and the intractable political, religious and cultural baggage that ‘the language question’ trails in its wake. It has at least two main dimensions. The first is the tension between *fusha* – Classical Arabic – and its colloquial cousins, ‘*aamiya* or *darija* and the various Tamazight dialects of the Maghreb. And the second is the tension between all of these and the colonial languages – English, French and Spanish – which have been overlaid upon them and have in many cases assumed dangerously divisive roles as class, educational and employment markers. Language has become a matter of politics, and the political disagreements and vested interests involved have a severe impact on education. I shall focus here as an example, Morocco because it exemplifies at their most extreme all these tensions, which have different resonances in each of the countries we are considering.

In Morocco today there rages a peculiar argument (which is important for the whole region) over the language in which early school education should be conducted. A country where 79 per cent of young people are (if we accept the PIRLS figures) at best inadequately literate, clearly has a major educational problem. The same is true of Algeria and Tunisia (though much of the corroboration is anecdotal, given the stellar literacy figures

asserted) – and may well be the case of Libya too where a literacy figure of over 99 per cent seem too good to be true. There is a strong link between literacy-acquisition and language, and it seems very clear that the doctrinaire determination to educate very young *darija* and Tamazight-speaking children in Classical Arabic is a significant contributor to this problem. It is not limited to Morocco, but current debates there exemplify its intractable nature: an Islamist government regards any attempt to dilute the stranglehold of Classical Arabic on literacy education as beyond discussion for religious reasons. A governing elite which uses Arabic as the language of administration and justice is equally defensive of their own linguistic achievement and monopoly. And where pan-Islamism and elite interest do not suffice, there is a sentimental pan-Arabism, reforged in the independence struggle, which fills the remaining gaps. The losers are Morocco's children, who remain, in effect, substantially illiterate.

The second question is also one of entrenched interests. French, in francophone North Africa, has a number of functions. It is the language of high culture, and of business (though English is making significant inroads into the latter). It is the language of higher education at least in the STEM subjects. And it is the ineradicable marker of the social and political elite. Morocco retains, outside its state education system, an archipelago of more than 20 'Lycées de Mission' owned and run by the French government. A recent analysis of graduations since independence shows that 45 per cent of Moroccan *lycée* graduates come from 500 families, 34 per cent from 200, 27 per cent from 100, 21 per cent from 50 and 15 per cent from 20 families. So as the system was Arabised in the 1980s the elite remained firmly outside the process. Even the then Minister of Education, who rushed Arabisation through the state schools, had his children at French *lycée* where they were educated in French. The francophone elites remain closely wedded to France in educational terms. Large numbers of North Africans study in France, at university and Grande Ecole, and recruitment fairs for managerial jobs in large corporations take place in Paris as much as in Casablanca or Tunis.

So North Africa faces a very difficult challenge on education reform. The demographic pressures remain intense, the costs crippling, the sheer size of the task alarming. There are vested interests in the semi-reformed state in which the regions education systems find themselves; but there is also

great goodwill, considerable expertise and a sense of urgency. There is good work going on in all the countries of North Africa, but it is not yet clear that the political will, the educational wisdom and the administrative excellence co-exist in the necessary constellation.

The stakes are high. The apparently fruitless process of education undertaken by the large numbers of young people from Suez to Agadir who remain unemployed, or underemployed, is dangerously destabilising. Quite apart from the tragic waste of human potential, the blighted lives and the stuttering development process, there is a cost in terms of political stability.

Mohamed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation triggered the 'Arab Spring,' saw education as the only way out of his dead-end existence in Sidi Bouzid. Not for himself – he had dropped out without completing secondary school – but for his sisters. His sister Samya told a journalist that 'my sister was the one at university and he would pay for her, and I am still a student and he would spend money on me.' Another sister, Basma, said 'his dream was to see his sisters go to university.' This dream is the head of steam behind the demand for betterment through education. It continues to build up.

