

THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION ON THE PLANNING AND FUNCTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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The Middle East and North Africa (the Arab Countries) did have since the 8th century their higher institutions of learning (e.g. Al-Azhar in Egypt and Al-Qarawiyyine in Morocco). During the Golden ages of the Islamic-Arab civilisation, these institutions were the centre of encounter for students and scholars representing various cultures and social backgrounds, from Asia to Europe. These institutions, in their own way, were promoters of cosmopolitanism, internationalism and cultural exchange (Sabour, 1994).

When the Arab Countries fell under the domination of European powers, the Western educational systems were introduced in this area. While traditional universities have kept a part of their prestige in the field of theology, juridical and human sciences, they have lost ground in the other fields. The foundation of modern universities has maintained close contact with the metropolitan institutions (e.g. teaching, exchange of students) in the West. These universities were also integrated into the global academic system. Aimed at producing a highly educated and trained intelligentsia, they are under the strict control of the State and are expected to help in the process of nation-building and to enhance the legitimacy of State power.

These universities, whose vocation is to teach global values like freedom, human rights, peace, international knowledge and skills, find themselves in contradiction with the political and ideological paradigms practiced by the ruling élite (Sabour, 1988, 1991, 1993a; Ade Ajayi, 1996). During the last decade, under the influence of globalisation (e.g. 'Ideascapes' in the term of Appadurai, 1990) and the increase in demands for more democratisation, the universities have become a force of opposition and challenge to the dominant ideology. In other words, thanks to students' and teachers' awareness of the global values referred to above, the universities became one of the most socially sensitive fields in society.

The impact of globalisation on the university in the Arab World has different dimensions. The positive influence is concretised in the openness of the university to the world and its involvement in global intellectual and scientific activity and culture. It can, therefore, fertilise and enrich its national culture and knowledge.

But globalisation is also seen in academia as tantamount to westernisation and subsequently as a source of domination and imperialism.

In this respect, globalisation is considered by Islamic activists as a danger and threat to Islamic values. One of the most visible instances for observing the rejection of globalisation is the rise of so-called 'religious fundamentalism'. Universities in the Arab World are a fertile domain for this fundamentalism (Tibi, 1995; Marfleet, 1998). In addition to challenging the ruling élite, this group is rejecting the globalisation vehicled by Western values. It promotes and endorses simultaneously an ideology of 'Islamic globalism' (Turner, 1994). One of the paradoxical aspects in Islamic ideology is that it wants the know-how and technology of the West but not its cultural values. A thing which is paradoxical because culture is always inherent in any scientific and technological creativity, problem-solving and use.

Their contention is that globalisation's main goal is the interference in the Arab states' decision-making, and the submission of their economic planning and social development to the influence of neo-liberal market economy and transnational corporatism. Among the sectors which could be endangered by this policy is academia and education in general.

The suspicion toward the goals of the logic of globalisation can be also explained, according to Tibi (1990), by other factors. He contends that globalisation is seen as a conveyor of Western moral, cultural and political symbols (e.g. sexual freedom, women's liberation, western democracy) which eventually undermine the Islamist conception, whose ideological aim is the de-Westernisation of Arab societies. This conception is often based on rigid conservatism and authoritative philosophy. In other words, this perception is supported by the so-called 'Neo-Third Worldist' assumption which '... sees the latest wave of the Islamic resurgence not as the consequence of Islam's peculiarities but rather as a combination of economic deprivation, social alienation, and political disfranchisement' (Hunter, 1998: 73).

If the policy of the entrepreneurial university is in vogue in the Western world, most universities in the Arab countries are still under the cupola of the State and managed accordingly. The ideology of entrepreneurship is still at its embryonic stage but gaining momentum. In fact, in some countries there is a commencement of a retreat of the State from its obligation and responsibility as guardian of the 'common good', in the benefit of privatisation policy and liberal economy. This policy is seen as a menace to the right for education and social equality.

As argued by Appadurai (1990) the new 'ethnoscape' created and stimulated by the process of globalisation has encouraged people movement and 'cultural and intellectual nomadity'. One of the most striking phenomenon, as far as the Arab Countries are concerned, is the brain drain. Due to the lack of job prospects, to the

economic uncertainty and the dearth of logistic and research resources and support, the Arab World represents one of the hot spots for brain expatriation (Yassine, 1984). This immigration, which has become part of the global reality, has beneficial aspects. Many of the expatriated transfer to their countries of origin economic capital, scientific knowledge and know-how, and an invisible conception and a set of world-views and symbols (e.g. principles of democracy, human rights awareness, Western rationality). But it has also considerable negative consequences on these countries when their best brains find refuge in Western academic institutions, research centres and industrial firms (Sabour, 1993b).

As mentioned above, the globalisation of economy has a deep impact on the Arab World. In fact, due to the burden of foreign debts, the continuous political instability, the weak capacity to compete on the global market, many of these countries (with the exception of some oil-producing countries) are freezing or cutting the budget of the higher education. This provokes the decline in the quality of teaching and research (Haddad, 1997). Moreover, because of massive student enrollment, the university has become a producer of *diplômés-chômeurs* (unemployed graduates). Many of them are ill-educated, bearers of bookish-knowledge who lack the required abilities and skills for meeting the increasing exigencies and demands of the local and international labour market. Due to the weakness of the private sectors, the State bureaucracy and apparatus remains the main employer of this large armada of graduates. Because of unemployment, an important segment of them accept underpaid and undervalued work, a fact which underpins the prestige of the university studies (especially in the field of social sciences, humanities, economics, etc.) and reinforces the spread of the so-called 'diploma disease' (see Dore, 1976). In this regard, the grip of the multinational firms and World Bank on most of Arab Countries' economy does not only impoverish their social change and make them more dependent than ever, but also undermine their capacity for providing efficient formal culture, education and proper qualification for facing the demands of a globalising society (McGinn, 1997).

This global negative impact on education is also reinforced by an ill-organised national academic policy. This policy, which is often carried out in an authoritative and anti-intellectual atmosphere, deprives the university from its autonomy and its genuine vocation of providing independent knowledge, and creative academic activities. The State, as the main sponsor of the university, imposes its will and aims on it and shapes its policy. This implicates the consideration of the political aspect of globalisation. Because of the sensitiveness of the university toward political and social issues, it is always seen with caution and suspicion by the ruling élite and therefore lives under the rapacious eyes of

its academic police and army. The policy of the ruling élite aims at the preservation of its monopoly of power, on the one hand, and attempts to seduce and convince possible foreign investors and international firms regarding the stability of society, on the other. Often these are some of the direct or indirect conditions stipulated by the global market forces for providing development aids and sponsorships.

Apart from that, the students are stuck 'between the devil and the deep blue sea.' Having invested in higher education (reaching the level of university is an achievement of the happy few: from the primary school to the university the drop-out is relatively around 60% and 85%), and after having managed to overcome all sorts of social, economic, cultural and symbolic hurdles, the student is confronted with job uncertainty. It is not surprising that the ideology of religious extremism is flourishing in most Arab campuses. It is partly a reaction against Western globalisation.

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