

~~Steele have identified a story to tell, and they have told it reasonably well.~~

~~MICHAEL OMOLEWA, University of Ibadan~~

**Iman Farag (Ed.), "L'éducation en Egypte", *Egypte/Monde Arabe*, n° 8-9, 1994, 558 p., ISBN 0752-4412, FF 100.**

This special issue of *Egypte/Monde Arabe* provides us with a fascinating insight into some aspects of the historical development of education in Egypt, outlining issues and challenges that have had to be tackled in the past, and which still confront the contemporary educational policy-maker. The collection of articles (all in French) — where the guest editor Iman Farag, who is a member of the editorial team of the Egyptian-based journal, is present not only as an author, but also as a translator (from Arabic) of several of the pieces published — does not claim to be comprehensive. It does, however, successfully show the interdisciplinary nature of the study of education, to the extent that a reflection on Egypt's educational system is, in fact, a reflection on Egyptian society as a whole. The articles are also organically linked in the sense that they are all an answer to the question: "Which debates and struggles have marked the history of education in Egypt?", and all are interpretive pieces which attempt to make connections between different historical and social processes.

The main contributions are grouped under two categories, i.e. "Actors" and "Processes". Iman Farag justifies this organisation of material in his useful editorial introduction, where he outlines the dichotomies and debates that have characterised the Egyptian educational field, namely: imitating foreign educational models vs. developing an indigenous one; focusing on the education of an élite vs. catering for education of the masses; privileging religious vs. secular education; remaining loyal to tradition vs. embracing modernity. Farag ably connects the Egyptian experience with that of the rest of the Maghreb and Machrek, as well as with other Arab countries, pointing out how the more central education becomes in the view of a people, the more severe do the struggles over it become. In this sense, education is caught between the past, present and future — it is always caught in the grips of reform — or hope of reform — but as a field it shows us clearly the limits of reform.

Four articles feature in the first category, "Actors", the referent here being institutions, individuals, and social groups that have marked the educational field in Egypt. Hassan Muhammad Hassan presents a critical overview of the "Cultural choices and educational orientations in Egypt between 1923 and 1952". The dates are significant ones in Egypt's history, the first marking the year when the country obtained its liberal constitution, the second indicating the start of the Revolution which brought the period of liberalism to an "end". The article is important because it highlights the way questions regarding education are intertwined with those of national identity. Hassan therefore traces the way various movements reacted to British presence in Egypt and, on the basis of economic, cultural, political and religious interests fought in favour of specific versions of education which served to either "inscribe" Egypt in a pan-Arabic, Muslim context or which instead insisted that Egypt had its own, very particular identity. Hassan focuses in some detail on four key movements active in this period, marked as it was both by colonial intervention and by a rising sense of national identity. An Islamic movement, inspired mainly by the *salafite* tradition, wanted education to be viewed in terms of *jâmi'a islâmiyya* (Islamic league) or of *râbita charqiyya* (eastern league). Another current of thought opposed this direction, emphasising Egypt's link to the west by focusing on its essentially Mediterranean character. Between these two poles lay another current of thought, one which highlighted the specificity of the Egyptian character, appealing to geographical (the Nile) or historical (pharaonic) categories in order to celebrate the local and the national. A fourth movement sought to privilege the economic and cultural relationship between nation on the one hand, and a larger Arab world on the other. Hassan teases out the implications of these different approaches for the educational project of the country, outlining in some detail the various options that these movements gave rise to.

The article by Muhammad Abu-l-As'ad focuses on another group of actors, Egyptian teachers. He locates the group within a context of a century of trade unionism, and provides a historico-ideological account of a movement that was born in 1891. The author portrays the socio-professional group of teachers' as being a "residue" of administrative structures, by virtue of the fact that they are mainly in the employ of the state. Additionally, in Egypt there is a practice that the leadership of the teachers' union is not subject to democratic elections, but is assumed automatically by the Minister of Education. Because of this, teachers find them-

selves at the interstices of the relationship between state and society, and have historically been mobilised for different, often conflicting ends. For instance, at the turn of the century teachers were considered to be the cream of the modernising group, the avant-garde "troops" representing "progress" because of their adherence to, and communication of modern and secular ideas. Today, on the other hand, there is an increasingly high profile of Islamic teachers. The relationship between the teaching body and the state therefore renders the professional status of teachers paradoxical.

Iman Farag focuses on Isma'îl al-Qabbâni and the intelligence testing movement in Egypt, using this episode as a case-study of the way "pedagogy" has been constructed as a field and a discipline. Farag highlights an important theme in the education systems of developing countries, namely the production and circulation of educational theories and practices, and what ultimately amounts to a (problematic) transfer of knowledge from the "North" to the "South". The author considers the themes of adoption vs. adaptation of such theories and practices, and how these processes give rise to local experts, local "fields" of education, and local power structures through strategies of inclusion and exclusion. A similar theme is pursued by Pascal Crozet in his focus on science education in Egypt between 1834 and 1902. Crozet looks at the way an indigenous scientific tradition was constructed on the basis of both inherited and imported scientific knowledge. He considers the *muhandiskhâne* — a polytechnic school for engineers — which played a key role in developing a tradition of adaptation rather than outright adoption of imported knowledge, and whose privileging of translation to Arabic suggested a space for the meeting of new and inherited knowledge, through the use of vocabulary from an older linguistic substructure. In this heavily referenced and annotated text, Crozet presents us with a fascinating study of a specific curricular history which has both internal and external referents, in the sense that the definition of the sciences depended on a struggle with other subjects already established in Egypt, and on a struggle with western and Islamic ways of perceiving *techne*.

Four other articles make up the "Processes" section of the journal. All four contributions draw on statistical information in order to throw light on a number of important themes concerning educational policy-making. Nader Fergany, for instance, considers the education of women in Egypt, and how despite national rhetoric on investment in human capital, women are still disadvan-

taged when it comes to access to elementary education facilities. Fergany notes that there has been major progress in health services in Egypt over the past thirty years, but access to education is still marked by gender and regional imbalances. Data collected in 1988, for instance, suggests that while the rate of children (6-11 years of age) in education in the greater Cairo region is 95%, that for the villages and farmlands in the higher plateau region is 65% and 57% respectively for girls. In the latter region, however, 89% of the boys are at school. While Fergany remains critical of the efforts in ensuring opportunity for access to (primary) education, Philippe Fargues highlights rather more the success in the diffusion of educational instruction, at least to the extent that this is reflected in different Egyptian census exercises. Taking as a base censuses from 1947 to 1986, Fargues notes the particular dilemmas, characteristics and challenges of the Egyptian case, focusing, like Fergany, on the education of women and contextualising the data by comparing them with that reported in other Arab countries and developing societies more generally. In his analysis of educational diffusion over space and time in Egypt, Fargues draws attention to major advances between generations born in 1880 and 1970, for instance. His conclusion is that while there might have been other periods where knowledge made great advances among the population at large in Egypt, it could have never been on the same scale and to the same extent as that achieved by the movement for mass education in the modern period.

Nadia Zibani's contribution examines another aspect of mass schooling, namely the phenomenon of child labour and its relationship to compulsory school attendance. Zibani's article is interesting not only because it presents new data about the common phenomenon of work undertaken by school-age children, but also because she contests some of the accepted negative stereotypes associated with the phenomenon. Zibani looks at the evolution of child labour in Egypt over a century through the use of statistics, pointing out that it labour and schooling are not necessarily mutually exclusive activities. Indeed, the data show clearly that there is a sizable group of children who both work and attend school. This phenomenon has to be placed in the Egyptian context where in many areas schools operate two and sometimes even three shifts daily in order to be able to reach more children. There is therefore ample time for these pupils to be involved in work. Zibani raises a very challenging question towards the end of her article. She notes that the Ministry of Education has declared that

it wishes to install a full day of schooling for all by 1997. How will this apparently positive and progressive measure affect educational attendance, if pupils will now have to choose between work and school?

Finally, Frédéric Abecassis considers the phenomenon of foreign schools in Egypt between the years 1921 and 1951. His historical analysis therefore uses the same parameters adopted by Hassan in the first article featured in the journal, and highlights the extent to which education took shape in the crucible of the formation of national identity and the emergence of the Egyptian nation-state. Abecassis chronicles the reduction of foreign schools towards the end of the first part of the century, a process that paralleled the extension of public Egyptian education. As with the rest of the authors discussed thus far, Abecassis focuses on the political struggles involved in the definition of legitimate education, noting that while there was a stigmatisation of foreign schools, given the nationalist reading of the tasks for education, many could not escape the contradiction that these same foreign schools reproduced national élites.

The journal has two other contributions related to education in Egypt. One is by Hammid Ammar, a veteran professor of education at the University of 'Ayn Chams, who is well known in the Anglo-Saxon world for his celebrated book *Growing up in an Egyptian Village*. Here Iman Farag translates excerpts from Ammar's *Fi bina' al-insân al-'arabi* ("On the Construction of the Arab", Dâr al-ma'rifa al-jâmi'yya, Alexandria, 1988), which among other themes considers pedagogy in the Arab tradition (then and now) utilising anecdotal, life-history material. A final contribution by Farag himself is a series of very revealing reflections on the challenges that present themselves in the contemporary field of education in Egypt. Farag painstakingly analyses articles in the press in order to critically comment on such themes as the reform of the *baccalauréat*, the length of the school day, current reforms, the rise of liberalisation and privatisation in education and the development of school "markets" at all levels, the link between schooling and fundamentalism, and so on.

There are other contributions in this journal which fall outside the focus of the special issue, and 200 plus other pages providing information about current political, cultural and economic events in Egypt. All in all, a wealth of data, critique and analysis which present the reader with insights into a complex, vibrant society.