Introduction

The Bologna Process in Africa: Globalization or Return to ''Colonial Situation''?

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The European reform of higher education (HE), known as ''Bologna Process''(PB), is gaining momentum in most African countries. BP means, as its name indicates, a process of reforms aimed at establishing a European HE area. Initiated in 1998 by the four signatories of the Sorbonne Declaration (France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom), it currently includes 46 member countries of the European Union. The objectives that are usually associated to it by its promoters are: (1) to ensure mobility within the European HE space, in order to study or work in this space, (2) to increase the international competitiveness of the European HE by attracting the best students and scientists from outside Europe, (3) to give Europe the scientific capacity to face the challenges of the contemporary world.

Yet, whereas in Europe the reform still gives rise to controversy, is the subject of intense discussions among social groups involved, and has as many versions as there are countries, most African states have taken steps for its adoption or are already in an advanced stage of its implementation. This situation includes quite unusual factors, in the sense that it is particularly rare for a state to accept the importation of a reform, which implies such a scope and challenge, even before it has been proven in countries for which and in which it was conceived. This situation appears even more unusual because, as stated in the articles of this issue, the core content of the reform does not bring, in

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most countries, substantially new elements, apart from the structures and duration of the curricula. It is indeed basically difficult to find in the reform itself, or even in the African HE system, all the principles underlying its adoption.

Therefore, the following lines will seek to identify and explain the factors which have mainly led to the introduction of the BP in the African HE. The focus will not so much be on the intrinsic content of this reform as on conditions for its imposition and its special contribution to African HE systems. The first part will, from a historical perspective, examine the events which, over the last two decades, led to this ''African consensus'' on the reform. We will try to show that the imposition of the BP was possible because it came at a time of great political and intellectual vacuity, the result of a series of ''reforms'' that led to the dismantling of the economic and social construction that was beginning to take shape just after independence. The second part will deeply examine the relevance of the contributions that the BP proposes to African HE systems.

The Political Context of the Reform

The BP, introduced from 2003 and 2004 (respectively in Morocco and Algeria), in a context of increased dependence on central countries, and correlatively one might say, against a backdrop of tensions both within the academic field and between the latter and political power. The reform, presented in the dominant discourse as an ''inevitable'' fact, linked to the requirements of ''globalization'', has resulted in little significant public debate on the reality and the future of HE, or even on the content of the reform itself. These debates, as long as they can be considered as such, are, for example, on an altogether different scale with previous ones that accompanied, just after independence and in almost all African countries, the reforms of HE and of scientific research.

HE (and education in general) was then at the heart of all hopes of emancipation. The academia was seen as the key instrument for gaining independence, both economically and politically, and for the renaissance of African cultures and identities. It was the place where modernization rooted in rehabilitated history and culture was built and planned. Being in a state of mind in favor of independence and confident in the future, the ''reconstruction'' of the continent, although led by Westernized elites, wanted to be largely ''self-centered.'' Foreign experts were indeed present in large numbers and played a very positive role in it, but they did it as technicians who put their knowledge to serve newly independent countries (and for many of them in a spirit of

international solidarity). African states turned heavily to foreign countries as a means of access technical competence not available locally or as a resource to support local capacity.

At the heart of these aspirations, the University received special attention and soon became an effervescent hotbed of work aimed at reappropriating knowledge and history. ''Through the academia, we affirm our right to think, the basis of the right to self-determination'' (2005:3), Issa Shivji wrote. Everywhere, the university responded to society with new learning approaches through immersion in the society. Students would go to fields and factories to learn and interact with workers in cities and the countryside. In a short period of just two decades (1960-1970), African universities pulled themselves up to the forefront of struggles against domination and social injustice, and played an active role in the denunciation of ideologies aimed at ''legitimizing academically, the knowledge and assumptions that supported the social order'' (Lander 2004:51). Whatever their political orientation, states had no other choice, under the social pressure, but to back accompany this movement through substantial investments in education and HE. From a dozen in the early 1960s, the number of universities has increased by 25 times today, and the number of students has increased in even more significant proportions.

Yet, the ''crisis'' in the 1980s, of which African States were only partially responsible, , drastically changed that momentum. The crisis reached its climax at the beginning of the new century. HE entered a critical phase: overcrowded facilities, obsolete and inadequate equipment, deteriorating living conditions of students and teachers, emigration of much of the scientific senior staff, leading to a dramatic decrease in the quality of teaching and research in most countries. The state of dereliction of human and material resources was such that relatively modest enrolment figures in comparison to other continents,[1] appeared like anunbearable ''massification''. This happened against the backdrop of an increasingly authoritarian administrative and political management and inevitably led to the weakening of the overall capacity of the states (at social, economic and financial levels), resulting in a heavy dependence on financial aid and/or international political support. Looking for solutions outside national frameworks and resources, the states engaged in a process of alienation from their own societies and thus from the ideals that led the struggle for independence. In a few years, African societies were gradually dispossessed of the control of their destiny. Their marginalized scientific and cultural elites were forced into silence or exile. Almost everywhere, in varying degrees, situations of rupture between universities and political authorities slowly but surely became established.

During this period of rupture at all levels, the states were, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, under a dual pressure with conflicting effects: on the one hand, international financial institutions were urging them to reduce the recruitment of teachers and the funding of universities, on the other, they were experiencing a growing social demand for school enrolment, which they could not ignore politically. In response to its problems, the Bologna process (otherwise known as LMD ''Licence-Master-Doctorat'' in francophone countries) was offered to the University as "turnkey" product. Thus, with the imposition of a series of "reforms" (legal, financial, economic, political ...), the BP appears to be the completion of a slow process of exclusion of states and societies from the definition of their own public policies. The considerable work of postcolonial reconfiguration of educational systems is severely challenged by a new paradigm of domination carried by the agents of globalization.

The Influence of Globalization and Return to "Colonial Situation"

A number of experts and observers have questioned the role of international institutions in the process of African States' dispossession of their own educa-tion policies and its corollary, the exclusion of local actors from decisions that affect their destiny. Marie-France Lange (2003:146) noted that "those mostly excluded from this partnership were, on the one hand, families (parents and pupils) and, on the other, teachers, and that the role of African States, as producers of public policies, was weakened, if not annihilated." For his part, Yann Lebeau, mentioned a "global agenda" driven by "multilateral institutions now decisive in the reflection and action on the reform process of public policy..."(Lebeau 2006:7). In this regard, the extension of the BP to African countries was supported by all agents of globalization. UNESCO, the World Bank and OECD have played a major role "in its international promotion." (Croché 2006:210).

After a period of weakening of local states in the 1980s, during which the local 'civil society' and 'NGOs' were favoured, the international or multilateral institutions, acting as agents of globalization, soon concluded that to meet their objectives, it was more efficient to rely on political than on a disparate con-glomerate of more or less malleable local NGOs. This repositioning caused a major evolution of the *internationalization* process which was originally, in contrast to *globalization*, a weakening factor for centralized and authoritarian powers, and therefore (even unintentionally) a factor of autonomy for grass-roots individuals and groups.[2] This change paid off: unlike the "civil society", governments fully met the expectations of globalization policies. Yet, in so doing, they gradually placed themselves in a position of foreignness to their

own society. Soon, as most of them were surrounded by a social and intellectual vacuum that they helped create, they were incapable to conduct autonomous reforms and had no choice but to accept the solutions proposed from outside.[3]. Therefore, ''The development of educational reforms became a bargaining area obscuring the social and political role that once governed their construction (Lange 2003:151).

The weakness of social elites (scientific, economic, cultural ...) resulting from their division, their multi-faceted dependence on the state, the tendency of the latter to foreignness, has created an environment - reminiscent of the ''colonial situation'' described by Georges Balandier - where all sectors of social life, including those representing the ''public force'' are put at the service of globalization. With the BP, the subjection process of the continent, which began with the political, economic, financial and educational reforms, is now almost complete and incorporates the scientific system. Through their societal impacts, these reforms represent a real ''social surgery'' as François Bayart and Romain Bertrand put it: ''The neo-liberal 'shock therapy' is symmetrical to the ''social surgery'', characteristic of the colonial issue'' (2006:8). The reforms that have affected various sectors of the state and the economy have created conditions for the acceptability of the reform of universities, where are traditionally concentrated the most important forces of social resistance. Being the last, they can not but accept to align with the new order and to adhere to its ideology.

The easiness with which the BP was introduced, without significant consultation of local social agents, resulted from this context. A context in which the political field resolutely took the form of a microcosm increasingly cut from its society and, conversely, opened to the field of globalization, so far as to appear as a mere appendix. One can therefore understand the fact, apparently paradoxical, that it is in African countries that the factors of globalization (economic and financial disengagement of States, deregulation, opening of markets, excessive privatization of public sector...) found their full expression. By comparison, in countries that are promoting it, those in Europe and North America, the international or global option is still defined by the limits of national options, particularly in the fields of education, HE, and scientific research. Thus, if African societies have remained largely local, as Jean Copans noted (2001:51-52), their official institutions and the elites are among the most globalized, drawing all their referents from the global context. Conversely, in societies of the centre, the opening onto globalization has not only prevented institutions and elites from drawing their approaches and practices from the local context, but it even helps them take part in a dominant position in the globalization process by imposing their own technical and social standards on it.[4]

Keen to find a solution to the HE stalemate after nearly two decades of half measures to keep the system afloat, African states find in the European proposal, a timely source of salvation (Benchenna). Although its generalization to all sectors has been slow, in particular under the resistance of students and teachers, a situation of no return has almost been reached. Its influence is such that it mobilizes all discourses on HE, emanating from public authorities, teachers or the media. Presented as a factor of integration into the global economy, the reform goes everywhere with the same terminology (knowledge society, information and communication technology, niches of competitiveness, global village ...), the same system of arguments (interlocking of economies, internationalization of knowledge, scientific mobility ...) and "rationalization" (specialization, cost, competence...); a terminology which refers to precepts based on an international market in which Africa accounts for less than 1 per cent of trade. The reform, which ignores any reference to the local context (Ghouati), is presented in the form of a set of proposals and technical operations whose success lies in their intrinsic characteristics.

This rhetoric has eventually produced a double effect: to impose the idea that the time is now for reforms that fall within the "framework of globalization" and, correlatively, to mask any reflection on a locally negotiated end to the crisis. It contributed to the dissemination of a mindset (submissive or convinced) presenting the reform as inescapable, not only among university officials, but also among most students and teachers ... So, many teachers and managers, very critical of the process, consider it nonetheless "inevitable" (see in this issue the article by Goudiaby), and local debates that have sometimes accompanied it, focused more on the terms of its implementation than on the problems of the African HE, as experienced by students, teachers and users. While almost all African countries have had original experiences in the fields of HE and scientific research, discourses and practices are fully focused on the devices of the reform as if they were to fill a vacuum.

With this reform, the agents of globalization do not only intervene in public policy choices in Africa, but also in the field of professional practice. "Experts" are sent to the African continent to help set up programs claiming compliance with the standards of Bologna, while African academics and administrators go to Europe to immerse themselves in the techniques and methods of the reform. Such exchanges with countries of the "North" are certainly not new – they also accompanied more self-centered reforms such as those in 1970s – but they mean in this context that African states still have to attain an autonomous capability in terms of design and management of programs adapted to their realities, or even, in this respect, that they have gone back to the starting point, just after independence, losing the political willingness that char-

acterized that time. The social field itself is not immune to the effects of the reform. Charlier and Croché quite rightly noted that imposing a synchronization of university calendars would challenge intergroup "negotiations" and therefore the modes of regulations that help the institution to function.

The globalization process has all the more affected African universities since most of them are more than ever dependent on the state. The latter in turn exercises a quasi-total control on them by holding the majority of their financial and material resources, and by commanding the appointment of their leadership and hierarchy. In all African states, university rectors and presidents are appointed by states without consulting the academia, often on the basis of allegiance criteria. The appointed rectors and presidents in turn, on the same criteria, name the senior management staff (the Deans) and intermediary management staff (heads of departments, of courses...). The state (or rather the ruling Power) is therefore directly the cause of most of the changes affecting higher education: reconstitution of the academic map, institutional creations, overhaul of curricula or structures, repeated revisions of the legal framework...

The involvement of political authorities goes beyond simple procedures and affects the academic content itself. Propounded by the globalization, vocational courses, once confined to the non-university sphere are now imposed on the degree structure. Market driven and academically less demanding courses (marketing, web design, management ...) which could have sat outside the university curriculum are introduced without consultation. Conversely, disciplines based on reflection and social criticism, such as sociology, philosophy and some humanities disciplines, are the subject of surveillance, restriction or prohibition, as was the case in Cameroon in the 1990s. Political authorities also intervene in the knowledge validation processes and assessment criteria, as well as in the entry qualification criteria to universities. We know all the difficulties that CAMES[5] is experiencing in the face of member states' desire to control, on the pretext of national sovereignty, the criteria for promotion of lecturers and qualifications validation. The absolute political control over the higher education sphere is facilitated by its relative isolation from other fields, notably the economic one. In general, but this is not peculiar to HE, the partitioning of the various social spaces accentuates their vulnerability to the control of political authorities.

Equally counterproductive solutions are advocated to solve the real problems of universities such as the exodus of academic staff or the or the pressure of rising student numbers on infrastructures. Thus, instead of acting on the causes of "brain drain", which are far from being primarily economic (Khelfaoui 1996, 2008), political power resort to authoritarian measures, which

are the very causes of this phenomenon. Our research in the Maghreb and West Africa have shown that the exodus of scientists is increasing more dramatically in contexts of exclusion, marginalization and non involvement in the future direction of institutions and of countries in general, than under difficult living and material conditions.. In the 1980s and 1990s, countries like Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire were very opulent but experienced a remarkable drain. At the same time, Burkina Faso, which ranked among the five poorest countries in the world, but launched a policy of openness to the scientific community, was then largely unaffected by this phenomenon. By suggesting legislations that would force African students to return to their home countries,[6] countries accentuated the frustrations, tensions, and demobilization while at the same reinforcing authoritarian methods of management of scientific institutions, known to be largely incompatible with scientific creativity.

The Role of Local Agents

Another point to be addressed is the role of other agents, university officials, teachers and students. Despite the influence of the state, each of these categories is characterized by a strategy and level of involvement peculiar to it. University officials (like those in other public institutions) consider that their mission consists in implementing policies adopted by the state. In fact, they behave as if they were its representatives and its extension in universities, and are all the more faithful to it since they are often devoid of legitimacy and of competitive scientific capital, they owe it everything. In this reform, the state entrusts them the role of "explanation and discourse professionals" (Bourdieu 1966:18), which they assume through conferences and seminars aimed at clarifying the implementation terms of the "LMD" and convincing people of its benefits. It should be noted here that in its African version, only the "LMD" aspect of the BP is nominally retained. The phrase "BP" is never used as such in Africa, probably to avoid that the emulation or "political blind conformity" be too obvious.[7] However, under the usual name "LMD," it is all the content (at least in its principle) of the European reform which is claimed: mobility, employability, quality, compatibility...

Furthermore, university rectors and presidents are regularly invited to conferences held alternately in Africa and Europe,[8] with the difference that if North Africans are acting separately, their counterparts in Central and Western Africa tend to get together in regional groupings.[9] Thus, if the states in the Maghreb deal separately with the European Union, those in sub-Saharan Africa are trying to act as part of groupings that are indeed aimed at adopting the "LMD", but also at creating spaces for trade and regional mobility.[10] Others who adhere

to Bologna are those who are benefiting from it: academics and civil servants enjoying travel and per diem in foreign currencies, and, as in Algeria, direct access to the Master level for students who agree to engage in any of the programs launched as part of the LMD system.

Academics are indeed in their vast majority skeptical, to say the least, or even fiercely opposed to the reform. But with no means to counter the control of the state over the media and the discourse, their voices are unconvincing. Although the situation varies from one country to another, they are usually deprived not only of the means to publicly express a common view, but also of the very conditions that enable them to formulate such an opinion: division into conflicting groups and various unions, close control by the police, demobilization, struggle for survival ... The opinion of academics, expressed individually in low circulation media, can be easily countered, when the political power bothers to, by "authorized" voices in more popular media. [11]

The Scope of the PB's Principles in the African Context

As mentioned above, the BP has not provided a truly innovative content. Let us take the example of the concept of "mobility", one of its leitmotivs. The article by Charlier and Croche shows that the BP is primarily aiming to attract international students. However, based on UNESCO data, the authors note that these students are already "the most mobile in the world." And so, at this level, it is not perhaps less mobility as such that is promoted than its regulation and profitability that are sought. The problem is then likely to be more related to the adaptation of African students to the European knowledge than to their mobility as such. From this point of view, the BP is primarily designed to dissolve differences in the standard and forms of knowledge production, and beyond, in the social relation to knowledge. These are the specificities that the BP, as applied in Africa, proposes to eradicate through the alignment of African higher education systems with the most vocationalised of the European higher education offers, in particular the so called "semi-vocational" courses and quality certification processes. However, in terms of mobility, the BP can be particularly restrictive for non anglophone Africa, whose students and teachers will struggle to compete in the space of mobility opened by Asian countries, unless they have a good mastery of the English language. Additionally, the European reform is strongly (and explicitly) linked to the international competitiveness of member countries in terms of "human resources". From this point of view, African countries are the only losers, as they are caught in a vise-like grip between the USA, Europe, and emerging countries, since the mobility in question is unlikely to play in their favour.

Conversely, even though it shows an ambition of international complementarity, the BP in its African version leaves little room to intra-African mobility and trade, which are so important in terms of local appropriation of human and material resources. Yet, in its European version, this aspect is a key aim. On this side of the Mediterranean, the reform is less focused on standardizing contents and curricula than it is on establishing proper conditions of international student and staff exchanges. Barblan emphasizes that "there is no definition of what should be an integrated Europe at academic level, "adding that it is simply" a space in which teachers and researchers can be recruited in any of the participating countries, and finally, a space in which employers and public authorities will recognize the value of qualifications obtained in all participating countries"(2002:95). This analysis was confirmed by Jean-Émile Charlier who noted that the European authorities "refrain from any explicit interference in national sovereignty: Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty on the Union signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992, recalling the principle of subsidiarity, they give to the Community only a supplementary role in terms of education" (Charlier 2003:5).

Attached as they are to their academic identities, European countries have reduced the ambitions of the "BP" to the mere establishment of conditions conducive to the mobility of students and academics. In contrast, African countries emulate for themselves the academic characteristics of European countries (generally those of the country they mostly depend on) without serious consideration of mobility opportunities for students and academics within Africa. Except for a few vague references in discourses of members of REESAO, mobility is essentially understood only in the Africa-Europe sense.

Yet, here again, the African states embraced the notion of African international mobility in the early 1970s. First, it should be noted that some universities and institutes are of inter-African creation or ambition. The African Center of Hydrocarbons and Textile Industry of Boumerdes (Alger), established in 1964, the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences and Medicine of Dakar, the Interstate School of Equipment Engineers of Ouagadougou, the Faculty of Applied Sciences of Bujumbura, the Institute of Computer Science of Libreville, are a few examples among many others. The BP brings nothing new but a reorientation of mobility in the African-Europe sense. CAMES as well as other inter-African agencies are also there to remind us that the equivalence of diplomas are not new issues in Africa. The importance of student mobility was at some point such that some national institutions have become de facto regional (Amougou 2004; Khelfaoui 2000).

What about ''employability''? As a concept specific to the business world, it came to replace the ''the adequacy between training and employment'', as if changing the vocabulary could change the reality. Most African countries had been offering vocational courses for a long time, such as Algeria, with the short cycle of technological institutes and universities, Burkina Faso, with the Polytechnic University of Bobo Dioulasso, Côte d'Ivoire, with the Polytechnic Institutes of Yamoussoukro ... Yet, the imported reform began with the opening of vocational courses presented as new in the African academic landscape. In Algeria, where such ''vocationalizing'' courses are now in place, they are identical to the Senior Technicians courses existing in Technology Institutes and to Post-graduate Diplomas in universities: same cycle (between two and three years), same content (practical and specialized), same presumed purpose (immediate applicability). Equally, the new Professional Master's Degree proves to be a replica of the Specialized Postgraduate Diploma (DPGS), introduced in Algerian universities in 1998. [12] Oddly enough, most pedagogical and organizational changes attributed to the BP appear to repeat the provisions of the Algerian reform of 1971.[13] The semestrialization of programs, the division of the syllabus into independent modules, the system of prerequisites, and the opening onto the labour market were all part of the operating mode and the objectives of the 1971 reform, as mentioned by one of the representatives of Algeria at the Euro-Maghreb Conference in Marseille on the LMD. [14]

Yet, despite the substantial industrial base of this country and the attention and benefits attached to these courses (Khelfaoui 2000), they do not meet the expectation of either students, staff, or even and especially employers. The reasons are twofold: the first may be the attraction of longer studies for Algerian students, and probably for all Africans who do not automatically associate ''education'' with ''occupation'', who do not solely reduce access to knowledge to its economic returns. The second is the limited success of such courses with employers themselves, because they are not immune to this cultural ethos, and because these courses did not prove to be more vocational than others. Employers rather prefer holders of more generic academic skills, more flexible and more flattering for the brand image of companies. Vocationally oriented courses actually play several functions that have little to do with ''employability''. Because they are of shorter length, they are used as channels for the quick dispatch of the growing flow of students, in order to make way for the new entrants. As Goastellec noted, ''The internal diversification of education systems is the first consequence of the increasing number of students.'' (2006: 17) Beyond, these new courses justify the hierarchical organization of education in academic and lengthy courses considered as ''noble'' or ''royal chan-

nels'' for well-off classes on the one hand, and in short and vocationally ori-
ented courses on the other. In so doing they lead again, as Lebeau noted to ''an
institutional diversification that masks a differentiation of institutions and staffs.''
(2006:10)

Furthermore, employability and vocationalization combine here with spe-
cialized contents and particular techniques. This approach, probably effec-
tive in a previous world where technologies were long-lived, is now aban-
doned in most universities in the world. With the pace of technological change,
with teamwork, and with self-management and communication skills re-
quirements, focusing on one technology or a specialized field has become
obsolete and is even now abandoned by vocational training centers. It seems
far from being an instrument of employability, a business concept address-
ing the capacity to adapt to changes affecting the labor market, or to ignite
them. The curricula offered in new short-term Bachelor's degrees, are often
linked, especially in computer sciences, with a technology, often patented,
which can certainly be transferred but not really appropriated. Based on
captive technologies, these courses place their graduates in a situation of
dependence towards the firm that owns the patent. If the firm withdraws
from the country, the graduates will have no choice but to follow it or to
change occupations. In addition, depending on the firm, they become the
best advocates of its interests and its presence in their country.

From another perspective, the ''vocationalization'' of HE contributes to
emptying it of any critical thinking. University curricula tend to take the shape
of an incoherent series of scattered courses, with uneven profiles and quality.
Many researchers in Africa and elsewhere see in it an instrument of domina-
tion and cultural alienation which does not offer the minimum conditions for
appropriation of science. The thematic issue of *Alternative Sud*, published by
l'Harmattan, examines how this approach has the effect of atomizing universi-
ties of the ''South'' and emptying them of any critical thinking: ''With the
fragmentation of knowledge, major societal issues, ethical goals, critical is-
sues are evacuated'' (Lander 2004:52).

While bringing nothing new, the approach consisting in imposing it without
real debates excludes any possibility of banking on African experiences of the
past fifty years. As a factor of instability, rather than renewal, the BP comes to
interrupt a process of endogenous reforms (Benghabrit-Remaoun and Senoussi,
Benchenna) which over time enabled pedagogical and scientific practices to be
rooted in the local reality. Thus, it only contributes to perpetuating the cycle of
instability generated by the political field in the field of HE, an instability which
prevents the accumulation of scientific traditions essential for the process of

"self assimilation" of science and technology, the condition of all forms of innovation. Because, as Thomas Kuhn wrote, "only investigations firmly rooted in the contemporary scientific tradition are likely to break that tradition and give rise to a new one" (1961:343)."

The Myth of "New Technologies"

The "BP" in Africa goes with an exhilarating discourse that sublimes information and communication technologies (ICT). If the contribution of ICTs to HE is undeniable (larger, faster, and more practical access to the scientific documentation, possibilities to make teaching more lively thanks to animation and modeling, greater accessibility through distance education ...) it is nevertheless necessary to protect onself against their pernicious effects. Yet, everything happens here as if these technologies would overcome all the problems of the African academia and miraculously pull it up to international standards. To cope with the overcrowding of lecture halls, academics are increasingly encouraged to adopt methods of assessment, such as MCQ, which allow the electronic processing of corrections. Already frequently used in Algeria, this "solution" is also advocated by the REESAO. However, its pernicious effects are well known: based on mechanic choices of responses, this method poorly measures the extent of students' knowledge, and does not at all help them develop self-reflective skills. Yet, in the current African context, there can not be any other way because the political benefits from the "massification" are prioritised over the scientific and professional quality of education (Khelfaoui 2006; Haddab 2008).

Researchers are rather skeptical about the "technical mediation" in educational practice. While it is recognized that some techniques, like those that carry ICTs, are henceforth effectively "unavoidable" in certain areas such as time control,[15] it is also admitted that they can adversely affect modes of learning. The well-known tendency of ICTs to favor information – and even raw data, often inaccurate and unreliable to support scientific hypotheses to the detriment of knowledge, is one of the most trivialized. The insistence on information (often of external origin as African countries are poor on programme contents – the only real stake of ICTs), tends to mask the educational and human communication behind it. The ideology that backs ICTs deliberately maintains confusion between data, information, communication, and knowledge while these correspond to different realities. "Information is not knowledge" warned Denis de Rougement (1989), and Albert Jacquard stressed that "to inform is to shape; to communicate is to share."

Many studies show that in the educational practice, the ''technical mediation'', although potentially enabling the teacher to have access to new forms of expression and intervention, ''can not be a substitute for human mediation'', ''The computer, added Jacquard in a very demonstrative comparison, is for education, what masturbation is for love: being alone with oneself.''[16] If they favor changes, computers do not educate because education takes different forms from a socio-cultural context to another. Referring to Jules Ferry, Jacquard noted in this exuberant conference presentation on the use of ICTs that ''the teacher teaches what he/she *is*, not what he/she *knows*, and the computer *is* not.'' And it is worth recalling in this regard the following premonitory verses of English poet, T. S. Eliot:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?[17]

In contexts where counter-powers remain effective against the Economic Power, as in Europe, the technical and instrumental dimension of the reform (employability, vocationalism ...) is relatively marginalized and in any case, subjected to the social and communicational dimension. As Andris Barblan showed, the BP is primarily in Europe the result of a negotiated approach among member countries. This approach, which this author identifies through four components, namely recognition, comparison, compatibility and commitment, focuses on the local context of each country and is ultimately aimed at developing mutual confidence (Barblan 2002:94). He notes that''The BP is nothing automatic since it relies both on the slow and gradual building of confidence and on the encouragement of innovative proposals around an open-ended definition, of what the future European HE area will be. (....) Members are free, however, to engage according to their own terms in the way of the common goal, although they subject themselves to the constraint that consists in using a defined set of common development tool'' (Barblan 2002:98).

Ultimately, the reform proposed to Africans, can benefit countries that are exporting it in all sorts of ways, except scientific. At a strictly scientific level, the interest of European universities is more in the capacities of their African counterparts to access originality and autonomy. The scientific autonomy is the condition of their ability to explore local realities and thus contribute to universal knowledge, rather than be confined in the role of poor emulators of knowledge produced elsewhere. The scientific challenge lies in the complementarity of different academic spaces, each having – as a consequence of the competition or for the sake the advancement of science – the comparative advantage which represents their own natural and social environment. The compatibility of university systems, if not synonym of mimetism, can only result in complementarity, itself only rendered possible by the greater autonomy of universities.

Although the problems of HE may be similar in their formulations (employability, access to universal knowledge, relationship to economy ...), there are as many variations as social contexts in the solutions to these problems. It should also be recalled that the ''BP'' is itself of Anglo-Saxon inspiration but that countries of this socio-cultural ensemble do not take their own model for a dogma. Their universities have great autonomy, altogether different, for example, from universities in the Mediterranean Europe. With the reform in its African version, the conditions of socialization of graduates, therefore of the African elite, are set outside the economic and cultural realities of the continent.[18]

This issue includes 9 contributions referring to different sub-regions: Along with an article dealing with the theme of the BP reform in Africa generally, the Maghreb, Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Cameroon, Botswana, and Congo are represented in it. All articles point to a deep gap between, on the one hand, the policy sphere, including political and academic officials and, on the other, grass-roots actors such as lecturers and students. The gap is large enough to be a major source of entropy for the academic field and the political field, both social forces eventually neutralizing each other. If states are nearly always able to impose reforms, those in charge of implementing them can empty them of any substance by keeping intact the practices that have been historically constructed. Moreover, one of the challenges of African countries is no doubt to fill this gap, which means reducing the terms of the domination of the political field over the scientific and social field in general.

All articles show there are dissensions everywhere between a reform targeting the development of professions in line with European contexts and means (educational outreach, industrial base, favorable scientific environment ...) and contexts of deprivation sagging under the rise of student numbers. Do students have the means to reach learning autonomy in situations faced by most African countries, marked by lack of documentation, difficulty to access the Internet, as well as poor living conditions? asked Bertrand Djouda Feudjio. In such conditions, it is therefore not surprising that students in particular perceive the reform ''only as another way of excluding the poor from higher education ...'' Under the obligation to ''adhere'' to the reform, academics on their part try to keep intact the teaching contents and methods (Benghabrit-Remaoun and Senoussi) while offloading part of programs implementation on the students, on the pretext of autonomy.

By excluding academic staffs and students, but also other social and economic operators, from participation in the building of institutions where they work or with which they may have to interact, the state relinquishes its role as agent and main supervisor of public policies on its own territory. The BP is inseparable from the policy of liberalization of markets and prepares or supports the alignment of African countries with the criteria of the GATS (Benchenna, Ghouati).

Notes

1 On average, Africa is far behind all other continents in terms of number of students enrolled in higher education. In 2007, the gross enrolment ratio by region is 6 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 11 in South and West Asia, 22 in Arab states, 24 in Central Asia, 26 in East Asia and the Pacific, 34 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 62 in Central and Eastern Europe and 70 in North America and Western Europe. The global average is 26. (UIS-UNESCO)!

2 In early 1980s, the process of globalization helped to give the ''civil society'' social autonomy, perceptible through the emergence of movements for democratization and liberalization, by weakening states which were less externalized and mostly over centralized and authoritarian.

3 Paradoxically, many African researchers have become consultants, offering their expertise, rarely put to use by African States, to various international NGOs and agencies.

4 See how the US program called ''Global Information Technology'' aimed to impose the US standards on the world in all matters relating to information and communication technologies.

5 The African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) was founded in 1968. It is comprised of Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Chad, Togo and Madagascar. Initially in charge of evaluating diplomas and managing the careers of academci staff, the prerogatives of CAMES were afterwards extended to permanent researchers working in various research structures.

6 Algeria unsuccessfully tried this approach in the late 1980s (Khelfaoui 1996).

7 Note that in terms of implementation of the ''LMD system'', Algeria has done more promptly than what the EU requests it to, and without formally adhering to the Bologna Process. This country had a similar conduct in the 1990s in terms of deregulation and financial and customs reforms, doing more than it is asked by IMF and WB, without signing agreement for the rescheduling of its debt or obtaining substantial aid. The ultimate aim of these policies is to disguise reforms as local initiatives, not imposed from abroad!

8 Like the Meeting of Rectors and Presidents from Maghreb Universities and the Francophone Conferences of the European Union, held in Marseille on 19-20 November 2004, and the one which brought together Rectors and Presidents of universities from twenty countries of sub-Saharan Africa in Yaoundé on 1-3 March 2005, organized by the University Agency for Francophonie (AUF)

9 Such as the Network for Excellence in Higher Education in West Africa (REESAO), founded in October 2005 in Lomé, which comprises about fifteen West African universities and institutes and whose mission is to work for the adoption of the LMD system by member institutions by 2011. In Central Africa, in a ''Declaration on the building of the CAEMC space of higher education, research, and vocational training'' dated on 11 February 2005 in Libreville, the Heads of states of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CAEMC) described the ''LMD'' as a factor of integration in the sub-region.

10 Thanks to stronger traditions of regional integration, universities in West and East Africa appear to be better prepared, compared to their North African counterparts, to consider the reform in a regional perspective, such as the European Union or other spheres. This is one of the ambitions of REESAO whose members, made up of university officials, seem to have finally adopted it.

11 In Algeria, opinions expressed in the print media by academics about the ''LMD'' are almost all hostile to its importation or, to say the least, the approach with which it is introduced.

12 Moreover, holders of the specialized postgraduate diploma demanded and obtained in January 2008 equivalence to the Professional Master. Introduced in 1998, the Specialized Postgraduation is a special one-year programme for company and public administration managers eager to improve their standard. It is the only fee-charging programme in the entire Algerian university system (University 2008:7).

13 See also in this issue the article by Benghabrit-Remaoun and Senoussi.

14 "I would also like to say to my colleagues that the Algerian university experimented in the 1970s a semi-modular, bi-annual system, with debts, prerequisites, etc. After ten years, it abandoned it due to its complexity, even though it used to receive only 150,000 students, while it is currently receiving over 740,000! That is why I confess my perplexity about the new LMD system. With 23,000 teachers, how to seriously consider the personalized tutoring of all students?" (AUF 2004: 55).

15 …and again, ICTs are greatly time-consuming when we consider that many people have become dependent on computers and gadgets they carry.

16 Televised conference, Chaîne Savoir, Canada, 2007.

17 In ''*Choruses from the Rock*'' (1934).

18 Issa Shivji thus deplores the influence of Eurocentric thinking in the African academia: "Everything that is European is considered as universal, everything non-European is, at best, described as multicultural, and at worst, as sectarian. Everything European is related to science, everything non-European is supernatural ..."(2005: 4).

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