

The Impact of French Colonial Ideology on Educational Institutions in Algeria and Tunisia

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Abstract

Algeria and Tunisia experience different post-colonial ideological and institutional realities albeit both being colonized by France. This paper seeks to understand why Algeria and Tunisia have different institutions and political circumstances by using path dependency, a historical institutionalist approach, which suggests the initial selection of an ideological option is reinforced overtime in policy and institutions. This paper found that Algeria experienced a failed assimilation due to the religious educational institutions selected and reproduced by Second Republic France, while Tunisia experienced a more successful colonial (and post-colonial) experience due to the secular educational institutions selected and reproduced by Third Republic France. This research demonstrates the lasting impacts of colonial ideologies and institutions on modern politics and ideological divides.

Introduction

The experience of colonialism in Algeria and Tunisia differs significantly despite both countries being colonized by the French in the 19th century; Algeria was colonized earlier and was eventually declared as a department of France, while Tunisia was colonized roughly 50 years later and remained a protectorate of France. Colonization in Tunisia ended through a negotiated settlement, whereas Algeria gained its independence through a bloody war of independence that raged for eight years. The differences, however, go further than just how French colonization began and ended in each country. Notably, the differences extend also to how the French governed in each country. In this paper, I examine how the French educational institutions differed in Algeria and Tunisia. I argue that the ideological difference in France at the

time of colonizing influenced the development of institutions, including the education system, and the current ideological trends.

Problem Statement

French secularism is embedded in Tunisian politics, impacting the pathway to democracy and political unity; however, Algeria has developed a form of anti-colonial political Islam. Albeit both countries being colonies of France, they have ended up with different institutions and different relationships to France. This paper seeks to understand how the ideology of the colon state, France, shapes the institutions of the colony, Algeria and Tunisia. Algeria was treated as an extension of France, leading to a settler colony model with assimilationist policies – and importantly pressures to ‘franciser’ by means of importing Catholicism. Tunisia was governed as a protectorate, allowing for more autonomy and the maintenance of existing local institutions. At the time of colonizing Algeria and Tunisia, the French Republic had fundamental ideological distinctions in terms of religiosity and colonial goals that influenced their actions within the colonies. The impact of metropole ideology on colonial administration provides insight into the broader patterns of colonial governance and post-colonial state building.

Literature Review

Given the question over how Algeria and Tunisia developed different political institutions and ideologies, this review is focused on education as an important institution, patterns and impacts of colonialism, and the relationships between secularism and education. The review spans from foundational works on comparative education to modern analysis on decolonization and the continuation of colonial systems. It is thematically organized to reflect these three

primary questions: What types of educational institutions exist? Why do different countries have different institutions? What are the approaches to secular versus religious education?

There is a recognized tripartite system of no religious instruction, confessional or denominational religious instruction, and non-confessional or non-denominational religious instruction.¹ In recent times, Liam Gearon notes that new paradigms of contemporary religious education have been developed including a socio-cultural and historical-political paradigm.² The primary problem within this recognized system is multi-religious communities. Post-apartheid South Africa, an example of a society with diverse religious and cultural beliefs, had mixed reactions toward the introduction of a multi-religious system.³ William Cummings suggests it is not helpful to analysis educational institution based on their ‘type,’ rather the focus should be on “educational outcomes” and on the core propositions of the educational institution.⁴ Two of the ten core propositions of the ‘institutions of education’ theory are 1) the concept of the ideal person and 2) that who/how/what is taught is based on the concept of the ideal person.⁵ In other words, the education system is reproducing the state’s ideal person, in language, ethics, and culture. The institution thus makes policy decisions based on this ideal person – for a colonial school, the colon would try to reproduce their ideal person by implementing their language, their curriculum, and their beliefs.

Similarly, in “The Effectiveness of Educational Systems in the Processes of Modernization” the authors look to social factors and specific educational factors of a state instead of the

¹ Liam Gearon, “The Paradigms of Contemporary Religious Education,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (2014): 52–81, 53.

² Liam Gearon, 71.

³ Liam Gearon, 54.

⁴ William K. Cummings, “The Institutions of Education: Compare, Compare, Compare!,” *Comparative Education Review* 43, no. 4 (November 1999): 413–37, <https://doi.org/10.1086/447578>, 422.

⁵ William K. Cummings, 425-428.

educational system ‘type’ to compare modernization efficacy.⁶ Educational systems and processes have been understood for a long time as means of “maintaining cultural continuity and of improving productivity.”⁷ Different countries have thus formed different educational institutions based on their cultural goals and needs. However, many articles suggested that external factors, such as colonialism and globalism, alter the development of educational institutions. Nicola Viegi notes that “present-day African institutions are often direct descendants of the colonial experience”⁸ and that “educational systems in colonial African were all implemented to sustain colonial rule.”⁹ To construct a colonial cultural hegemony, “educational systems occupied a central role”¹⁰ in enforcing economic and political domination, but also in continuing the imperial relationship with the colon by raising up an assimilated, educated elite class.¹¹

Alf Heggoy and Paul Zingg researched particularly into French education in revolutionary North Africa noting the assimilationist educational institution. Although the French colonial leaders made promises to not interfere with Islam, “the French inaugurated a conscious policy of cultural disrespect [...] which secular schools perpetuated.”¹² They argue the French had to “enforce their own righteously conceived set of educational norms” in order to maintain the superiority of the French system – enabling Muslim education to continue would question the

⁶ Lydia Aran, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Chaim Adler, “The Effectiveness of Educational Systems in the Processes of Modernization,” *Comparative Education Review* 16, no. 1 (February 1972): 30–43, <https://doi.org/10.1086/445567>, 36-37.

⁷ Lydia Aran, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Chaim Adler, 30.

⁸ Nicola Viegi, “The Economics of Decolonisation: Institutions, Education and Elite Formation,” *Theoria* 63, no. 147 (January 1, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.3167/th.2016.6314705>, 61.

⁹ Nicola Viegi, 64.

¹⁰ Nicola Viegi, 64.

¹¹ Nicola Viegi, 69.

¹² Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, “French Education in Revolutionary North Africa,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7, no. 4 (October 1976): 571–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743800024703>, 571.

dominion of the French.¹³ As French schooling was challenged by “liberal and radical Algerian politicians,”¹⁴ the French administrators adapted institutions to seem more attractive and available to the public reinforcing the colon desire to “protect his position.”¹⁵ Heggoy and Zingg conclude that these reforms nonetheless perpetuated “an anachronistic and oppressive system,” and real reform in the creation of a new educational institution could only be provided in the abolition of colonialism.¹⁶

David Kinsey recognized a similar, yet different, pattern of French colonial education in Tunisia. Here the French “tried to avoid direct interference with traditional Islamic education in the private sector” and created a Franco-arab model of schooling that was based on French curriculum with added Arabic study.¹⁷ The French policy garnered two split reactions, which perpetuate into modern politics: 1) ethnic Tunisians rejecting the imprint of French rule and 2) modern Tunisian neo-Destours supporting the Franco-Arab model, although still opposing the French protectorate.¹⁸ Like the Algerian example, “the basic concern of colonial leaders was political stability” and institutions were adapted in attempt to create more stability.¹⁹

Another external factor, less widely researched, is globalization. Martin Carnoy and Diana Rhoten argue “by ignoring differences in contextual capacity and culture at the national, regional, and local levels, globalization has resulted in some unintended and unexpected consequences for educational practice that in some cases have contributed to the deterioration of

¹³ Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, 572.

¹⁴ Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, 576.

¹⁵ Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, 578.

¹⁶ Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, 578.

¹⁷ David C. Kinsey, “Efforts for Educational Synthesis under Colonial Rule: Egypt and Tunisia,” *Comparative Education Review* 15, no. 2 (June 1971): 172–87, <https://doi.org/10.1086/445529>, 174.

¹⁸ David C. Kinsey, 181.

¹⁹ David C. Kinsey, 184.

quality even when the objective has been improvement.”²⁰ Ultimately these articles suggest that educational institutions are formed both to reflect cultural beliefs and goals for their ‘ideal person’ and out of pressure from external factors like colonialism and globalism.

The pedagogy and governance of educational institutions also often reflect religious ideologies. In the case of colonies, the curriculum and educational policies implemented reflect the religious alignment of the metropole, whether secular or religious, and typically reject that within the colony. Ratina Ghosh notes that “secularism is an ideology that requires separation of religion from the state (as well as other areas of public life) and does not necessarily mean exclusion of religion.”²¹ Secularism also involves the idea of equal rights and respect for all citizens including the right to education and to religious freedom. As secularism is an ideology, it has moral and political agendas which does “[define] the borders of free speech and will necessarily discriminate against those who hold traditional religious values.”²² In a religiously diverse community, it is difficult to apply either ideology. Fiachra Long writes similarly that “very often religious education finds itself caught in the middle between two versions of secularism, each basing itself on contrasting notions of ‘citizenship’. The first version sees religion as a socially divisive element and hopes for the day when all religions will disappear. The second sees social differences, including those animated by religious differences, as fundamental to a diverse society.”²³ Secular educational institutions can take either form of secularism – divisive and discriminatory, or accepting of diversity. Education is also the primary

²⁰ Martin Carnoy and Diana Rhoten, “What Does Globalization Mean for Educational Change? A Comparative Approach,” *Comparative Education Review* 46, no. 1 (2002): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3542019>, 6.

²¹ Ratina Ghosh, “EDUCATION IN SECULAR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES: The Challenge of Religious Diversity,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 40, no. 3/4 (2014): 86–101, 90.

²² Ratina Ghosh, 91.

²³ Fiachra Long, “Religious Education in a Secular SocietyL,” *The Furrow* 63, no. 12 (December 2012): 603–9, 603-604.

focus in the secularizing process of France. The Jules Ferry laws marked the first and greatest move towards secular institutions by reshaping the Church relations and religious curriculum in public schooling.

Research Methods

To shed light on why the French introduced distinct educational institutions in colonial Algeria and Tunisia, I adopt a historical institutionalist approach. This approach assumes that the initial state building (rules, constraints, institutions) has a sustained influence on policy and future institutions. Political scientists use this approach to answer questions about major political occurrences by seeking historical explanations centered on institutions. In this paper, I emphasize the importance of path dependency, one method of historical institutionalist inquiry, in the creation and maintenance of institutions over time. James Mahoney argues that “path dependence characterizes specifically those historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties.”²⁴

One form of path dependency is the self-reinforcing sequence which refers to “periods of institutional genesis [that] correspond to ‘critical junctures.’”²⁵ Critical junctions are adoptions of institutional arrangement from two or more alternatives, and once selected, are stably reproduced into the future through increasing legitimation. The development of the French protectorate in Algeria and Tunisia seem to fit this alignment best since there were alternative options for state and church relations which set into motion institutional patterns into post-colonial state building. Mahoney formulates a pathway to describe in the self-reinforcing sequence in terms of three time

²⁴ James Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 507–48, 507.

²⁵ James Mahoney, 513.

periods. Time 1 describes the initial conditions and the multiple options available for selection. Time 2 is the critical juncture where one option is favorably selected. Time 3 reflects the self-reinforcement of the selected option and its stable reproduction over time. I adopt this three-period model in my case study analysis of Algeria and Tunisia.

Findings

Background of secularism in France

Prior to the Third Republic in France, there were two major moments where the ecclesiastical government was challenged. Catholicism maintained supremacy over the State; however, these were the beginning movements towards secularism, or *laïcité*. The first was the 1789 Declaration of Rights of Man where rights were extended to Protestant civilians. Bulutgil writes, “the drafters [...] refused to include Catholicism as the state religion and made public office and civil rights available to Protestants.”²⁶ This Declaration expanded the reach of the state beyond that of Catholicism in France.

The Reign of Terror (1793-1794), following the creation of the First Republic, was the second challenge to the Catholic Church authority. The Terror marked a transformation of religious institutions. A part of the Terror was the emancipation from ‘fanatisme’ and a regeneration of old religious forms by means of purification. This challenged the ‘religious civil’ or the implicitly religious values of the nation. While this purification was enforced violently through the closing of religious buildings, “le culte de la Raison éternelle” developed out of it.²⁷ Feasts for the goddess of reason and other forms of revolutionary religiosity enabled

²⁶ H. Zeynep Bulutgil, “Comparative Historical Analysis I,” *The Origins of Secular Institutions*, March 3, 2022, 63–118, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197598443.003.0004>, 74.

²⁷ Jean Baubérot, “Histoire de La Laïcité Française,” *Que Sais-Je ?*, 2000, 17.

communities to gather around new common values. The rational turn of religious language continued into education, as the focus switched to education as an institution for training “free and happy” men rather than Christian men.²⁸

There was a concern, even among revolutionary secularists, that privatizing religion would harm morality and reach of the law. An important justification for the system of recognized religions is the preventative and encompassing role of religion. While law is limited to actions, “religion rules the heart” and links institutions to morality.²⁹ As it relates to education, removing forms of religious morality and values might inhibit the formation of moral, enlightened young men. According to Baubérot, the state needed to enforce an institutional fragmentation where the state produces a cultural perception independent of religion, a recognition of the social legitimacy and role of religion, and the pluralism of recognized religions in order to secularize the law.³⁰ This logic was able to reconcile elements of *laïcité* and ‘religion civil’ unsolved in the Revolution, yet there were naturally disputes throughout the 19th century about the ability to remove religious morality from the law.

After the end of the Terror in 1794, the more radical policies of dechristianization were overturned, but “the fundamental restructuring of the church- state relations and the secularization of the civil status of individuals remained valid.”³¹ Only after 1815 with the restoration of monarchy was there significant pushback against the secularizing reforms of the Terror.³² Under Charles X and his Restoration regime, reforms including the control of education were reversed and Catholic church influence was reinstated. A responsive ‘White Terror’ exiled

²⁸ Jean Baubérot, 15 – translation by author.

²⁹ Jean Baubérot, 28 – translation by author.

³⁰ Jean Baubérot, 29.

³¹ H. Zeynep Bulutgil, 80.

³² H. Zeynep Bulutgil, 80.

or killed thousands of anti-clerical proponents.³³ This was a significant delay in the secularizing process of France, and the strengthened relationship of Church and State flowed into the creation of the Second Republic.

While the 1848 revolution creating the Second Republic seemingly instituted a separation between the Church and the Republic, the Falloux law of 1850 maintained the weight of religion in education - teachers could be removed or transferred if they displeased the priest.³⁴ At the same time, Edgar Ouinet, among other secularists, advocated for the establishment of a secular school teaching union, peace, and civil harmony amidst the debates of beliefs and churches.³⁵ France invaded Algiers in 1830 and had completed their conquest of Algeria by 1875, instating a colonial administration rooted in the Second Republic ideology.

Entering the Third Republic, the establishment of the Jules Ferry laws in 1882 altered the direction of State and Church relations. Staunchly against any republicanized form of ‘religion civil,’ “Jules Ferry’s public education laws ended the dual public and religious education system as well as the role of religious actors in the public education.”³⁶ Primary school education “became free and obligatory and its curriculum emphasized scientific education and the teaching of French history from a republican perspective while excluding religious education or teaching by members of the clergy.”³⁷ By 1883, education curriculum also denoted a rupture of influence from the Catholic church: “You can go or not go to church, change your religion if you want, or even have none at all.”³⁸

³³ H. Zeynep Bulutgil, 81.

³⁴ Jean Baubérot, 43.

³⁵ Jean Baubérot, 43.

³⁶ H. Zeynep Bulutgil, 89.

³⁷ H. Zeynep Bulutgil, 89.

³⁸ Paul Bert, *L’instruction Civique à l’école*, 1883, 114 – translation by author.

This shift from a State subordinate to the Church to a State asserting its independence from the Church came out of the popular anti-clerical stance – claiming “Clericalism, that is the enemy.”³⁹ The Clerical party was seen as “[inspiring] and [directing] the imprudent fight against free institutions” and had worked to maintain the “immense influence” of the Church in education.⁴⁰ During this fight over clericalism, France invaded Tunisia and was made an official French protectorate.

Case study of Algeria

Time 1: Initial options for French institutions

The earliest colonial encroachments in Algeria began in the Second Republic and were centered about a fusion of races – “French military leaders [...] began calling for the propagation of French as the only sure means of winning native hearts and minds and even of paving the way for the ‘fusion of races.’”⁴¹ The fusion could only occur when both the French settler population and the native Algerians had “generally the same thoughts, the same affinities, the same repulsions, [and] the same way of looking at things.”⁴² Language was viewed as the “only means to transmit and exchange [such] thoughts and feeling” to the indigenous population.⁴³ The spread of language was used to cultivate assimilation and direct the establishment of institutions whether religious or secular.

³⁹ Jules Ferry, *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry*, vol. 3 (Paris: A. Colin & cie, 1893), 1 – translation by author.

⁴⁰ Jules Ferry, 1 – translation by author.

⁴¹ Janet Horne, ““To Spread the French Language Is to Extend the Patrie”,” *French Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 95–127, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-3686068>, 99.

⁴² Janet Horne, 100.

⁴³ Janet Horne, 100.

Time 2: Religious institutions favored

Religious institutions were favored in Algeria due to the Second Republic orientations with Catholicism. France was too occupied with the nascent secularization movement within the metropole to develop secular education in the colonies: “In 1830, France was itself experiences a crisis relating to education. The French therefore had too much to do in order to reform education, secularize it, extract it from the domination of the church to think of extending or developing education abroad.”⁴⁴ While there were renewed questions of the relationship between the Church and the State during the Second Republic, “France was, and remained, Catholic in most parts of the world” and this contributed to the cultural and institutional construction of the French empire into the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Part of the argument behind the continuation of Catholic schooling in the colonies while the metropole was secularizing during this period can be linked to a desire to ‘make up for’ lost Catholic influence. Colonialism in Algeria was in some ways an exportation of religious institutions and education. In France, the Church seemed to have “lost the monopoly on education” and now had the possibility of “making up, on the other side of the Mediterranean, the ground it had lost in France.”⁴⁶

Time 3: Reinforcing religious selection

The path dependent selection of religious institutions due to the Second Republic context was reinforced with the destruction of prior Algerian schools and poor results of assimilation attempts. Rather than improving Islam-oriented Algerian infrastructure including school systems

⁴⁴ Abderrazak Bannour, “Aperçu Sur l’enseignement Du Français En Tunisie de 1830 à 1883,” *Documents Pour l’histoire Du Français Langue Étrangère Ou Seconde*, no. 27 (December 1, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.4000/dhfles.2604>, section 2 – translation by author.

⁴⁵ Janet Horne, 100.

⁴⁶ Abderrazak Bannour, section 6 – translation by author.

or at least integrating them, as demonstrated later in Tunisia, the French “destroyed them violently, or let them perish, by design, or by ignorance.”⁴⁷ They were ignorant to the desires of the indigenous population for Islamic education and Arabic language instruction, deciding instead to establish Catholic education and French language instruction. As a result, there were low enrollment rates from Muslim Arab populations in Algeria and contentious relationships between the French settlers and indigenous groups.

Case study of Tunisia

Time 1: Initial options for French institutions

When Tunisia was not yet a protectorate, Catholic missionaries began to build schools and promote Catholicism, reflecting the actions taking place in colonial Algeria and the ideology at home in Second Republic France. In 1893, the French colonial mission was still to impose Catholicism as colonialists believed that missionaries would show Algerian populations that France “was coming, cross in hand, to give everyone the benefits of Christian civilization.”⁴⁸ Catholicism was the primary instrument for establishing respect and veneration for the incoming French settlers and empire. However, the dialogue changed leading up to the installment of the French protectorate in Tunisia: it was argued that education “through the benefits of charity and not through conversion to Catholicism” would attract love and sympathy for France.⁴⁹ At this point, institutions still displayed Catholic beliefs yet were explicitly not for conversion purposes.

France wanted to maintain the status quo within Tunisia (including respecting religious identity) yet ‘franciser’ the Tunisian population through French language instruction and

⁴⁷ Janet Horne, 108.

⁴⁸ François Bournand, *Tunisie et Tunisiens*, 1893, xiv – translation by author.

⁴⁹ François Bournand, 262 – translation by author.

professional training for public and private companies. There were discussions of assimilation akin to that pursued in Algeria, and the establishment of religious educational institutions was still a debated option. Many colonialists, having learned from the failed Algerian experience, understood that “[they could not] count on religion to effect this assimilation” since the Tunisians “[would] never convert to Christianity.”⁵⁰

Another complexity to the French protectorate in Tunisia is the diverse population of both indigenous groups and settler groups. Horne writes, “the intricate weave of nineteenth-century Tunisian society had been deeply impacted by centuries of migration and constant mobility and exchange among various peoples of the Mediterranean basin. Tunisia, as Julia Clancy-Smith put it, was a crossroads where ‘empires meet,’ a space of British, French, Ottoman, and Italian rivalries.”⁵¹ Not only did the French protectorate need to create institutions that met the needs of a diverse group of Tunisians, but the French also had to decide how to rule and instruct the other European settlers, many of whom were political rivals.

Time 2: Secular institutions favored

By 1889, French secular schooling exploded in the colonies, and it was clear the protectorate had selected to establish secular institutions in Tunisia. This undoubtedly occurred due to the Ferry laws that were passed just seven years prior, but also was a reaction to the mistakes made in Algeria as a result of their religious assimilationist institutions. Along with creating free, obligatory, secular education in France, Ferry and Jusserand developed ideas for schools in Tunisia. Jusserand suggested “continuing financial support for French congregational schools

⁵⁰ Nouredine Sraieb, “L’idéologie de l’école En Tunisie Coloniale (1881-1945),” *Revue Du Monde Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 68, no. 1 (1993): 239–54, <https://doi.org/10.3406/remmm.1993.2570>, 241 – translation by author.

⁵¹ Janet Horne, 104.

[to] help establish a more unified and ultimately ‘French’ settler community.”⁵² Congregational schools could act as a cultural melding agent for a new trans-European settler community strongly identified with the French metropole. There was no motive to alter from religious forms of instruction due to their popularity among French and other European settlers; however, a form of French schooling needed to be developed to achieve the goal to ‘franciser’ the Arab population.

When Tunisia officially became a protectorate of France, the dialogue shifted to the *reorganization* of Tunisia. As mentioned above, the Catholic schools were maintained to cater to the European settler populations, but similarly the Arab kouttab system was integrated into French colonial education. The colonial authorities wanted to “maintain the fiction of Tunisian sovereignty” and “give the illusion of protecting, even safeguarding, the Tunisian cultural identity” by taking seemingly lenient positions on religion and customs.⁵³ With some disputes, Franco-Arab schools were created to instruct both settler and indigenous populations in French language, Arab language, and standard subjects from a secular, republican perspective while enabling independent Koranic instruction. The Franco-Arabe schools were in line with Third Republic secular ideologies and overturned some of the failures in Algeria. France decided to take a religiously lenient approach in the Tunisian educational field, learning from the lost time, confidence, and legitimacy in Algeria.

If Republican France had learned the errors of its way in educating its people, then colonizing France “seems to have learned a lot from the Algerian experience, the time and confidence that she lost there, and first in the academic field.”⁵⁴ The dismantling of Algeria’s

⁵² Janet Horne, 109.

⁵³ Nouredine Sraieb, 247.

⁵⁴ Patrick Cabanel, “L’école Laïque Française En Tunisie (1881-1914) : La Double Utopie,” *La Tunisie Mosaïque*, 2000, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pumi.5006>, section 15 – translation by author.

Muslim schools was proven to be disastrous for French-Algerian relations and detrimental to educational efforts; Tunisia, by contrast, was seen as “a site of regeneration for the empire” and an opportunity to rectify mistakes.⁵⁵ To avoid ignorance and low enrollment from indigenous populations, which demonstrated a rejection of French colonial institutions in Algeria, the settlers mixed French and Tunisian populations and used both French and Arabic instruction in schools.⁵⁶ Language was prioritized over religious instruction with primary aims to civilize, ‘franciser,’ rather than christianize.

These leniencies towards religious instruction arose out of a desire to be accepted by the Tunisian populations and out of a sort of ambivalence towards the French Protectorate in Tunisia. Due to French control in Algeria, there was less pressure or direction for the French in Tunisia causing the Protectorate to be less costly to the French and less encroaching on the indigenous population. The Protectorate was established “to prevent the British or Italians from gaining control of the country and to remove the remaining obstacles to the expansion of European, particularly French, investment.”⁵⁷ There was no need for another settler colony in North Africa, so the goals for ‘fusion of races’ present in Algeria (which included a greater emphasis on religion) were not discussed with Tunisia. The institutions were established ultimately based on cost-benefit to the French – they were designed to “provide the most favorable environment for French economic activity at the least cost to France.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Janet Horne, 106.

⁵⁶ Nouredine Sraieb, 244.

⁵⁷ Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1820-1980*, December 31, 1987, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400859023>, 151.

⁵⁸ Lisa Anderson, 151.

Time 3: Reinforcing secular selection

The reinforced selection of secular institutions is evident through the coexistence of laïcité and Islamic practices, contrary to the direction of the Ferry laws. The French approach in Tunisia included the ancient Ottoman systems and integrated local cultures - being inclusionary to Islam rather than exclusionary as laïcité was to Catholicism in France. Instead of abolishing over 500 Arab schools in Tunisia, the French preferred to “integrate, and integrate thus, very officially, a religious education in public schools, contrary to the letter and spirit of the Ferry laws.”⁵⁹ The French government had no plans to disturb the kouttab teaching, and believed rather in a “resurgence, in its republican version, educational and editorial, [of] the ancient dream of an Arab Kingdom in a French direction” in Tunisia.⁶⁰ Laïcité policies even protected the practice of Islam in Tunisia by creating a neutral zone that preserved “the autonomy of beliefs and religious practices in the private domain alone.”⁶¹

Conclusion

The difference in educational institutions and modern ideological preferences between Algeria and Tunisia reflect the divergent ideologies of Second Republic and Third Republic France. In Algeria French policies initially favored religious institutions aligning with the Catholic-oriented Second Republic, but they encountered resistance from the indigenous population, who wanted Islamic and Arabic language instruction, leading to a failure in educational assimilation efforts. Conversely, in Tunisia, France took a more lenient approach,

⁵⁹ Patrick Cabanel, section 28 – translated by author.

⁶⁰ Patrick Cabanel, section 25 – translated by author.

⁶¹ Émilie Pontanier, “Laïcité Du Système Scolaire Français En Tunisie: Autonomie Culturelle Ou Abstention Religieuse?,” *Social Compass* 58, no. 2 (June 2011): 247–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768611402616>, 251 – translated by author.

integrating Islamic education into secular schools and avoiding the problems experienced in Algeria. This approach in Tunisia reinforced the Ferry laws and secularizing movement occurring in Third Republic France, but did so with greater cultural sensitivity, balancing French economic and political interests with the preservation of local institutions and religious preferences.

The two path dependent case studies reflect initial French colonial state building (including institutions and religious alignment) has a sustained influence on policy and future institutions. Although the Ferry laws were written and enforced while Algeria was still a French colony, the initial religious selection inhibited the adaptation of the secular Ferry laws in Algeria. Though this paper was limited to analyzing the continuation of educational institutions within the colonial period, and only briefly mentioned the post-colonial relationships with religious, secular, and colonial institutions, French colonial state building continues to influence policy and institutions in Algeria and Tunisia.

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