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Pilgrimage for Knowledge in Christian Lands: Moroccan Students in Nineteenth-Century Italy

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Abstract: This article deals with the impact of Morocco's educational initiative in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where select youths were sent to study in Europe, particularly in Italy. Initiated by Sultan Moulay Hassan, this program aimed to modernize Morocco by equipping students with foreign language proficiency and scientific knowledge. The graduates' return stirred mixed responses: they were valued for practical skills in the Makhzen system, yet faced suspicion and hostility from the conservative elite fearing a challenge to traditional values and power structures. The article explores how this education served as both a tool for social mobility and a source of ideological division, leading to the exclusion of some of these individuals from local elites.

Keywords: Educational Reform in Morocco, 19th and 20th Century Moroccan Education, Sultan's Reformist Vision, Orthodoxy Versus Modernism, European Education as Reform.

The Initiatives of Sultan Moulay Hassan I: Fostering Moroccan Education in 19th-Century Europe

In the latter half of the 19th century, subsequent to the Moroccan army's defeats by the French in the Battle of Isly in 1844 and by the Spaniards during the conquest of Tetuan in 1859, Sultan Moulay Hassan I became convinced of the urgent need for introducing reforms and modernizing the country.

He dispatched a score of ambassadors to Europe to establish political and commercial treaties[1] and several expeditions of young students to be educated in European institutions.[2] Groups of young Moroccans were dispatched to Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.[3] The first

[1]. On Moroccan ambassadors to Europe during Moulay Hassan's reign, see ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Tāzī, *At-tārīkh al-diblūmāsī li-l-Maghrib*, vol. 10, Alawit Period, vol. 2 (Mohamedia: Imprimerie de Fedala, 1986) and Bahīja Sīmū, *Al-ʿAlāqāt al-Maghribiyya al-ʾĪṭāliyya, 1869-1912* (al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ: Manshūrāt al-lajna al-Maghribiyya li al-Tārīkh al-ʿAskarī, 2003).

[2]. It is worth noting that in 1815, a group of Iranian students travelled to London to study modern sciences. Over the next four years, they immersed themselves in their studies and the London metropolis's entertainment. Their experience is discussed in Nile Green's *The Love of Strangers: What Six Muslim Students Learned in Jane Austen's London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). In 1826, Egypt sent a contingent of students to study in Paris. On these students see Ian Coller's *Arab France Islam and the Making of Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) and Ed de Moor's "Egyptian Love In A Cold Climate: Egyptian students in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century," in *The Middle East and Europe: Encounters and Exchanges*, eds. Geert Jan van Gelder and Ed de Moor (Amsterdam: Rodin, 1992), 147-66.

[3]. On Moroccan students in 19th and early 20th century Europe, see Jacques Caillé, "Les Marocains à L'École du Génie de Montpellier (1885-1888)," *Hespéris* XLI, 1er-2ème trimestres (1954): 131-45 and

group went to Italy in 1876 and included only three students. The number increased to twelve students in 1884 and doubled to 24 students in 1887-1888.

What is interesting about Italy is that the number of students kept increasing; they stayed longer periods in Italy than the groups that went to other European countries, and while France and Britain were reluctant to receive more students,[4] Italy continued to receive them. Equally important is that the Moroccans who studied in Italy left extensive archival sources in the form of letters as well as autobiographies: the memoir of Al Hussein Zaari, edited by Ahmed Maaninou as "Mudakirat Ṭalib Maghribi Ursila fi Baa'tha Maghribiya ilā Iṭāliyā,"[5] "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni: Etudiant en Italie 1887-1899," written originally in French,[6] and the memoir of Mohamed Ali Ben Touja Rbaṭi.[7]

The establishment of the first group of students in Italy occurred in 1876. It consisted of three youths: Al Moukhtar Boukhari Raghay, Abdeslam Inouch, and Mohamed Bennani al Fassi.[8] They studied at the International Academy in Turin for seven years, until 1882. A letter from the Moroccan Foreign Affair Minister, Mohamed Bargash, to Moulay Hassan affirms that "the three students who had been studying in Italy… have learned what they had been sent to learn and have returned with a great degree and an attestation of the fulfillment of what was required of them and each one of them excels more than the other in a particular art."[9] Delighted with this success, Moulay Hassan gifted a gilded dagger to the school's director as a token of his appreciation.[10]

The positive outcome of the initial venture prompted Moulay Hassan to send more student expeditions. A royal letter dating 1st March, 1882 instructs Mohamed Bargash to contact with all speed the European consuls in

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Jamāl Ḥīmr, *Al-Baʿathāt al-taʾlīmiyya fī ʿahd al-Sulṭān Mawlāy al-Ḥasan* (al-Ribāṭ: Manshūrāt al-Zaman, 2015).

4. Khalid Ben Srhir observes that "the student groups to Britain did not continue and were not renewed as was the case with those sent to the other European countries." *Britain and Morocco during the Embassy of John Drummond Hay, 1845-1886* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 261.

5. ʾAḥmad Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib Maghribī ʾursīla fī Biʿtha Maghribiyya ʾilā ʾĪṭālyā Mundhu thamānīn sana," *Daʿwat al-Ḥaq* 113 (November 1968), https://www.habous.gov.ma/daouat-alhaq/item/2668.

6. ʾAḥmad Djeblī El ʿAydūnī, "Mémoires de Mūlāy ʾAḥmad Djeblī El ʿAydūnī: Etudiant en Italie 1887-1899," in Muṣṭafā Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya bi-l-Maghrib: 1863-1894* (al-Ribāṭ: Al-Maṭbaʿa al-Malakiyya, 1984), 1387-92.

7. See ʾAḥmad Maʿnīnū, "al-Qāʾid Muḥammad ʿAlī ʾibn Tohat Rbāṭī fī ʿahd al-Ḥasan al-ʾawwal wa ʿuḍw al-Biʿtha al-ʿilmiyya at-thaniya li-ʾĪṭālyā ʿām 1887," *Daʿwat al-Ḥaq* 275 (November 1968), https://www.habous.gov.ma/daouat-alhaq/item/7182.

8. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʾIbn Zaydān, *al-ʿIzz wa-Ṣawla*, vol. 2 (al-Ribāṭ: Al-Maṭbaʿa al-waṭaniyya, 1962), 150. At the time Morocco dispatched three students to five countries, Spain, France, Britain, Italy, and Germany. All their names are recorded in ʾIbn Zaydān, *al-ʿIzz wa-Ṣawla*, vol. 2, 150-1.

9. See Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*, 1354.

10. Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*, 1354.

Tangier to inform them of his intention to send more students to study in Europe:

> "it is necessary for us to consider appointing individuals who are skilled in navigation, engineering, and maritime knowledge. They are to be divided among the captains of English, French, Spanish, German, and Italian ships, with a total of six individuals for each nationality. Among the six mentioned, two will be specifically learning navigation and engineering in schools dedicated to these subjects within each nationality, while the other four will be devoted to learning maritime sciences. These are the ones who will be divided among the captains. All their expenses will be at the charge of the Makhzen. The ultimate purpose is that they gain knowledge."[11]

The Sultan concludes his letter by urging Bargash to engage in speedy negotiations with the representatives of the European powers on this issue and inform him of the outcome.

Britain quickly declined the Sultan's request. John Drummond Hay, writes Khalid Ben Srhir, apologized that his government could not accede to this request on the grounds that allowing foreign naval personnel to train on ships belonging to Her Britannic Majesty's fleet was in breach of British legislation.[12] While the English were reluctant to receive new Moroccan students, we learn that in 1884 a contingent of 15 students landed in Italy.[13] The following year more students were considered. A letter from Moulay Hassan to Hajj Mohamed bin Said Al Salawi, dated 5 November, 1886, stated:

> "Furthermore, the Italian ambassador informed me that the twelve students from the people of Rabat and Salé did not show aptitude for learning due to their old age. Therefore, we requested him to send his deputy to you to select four children of the most brilliant from the people of Salé, aged between twelve and thirteen. If he sends him to you, we command you to bring a number of them from the mentioned age group for him to choose the four. Once he selects them, keep them under your supervision and provide us with their names so we can give you further instructions. We have also written to the

[11]. Letter from Mūlāy Ḥasan to Muḥammad Bargāsh, dated 10 Rajab, 1299 (27 May, 1882), in Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib."
[12]. Ben Srhir, *Britain and Morocco*, 262.
[13]. Khalid Ben Srhir, "*Al-Baʿathāt aṭ-ṭullābiyya*" in *Maʿlamat al-Maghrib*, vol. 4 (al-Ribāṭ: Manshūrāt al-Jamʿiyya al-Maghribiyya li-taʾlīf wa-tarjama wa-nashr, 1991), 1279.

governor of Rabat to bring a number of the most brilliant children there within the mentioned age group for him to choose six from."[14]

This quote exemplifies the Sultan's forward-thinking and commitment to educating his people. The insistence on sending young and "brilliant" children abroad for their education indicates a strategic vision for the future of Morocco. He recognizes the benefits that an educated populace, particularly those trained in the modern institutions of Europe, could bring to his kingdom.

The Sultan's hands-on involvement in the process—carefully selecting students based on their age and intellectual prowess, ensuring they are placed under supervision, and keeping track of their progress—indicates his personal commitment to this cause. This is not an aloof ruler leaving such matters to subordinates. Instead, he is an engaged and invested leader, cognizant of the powerful tool that education represents and determined to wield it to ensure his nation's progress. In essence, this passage gives a glimpse of a Sultan who was not only a ruler but also a visionary educationist, fully aware of the transformative power of learning.

The Dialectic Process: Struggles of Educational Reform and Concerns of Acculturation

Building on the commitment of the Sultan towards education, this section analyzes the mechanics of how this educational vision was actualized. The process of executing this grand plan was marked by meticulous care, significant expenses, and involved strategic collaborations with foreign entities. Here, we explore the selection process, the financial responsibilities undertaken by the Makhzen, and the initial language programs instituted to prepare students for their European sojourn. It also takes a glimpse at the challenges encountered, including underperforming students, and the Sultan's uncompromising stance on high standards and academic achievement.

The expedition started with choosing suitable students. They were consistently chosen from urban centers, mainly Tangier, Fez, Mekess, Tetuan, Salé, Rabat, and Larache. The *Makhzen* took meticulous care in the selection process, often involving foreign consuls. For instance, during the second study expedition to Italy in 1887-1888, Gentile Giantelle, the dragoman at the Italian Consulate in Tangier, and the representative of Ambassador Stefano Scovasso himself was involved in the process. He traveled to various Moroccan cities to select eligible students, ensuring their potential success.[15] The group consisted of 24 young men between 13-16 old who were chosen

[14]. Muḥammad al-Manūnī, *Maẓāhir yaqaḍat al-Maghrib al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 1 (al-Ribāṭ: Maṭbaʿat al-ʾUmniya, 1973), 144.
[15]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib."

from urban cities: 10 students from Rabat, 5 from Salé, 4 from Larache, 3 from Tangier, and 2 from Fez.

While the students Egypt sent to French schools were mostly from families associated with government authorities,[16] the Moroccan students came from ordinary backgrounds. These students experienced a remarkable transition from the social margins to the center of European culture, moving from a traditional society to being exposed to the wonders of modern and advanced civilization.

The *Makhzen* took charge of all the expenses. A letter from the Sultan to his representative in Tangier, Mohamed Ben Larbi Torres, dated 3 January 1888 states that:

> "The fees (*muratab*) requested by the Italian consul for the fifteen students annually was 37 thousand pesetas, 2500 pesetas for each one, in addition to the payment for the trip from Genoa to Turin, the place of their study." The sultan ordered the payment to be speedily made so that the students would not be delayed in their studies, requesting Ahmed Ben Larbi Torres to add extra money to the students "for little expenses for themselves."[17]

Each educational expedition started with an initial linguistic study program in Tangier which sometimes took several years. Occasionally, the learning was not successful. A Letter from the Sultan states that "a group of students from Salé and Rabat have been studying French and Italian for seven years in Tangier at the hand of two Jews from the city, but no result appeared on any of them. Consequently, we order you to send them back to their cities… and we have ordered the suspension of their funding and of the two Jews who were instructing them."[18]

New language instructors had to be recruited, and intensive instruction in foreign languages continued in Tangier. A document in 1895 mentions that "there was in Tangier an Italian teacher who was appointed to teach the Italian language, and who was to receive 150 pesetas from the port customs as a monthly salary for his teaching." The document adds that the location where the Italian teacher used to provide instruction in the Italian language came to be referred to as *madrasat at-talyan*, "the Italian school."[19] Indeed, 19th-century Tangier was evolving into a thriving hub for learning foreign languages in Morocco, a veritable cosmopolitan city.

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16. Coller, *Arab France*, 168.
17. Sīmū, *Al-ʿAlāqāt*, 409.
18. Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*, 1339.
19. Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*, 1339.

At times, the performance of some students fell short of expectations, necessitating their dismissal and return home as is evident in a royal letter dated 1900 from Sultan Moulay Abdelaziz, Moulay Hassan's successor, who ordered "the sending of two students to Italy… while the other seven to be returned back to their homes" because of their unsatisfactory achievement.[20]

Following the account of the Sultan's effort to implement his educational vision, it is significant to note the trials and triumphs that came with such an endeavor. As the students were immersed in these foreign cultures, their young age, preferred by Gentile Giantelle, naivety, and susceptibility to influences beyond their traditional values posed a unique challenge as revealed in a letter from the Sultan to Torres, dated 13 October 1900:

> "We have learned that the two boys who went to Italy for education are young and unable to distinguish between what is harmful and beneficial. They may be influenced by non-Islamic practices, and their hearts may be inclined towards them because of their emptiness. And when they come back, it will be difficult to eradicate those influences. It was necessary to be aware of such matters and provide guidance to protect their faith. Therefore, we urge you to consider how to rectify this situation by appointing someone suitable to accompany them and prevent them from engaging in activities that corrupt their beliefs and discourage them from abandoning Islamic rituals such as prayer and fasting during their stay."[21]

The students singled out in the letter were siblings from Tangier, namely Moukhtar and Sadiq Tounsi. In 1907, following a three-year educational sojourn in Italy, the Sultan was informed of their successful progress by the Italian consul, emphasizing that, "they have moved to the third level of their education and needed a fourth one to complete what they had been sent for and that an engineer has been assigned specially to teach them at the expense of the school." Notably, it emerged that these two brothers hailed from an underprivileged background. This detail underscores the Sultan's merit-based approach to selecting students for these opportunities, an aspect that diverged from the norm of prioritizing individuals from the elite. The Sultan also extended assistance to their impoverished parents.

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[20]. See Yaḥyā Būlaḥya, *Al-Biʿthāt al-taʿlīmiya fī-l-Yābān wa-l-Maghrib: Min ʾarbaʿīniyāt al-Qarn al-tāsiʿ ʿashar ʾilā ʾarbaʿīniyāt al-qarn al-ʿishrīn* (Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2016), and Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*.
[21]. Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*, 1360.

Another letter from the Sultan to Torres dated 3 December 1887, refers to the arrival in Tangier of the students chosen from Rabat, Salé, and Larach to study in Italy. They would be accompanied by a former Moroccan graduate from Italy who "was eloquent in the Italian language, smart and of a good character, to translate for them and help them."[22]

Moroccan Students at Turin Military Academy

Having shed light on the Sultan's transformative and merit-based approach to education, it becomes crucial to mention the experiences of these students themselves. This transition provides a firsthand perspective of this educational experiment's outcomes. A particularly illustrative account is offered by Hussein Zaari, a Moroccan student who had the opportunity to study in Italy. His travelogue speaks about the lived experiences of these pioneers in European education.

Al Hussein Zaari writes in his autobiography that after being chosen to study in Italy, he traveled to Tangier in September 1888. He stayed there together with other students for 18 days waiting for their clothes to be prepared for them. Then they boarded the Italian battleship *Dandolo*[23] for Genoa where the schoolmaster, Senior Agostino De Grossi, received the Moroccan students. They spent the night at a hotel in Genoa and the following day took the train to Turin. On the way from the train station to the school, the passersby stopped and gazed curiously at the Moroccans. "Our passage from the station to the school," Zaari recalls, "attracted full attention, especially since we were still dressed in the traditional Moroccan attire (the caftan enclosed within the melifa robe) that we had donned in Tangier."[24]

On arrival at the school, Zaari's narrative reads that the Moroccan students were received by the teachers and students, and welcoming celebrations were organized. Al Aydouni, another Moroccan student and author of an autobiography about his experience in Italy, states that "celebrations were held in various classes in honour of our arrival. These abundant joyful events were mixed with the excitement of watching the Moroccan children."[25]

Three students, Moukhtar Zaari, Mohamed Bennani, and Abdeslam Ben Gilani, sent a letter to Bargash, explaining their reception by the Italian General and pleading for a reward "for the General, his deputy, the colonel, and the Minister of Defense for what they have done for us, for the sake of

22. Būshaʿra, *Al-ʾIstiṭān wa-l-Ḥimāya*, 1355.
23. Italaina ship is called *Enrico Dandolo.*
24. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib."
25. El ʿAydūnī, "Mémoires," 1389.

our master."[26] The three Moroccan students explain that in the college the General assigned the Moroccan students a special cook "treated us with utmost respect and kindness and provided us with halal meat, and we are an abundance of blessing. All praise be to God."[27] The letter must have relieved the Sultan of his anxieties about the faith and scholarly achievement of the Moroccan students.

Zaari states that the name of the school was Instituto Internazionale Italiano and that its motto was "Frate Exaovenis,"[28] which he explains as international brotherhood. Zaari describes the school as being square, with its lower floor containing the study rooms and a dome at the entrance that rises above a spacious hall for receiving people, and another spacious hall for students to sit during break time. The upper floor comprises wooden rooms which serve as dormitories for foreign boarding students.[29]

At the Instituto Internazionale Italiano, the Moroccan students had the opportunity to be acquainted with international students. During their time there, they had the opportunity to meet several young men hailing from South America, Russia, Germany, France, and Egypt. Additionally, they were joined by the Ethiopian mission dispatched by King Liqawus Menelik. A delegation from the Balkan nations was also present, which included the nephew of the King of Montenegro. This family maintained connections with the ruling dynasty, as the heir to the Italian throne had married Princess Helene, the daughter of the King of Montenegro. Furthermore, at this institution, Moroccan students became acquainted with His Highness Prince Ahmed Fouad, the Crown Prince.[30]

This international aspect is also emphasized by Al Aydouni, who mentioned more nationalities, stating enthusiastically, "We found ourselves surrounded by students from Bulgaria, Armenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Japan, Egypt, and especially Ethiopia. At the same time, several princes were present: Prince Ahmed Fouad, the current king of Egypt, and Prince of Montenegro, the brother of the current Queen of Italy."[31]

Interestingly, Moroccan students who mainly came from disadvantaged social backgrounds found themselves attending highly

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[26]. "We entered the school of the Italian Makhzen, the place where the commanders of the Italian army are graduated. They welcomed us delightfully. We entered in the presence of their General, the highest commander of the army, who was extremely joyful to receive us and assigned six instructors to teach us, and he was overjoyed with us. We were ranked highly and shown more affection than the mind can comprehend. We wore their military uniform and we were extremely happy and thankful to God" (Quoted in Sīmū, *Al-ʿAlāqāt*, 405-6).
[27]. Sīmū, *Al-ʿAlāqāt*, 405-6
[28]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 125.
[29]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 125.
[30]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 125.
[31]. El ʿAydūnī, "Mémoires," 1389.

prestigious schools, alongside classmates who were royal princes and students from aristocratic families.

At first, the Moroccans learned Arabic at the hand of a Lebanese teacher named Don Marcos, then they were taught the Italian language by an Italian teacher for three years. "We learned the Italian language and spoke it fluently." Al Aydouni threw himself headlong into the opportunities and challenges that the Italian academic institutions offered. Zaari states that in the third year, following an order from the Sultan, the group was divided into three groups, each specializing in a particular discipline: soldier education, maritime sciences, and weapon manufacturing.[32]

While Zaari and Al Aydouni made significant progress, occasionally, students underperformed and the Makhzen requested their prompt return to avoid any further expenses. Concerning the expedition of 1887-1888, two letters one dated 15 April 1889 and the other 4 May 1889 were sent from the Italian deputy Minister to the Moroccan Foreign Minister, Mohamed Gharnit, regarding some Moroccan students studying at the Royal Military Academy of Turin. Their achievement was not satisfactory but he proposed deferring any decision regarding their case until after they have completed their exams and their educational requirements have been evaluated. In response to this suggestion, the *Makhzen* stated: "If this examination shows that some of them have not learned as required and have proven to be unsuitable for education, please provide us with their names promptly so that the esteemed authority, may God grant it victory, can arrange for their return to their homeland and replace them with those who are more intellectually capable."[33]

The Sultan received regular updates on the students' well-being and their progress and provided instructions and guidance on how to proceed. His personal involvement demonstrated his commitment and dedication to the students' academic success and their overall well-being.

Meeting the Moroccan Ambassador

In his travel narrative, Zaari states that in 1892 an envoy from Morocco came to Italy, led by Abdel Salam Barchid Chaoui. They carried valuable presents to the Italian monarch, consisting of exquisite Moroccan gold and silver handicrafts. Zaari affirms that the gifts were covered by the Italian newspapers, which also reported on the precious gifts that the Italian King gave to Abdel Salam Barchid Chaoui for Sultan Moulay Hassan. Zaari also states that the school director told the Moroccan students "that the emperor removed a ring from his finger and gave it to Mr. Abdel Salam

[32]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 126.
[33]. Būlaḥya, *Al-Biʿthāt al-taʿlīmiya*, 459.

Barchid Chaoui, saying, 'Place this on the finger of His Majesty the King of Morocco, as a symbol of the love and friendship between us."[34]

After his interview with the King of Italy, ambassador Barchid Chaoui visited the Italian cities. On arrival in Milan, he contacted the school director requesting to see Moroccan students. Zaari autobiography states, "The next day we boarded the train, accompanied by the director and the Arabic language teacher, Mr. Marx." The reception took place at a luxurious hotel in Piazza del Duomo where a magnificent banquet was held for the Moroccan students. "Before parting ways, we were each presented with a golden Louis. We returned to our duties, and Mr. Abdel Salam traveled to Germany."[35] The ambassador's warm reception and generous treatment of the Moroccan students in Italy further highlight the Sultan's genuine interest and care for the students, as well as his unwavering commitment to the study abroad project.

Italy's Strategic Embrace of the Moroccan Students

Because travel expenses were very high, Moroccan students stayed for years without ever returning home to see their families. They spent their holidays in Italy, "in the area of Gavour near the Alps, towards Monferrato. We would always wander and explore the regions, ascending the snow-covered mountain peaks." During these summer excursions, the Moroccan students were granted permission to visit restricted military areas. In his autobiographical travelogue, Zaari confesses that they seized the opportunity to explore the secret fortifications situated along the Italian-French border. Access to these fortresses was restricted even to Italian nationals; however, they received special permission to enter. Consequently, they were able to wander through and examine the architectural and defensive strategies employed. The Colonel responsible for their escort conveyed his hope that they might replicate such fortifications in their own country. He further asserted that it was fitting for them, as students of the Hassania mission, to gain insights into military strategies and confidential matters, as this was sanctioned by the Italian government.[36]

During the second half of the 19th century, significant political tensions and occasional confrontations characterized the relationship between France and Italy. This was due to a range of factors, including territorial disputes, colonial rivalry, and competition for influence in European politics and the Mediterranean Sea. The unification of Italy, which occurred in 1861, played a major role in exacerbating the strained relations between France and Italy and contributed to the formation of the Triple Alliance in 1882, between

[34]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 126.
[35]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 126.
[36]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 123.

Italy, Germany, and Austria-Hungary against France. In this context, Zaari states, "the school director, Signor De Grosso, personally liked me and trusted me, which made him confide in me with many secrets, including the alliance between Italy, Germany, and Austria, and what benefits Morocco could gain from it."[37]

The school director confides more information to the Moroccan students about Moroccan-Italian relations. He told them that the Moroccan Sultan intended to establish a bank, and he prepared a guarantee of twenty million gold coins, including Louis d'or, Doppia, and Benduq coins, in addition to silver coins of various types. The school director expressed astonishment at how Morocco managed to amass such a substantial sum of money in a short period, revealing the country's wealth. When Zaari remarked that "Italy is wealthier than Morocco," the school director responded, "You are wealthier than Italy because you have no debts." [38] Zaari's autobiography furthermore states that the school directors informed the Moroccan students an Italian company was preparing to lay down gold, silver, and copper railway tracks in the capital, Fez. In addition, Germany has been commissioned to construct defense fortresses in the coastal cities of Morocco. Zaari enthusiastically comments, "He shared with us the exciting news that the Moroccan flag will soon wave across all seas."[39]

This account highlights the significant recognition given to Moroccan students dispatched by the Sultan during the specific period of Italy's alliance with Germany and Austria. It is essential to consider the historical context that Algeria had already become a French colony at the time. The passage elucidates the intentions of Germany and Italy to make military and logistical investments in Morocco due to its perceived wealth. In the late 19th century, Italy was interested in Tunisia due to its proximity to Italy and the significant Italian community that was living there. Italy saw Tunisia as an extension of its national territory and hoped to make it a part of its colonial empire. However, these plans were thwarted when France established a protectorate over Tunisia in 1881, a move that greatly disappointed Italy and strained French-Italian relations. This incident played a significant role in Italy's decision to join the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1882, as it felt betrayed by France, which had been its ally during the Italian unification. Therefore, Italy's interest in Morocco could be seen as part of its broader strategy to expand its influence and colonial holdings in the wake of the loss of Tunisia to France.

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37. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 123.
38. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 123.
39. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 123.

Zaari's Successful Return

Zaari's Italian travelogue provides an insight into the career prospects of Moroccan students in nineteenth-century Europe. After eight years in Italy, the majority of the Moroccan graduates returned back home. In this vein Zaari reported:

> "I obtained permission from the Italian Ministry of the Interior to pursue the study of foreign languages. Thus, I enrolled in the higher school in the city of Turin and remained in Italy until 1898 when I obtained the desired certificate. It was my intention to move to the city of Florence to continue my language studies, particularly German, along with studying international law. However, the Grand Vizier, the esteemed jurist Mr. Ahmed Ben Moussa, sent me a letter ordering me to return to Morocco. Thus, I returned in the month of November 1898."[40]

Back in Morocco, Zaari immediately headed to the office of Mohamed Torres, the deputy of the state. Torres asked him about several things and then ordered an appropriate suit to be made for him. A few days later, Zaari traveled to Marrakesh to meet with the royal chamberlain, Ahmed Ben Moussa. Zaari describes their meeting, "he received me in private and started asking detailed questions about my interactions with the school director and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This informational session continued until sunset, and then he asked me to come again the next morning to Dar al Makhzen in Sidi Bouzid at nine o'clock." The next day, Ben Moussa sent Zaari to meet with Abdel Salam Tazi, the Minister of Finance. Zaari states that he "received me graciously and seated me next to him." He handed him a file containing various correspondence and transactions and asked him to organize them: "I immediately moved to an adjacent room and opened the file. To my surprise, all the correspondence was in English. I organized it as required, separating the letters that I could answer individually from those that needed no individual response."[41]

Then, Abdel Salam Tazi sent Zaari to meet with the Minister of War, Said Al-Alaq. In his office, Zaari met with Mohamed al Gabbas, who had studied in Britain at Chatham School. Zaari states that:

> "We had a conversation in English, and Mr. Mohamed registered me in a notebook as someone proficient in foreign languages. He assigned me a monthly stipend of 24 rials, and Minister Said advised me to visit him frequently, even offering to accommodate me in a house near his residence, in order to familiarize

[40]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 123.
[41]. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 123.

me with correspondence, most of which was in French, including military regulations and political guidelines."[42]

This is why the Moroccan students who were educated in Europe earned the reputation of being "*Ṭalabat al-alsun*,"[43] the students of languages. Having examined the successful story of Zaari and his smooth integration back into Moroccan society, it is equally important to shift our attention towards the less fortunate accounts.

Unsuccessful Returns

The *Makhzen* found various employments for Moroccan graduates from Europe: in Bab al Makina in Fez in the manufacturing of weapons and the minting of currency, military captains, building and repairing towers and installation of batteries, translation in the foreign ministry, drawing maps and topographical works, journeys to Europe to negotiate treaties or purchase military equipment.[44]

Mohamed Ben Omar al Abbari spent five years studying in the School of Turin, from 1891-1896. In 1896, he moved to the Cavalry School in Modena, from which he graduated in 1898 with the rank of officer. In the following year, he accompanied a mission to Germany to purchase military equipment from Krupp factories. And in 1907, he was appointed commander of the cavalry regiment in Tangier.

But, these success stories cannot conceal the failure of the Moroccan study-abroad program. Al-Ṭahar Ḥaj Oudiyi, who studied in France, composed a pamphlet entitled *Al Istibṣār fi Ajāāib al Amṣār wa al Jibāl wa al Anhār* where he launched a bitter critique of the *Makhzen* officials. He says that in 1888 "in the city of Fez, I saw with my heart's eye ministers, scribes, and trustees, a circle of hypocrisy, disbelievers with a turban and *chachiya* (skullcaps), when they said to the Commander of the Faithful that 'We spent years the land of Christians, and returned from there converted asses… they have become to this day our most embittered enemies."[45]

The *Makhzen* officials considered the returnees, with their new ideas, modernist thinking, mastery of languages, and knowledge about the West as a threat to their interests and used religious discourse to attack them. Even some intellectual elites were skeptical about the missions.[46]

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42. Maʿnīnū, "Mudhakirāt Ṭālib," 124.
43. al-Manūnī, *Maẓāhir yaqaḍat*, 123.
44. See Būlaḥya, *Al-Biʿthāt al-taʿlīmiya*, 510.
45. Jamāl Ḥīmr, "Al-Baʿathāt al-taʿlīmiyya fī ʿahd al-Sulṭān Mawlāy al-Ḥasan" (MA Thesis, University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Faculty of Humanities, Fez, 1988), 225.
46. Moroccan nineteenth-century historian, Khālid Nāṣirī, recommends that "One of the most important concerns regarding them is that they should not adopt the manners of foreigners, nor follow their ways in their expressions, conversations, speeches, or greetings, among other things. Calamity has befallen

Critics like Mohammed al Sayiḥ comments that Sultan Hassan "implemented important measures, including sending educational missions to European countries, similar to the missions that Japan also sent during that era. However, it did not yield any significant results because the Moroccan people at that time did not comprehend what their Sultan understood, and they did not send their children to Europe willingly."[47] He goes on to state that after the death of Sultan Moulay Hassan, his son Sultan Abdul Aziz ascended the throne, and it was his chamberlain Ba Hmad who took charge of the Kingdom. He was averse to modernization and ignored the Moroccan graduates so some of them had to learn new trades for their subsistence. This is the case of Mohammed Najjar who studied in Germany and became a farmer. He says, "the Christians teach the mind, the Muslims render it blunt."[48]

One of the students of the first cohort became a Spanish protégé and served as a secretary to the Spanish captain in Ksar Kbir. The *Makhzen* protested to the Spanish ambassador "concerning Moukhtar Ragahy who have joined your army in Ksaar, and we have explained his case that he belongs to the Makhzani army… and that the *Makhzen* has spent money on his education in European schools… and employed him as an engineer." The complaint adds that the *Makhzen* was deeply unhappy that he should be recruited into the Spanish army and that his protection was not valid. It seems that it was a common practice as there was another complaint not allowing Miloud Ben Mohamed Al Ziyadi al-Ṭalbi who returned to Germany to complete his education in Berlin in 1896 and intended to seek German protection. The *Makhzen* describes him as "a soldier, one of the students of the German language working for the *Makhzen*" and therefore insists on the invalidating of his protection.

Mohamed Tadlaoui, from Rabat, studied in Turin then the school of infantry in Modena ended up a farmer in Qalaa Sraghna. While Mohamed Elouazzae, from Rabat, who too studied in the military schools of Turin and Modena, immigrated to San Paolo in Brazil in 1902 and never returned back to Morocco.[49]

Muslim armies they adopt the manners of foreigners. They sought to learn the art of war to preserve their religion, but in the learning process, they ended up losing their religion. Within two or three years, the children of Muslims would become foreigners, adopting their manners and discipline. They even abandoned the prescribed Islamic greeting in the Quran and replaced it with placing their hand behind their ear" (ʾAbū al-ʿabbās ʾAḥmad ʾIbn khālid al-Nāṣirī, *Al-ʾIstiqṣā li-ʾakhbār duwal al-Maghrib al-ʾaqṣā*, taḥqīq Jaʿfar al-Nāṣirī wa Muḥammad al-Nāṣirī, vol. 9 (Al-dār al-bayḍāʾ: Dār al-Kitāb, 1954-1956), 106).

47. Muḥammad Sāyiḥ, "al-Sulṭān Mawlāy ʾIsmāīl ʾIbn Muḥammad al-Sharīf," *Daʿwat al-Ḥaq* (November 1957).

48. Quoted in Būlaḥya, *Al-Biʿthāt al-taʿlīmiya.*

49. See El ʿAydūnī, "Mémoires."

A Cosmopolitan Rebel: The Trials and Triumphs of Ahmed Djebli

Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni was born in Rabat on 26 June, 1866. He was chosen among the third expedition of fifteen students to study in Italy. Ahmed Djebli belonged to the lower class and was not part of the merchant bourgeoisie or the *Makhzen* elite.[50] After five years of study in Turin, Djebli joined the School of Infantry Officers in Modena in 1891. He returned to Morocco in 1896, at the age of 30, after spending nine years in Italy. His life in Morocco took on an extraordinary trajectory. He joined the service of the *Makhzen* of Moulay Abdelaziz, serving as a military engineer and participated in the *Makhzen's ḥarkas* and *maḥala* (military campaigns) against the uprisings in Chaouia and Tadla in 1897, where he sustained multiple wounds. During these campaigns, he undertook topographical missions under the command of Moulay Abdelhafid, Sultan Moulay Abdulaziz's brother and leader of the Cherifian troops.

In 1900, due to his expertise in artillery, Moulay Abdelaziz appointed Djebli to lead the delegation sent to Germany for the purchase of cannons from the Krupp weapon factory in the city of Essen.[51] In 1901, Djebli was dispatched to Algeria together with the Minister of War to demarcate the Moroccan-Algerian borders. During this journey, Djebli was seriously injured. He decided to resign from the Makhzen. Moulay Abdelaziz granted him a small pension along with a decree addressed to the Pasha of Rabat, authorizing him to establish a school in Rabat to teach mathematics and foreign languages. However, the Pasha deliberately obstructed Djebli's efforts by placing numerous obstacles in his path, preventing him from realizing his vision.

During his treatment at Mustapha Hospital in Algiers, Djebli met with the Russian maiden who would later become his beloved bride. Elena Alekseevna Bezrukova had arrived in Algiers to visit her brother, who was undergoing treatment for his lungs. The Moroccan patient proposed to her and she unhesitatingly gave her consent.

Elena and Ahmed's marriage was extraordinary not only due to its being the first union between a Moroccan and a Russian girl, but also because it was conducted in a Catholic ceremony. Their union was solemnized on 23rd

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[50]. If ʾAḥmad Djeblī El ʿAydūnī was from a privileged background, his father would not have chosen to apprentice him to a cobbler. Typically, families of means would involve their children in business ventures or other pursuits befitting their social status.

[51]. Djeblī explains that Muḥammad Tadlāwī has become a simple farmer in the Sraghna region and Muḥammad ʾIbn Elouazzâe immigrated to San Pablo, in Brazil, in 1902. El ʿAydūnī, "Mémoires," 1390.

February, 1903, in Genoa, Italy.[52] The marriage certificate was issued by the Archdiocese of Genoa.

In his autobiographical account, "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni: Etudiant en Italie 1887-1899," Ahmed speaks emotionally about his marriage to the Russian aristocratic lady. After their honeymoon in Genoa, the couple traveled to the bridegroom's homeland and solemnized a second marriage, now under Islamic law with the bride's name converted to Khadija.

Elena bore Djebli three children: Mohamed, who became the first Moroccan lawyer,[53] Maryem, who became renowned as Morocco's first female pianist, and Ahmed, who pursued a career as a medical doctor.

On April 28, 1931, Djebli was arrested and imprisoned for writing and distributing anti-Berber Dahir leaflets.[54] His house was raided and searched and all his papers, letters, and documents were confiscated. The pro-French colonial press quickly reported his arrest under the alarming title, "Arrest of Agitators."[55] The French socialist press, on the other hand, launched a severe attack on the Moroccan *Makhzen* and the French Protectorate. It affirmed that both Djebli and his Russian wife had French protection and attacked the colonial press' reference to their Russian protection as mere fabricated propaganda to deny Djebli French justice. In the absence of legal representation, Djebli was quickly indicted and sentenced to two years in prison and exile. When the news of Djebli's reached Jean Longuet, he traveled to Rabat and had a meeting with General Charles Noguès, Director of Indigenous Affairs.

In an article entitled "A Scandalous Prosecution of an Innocent," *Le Midi Socialiste* talks of the monstrosities of the Djebli affair. Chérif Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni, the paper stated, was a French protégé, which made him subject to French and not Moroccan laws. As for the charge of rejecting the Berber Dahir, Djebli's position was outspoken in both his speech and writings.[56]

Eventually, through a consistent press campaign and the efforts of his lawyers, the Moroccan courts annulled his initial sentence, acknowledging that being a French protégé, Djebli was not subjected to the Cherifian tribunal jurisprudence. He was retried in a French court which now charged him with

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52. El ʿAydūnī, "Mémoires," 15-6.
53. His name was Mohamed Alexis-Lola. It was reported that he was assassinated by the French army in 1943. See Pauline de Mazières, *Histoires de Russes au Maroc: Fragment III. Madame Djabli* (Tanger: Edition Khbar Bladna, 2011), 27.
54. Gilles Lafuente, *La Politique Berbère de la France et le Nationalisme Marocain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), 248.
55. *Le Temps Colonial* (2 May, 1931). The same is announced in *Paris-midi* newspaper (5 January, 1931), and (1 May, 1931).
56. *Le Midi Socialiste* (25 July, 1931).

conspiracy with a foreign country for writing against the Berber Dahir to the Queen of Holland. The accusation runs as follows: "The crime of machination and giving secret information to foreign powers with the intent to incite them to commit hostilities against France."[57]

For Michael Pym, the arrest and trial of Djebli served as an illustration of the arbitrary cruelty and hypocrisy of the French Protectorate. He quotes a statement from General Nogues who remarked, "Djebli, you know, is perhaps not guilty. Or if he is, he is only very slightly implicated. But, let him give us the names of the real culprits and we'll let him off after a few months. We have to make an example after the recent events in Fez."[58] Djebli was tried, and after nine months in prison, he was acquitted.[59]

Djebli's life story is, indeed, a captivating tale of transformation and defiance. His encounter with Europe sparked a profound change within him, fashioning for him a new identity rooted in cosmopolitanism. Despite starting as a cobbler apprentice after being withdrawn from school due to misbehaviour, Djebli defied expectations. He studied in prestigious military schools in Italy, served in both the Italian and Moroccan armies, became a wealthy landowner, and married a Russian bride. The knowledge he acquired in Italy, his mastery of European languages, and his economic independence made him politically subversive in the eyes of the *Makhzen* and the Protectorate, rendering him a formidable figure who posed a threat to established authorities.

Djebli was keenly aware that his education at one of the most prestigious European institutions, his multilingual proficiency, intellectual pursuits, and economic independence posed a threat to both the Makhzen and the Protectorate. These achievements became a source of envy for his Moroccan and French detractors, fuelling their resentment and attempts to undermine his reputation.

Throughout his journey of crossing borders, Djebli embraced hybridity and maintained a unique perspective as a nationalist who spoke and wrote from outside the confines of nationalism, a transnational commitment to human ideals.

Conclusion

The educational initiative launched by the Sultan of Morocco during the late 19th century signifies a transformative moment in the nation's history. Seeking to foster a generation of Moroccans equipped with European

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57. *Le Populaire* (1 February, 1932).
58. Michael Pym, "The Franco-Muslim Position with Special Reference to the North African Dependencies," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* XX (October, 1933): 625.
59. See Pym, "The Franco-Muslim," and Lafuente, *La Politique Berbère*.

knowledge and skills, the Sultan made deliberate choices to select students not from the privileged elite, but based on merit, from families of lesser means. This action was not just about imparting new learning; it was part of a strategic vision to enhance Morocco's standing in the midst of rampant colonial aspirations.

However, this initiative was met with resistance, notably from the local elite who perceived it as a threat to their entrenched positions of authority and power. The Sultan's inclusive and progressive policy of advancing the 'commoner' upset the established social order, adding to the tensions within Moroccan society.

Upon their return, the students often faced significant challenges, resulting in some unsuccessful reintegrations. Yet, their stories reflect much more than mere narratives of struggle. They are instances of innovation, of transformative encounters between traditional and modern identities. Some students, like Al Aydouni, in the face of societal and religious backlash, were forced to forge a new path, creating a novel religious identity that promoted modernization and rejected fanaticism.

In essence, the Sultan's initiative marked the onset of a significant cultural and intellectual shift in Morocco, one that was to meet with resistance from the traditional elite but ultimately paved the way for progressive transformations within Moroccan society. The narratives of the Moroccan students abroad serve as poignant reminders of the complex interplay between education, social politics, and religious identities. They offer valuable lessons about the tensions that arise when tradition and progress meet, as nations navigate their path towards modernity. As such, they continue to echo in the debates about the dynamics of societal change and cultural adaptation in contemporary Morocco.

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العنوان: الرحلة من أجل طلب العلم في الديار المسيحية: الطلبة المغاربة في إيطاليا إبان القرن التاسع عشر

ملخص: هذا المقال محاولة تقديمية وتحليلية لتسليط الضوء على أثر المبادرة الدراسية والتعليمية المغربية في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر وأوائل القرن العشرين، والتي تمثلت في إرسال نخبة من الشباب المغاربة للدراسة والاستفادة من بعض التكوينات في مختلف التخصصات بأوروبا، وخاصة في إيطاليا. كان هذا البرنامج الذي أطلقه السلطان مولاي الحسن يهدف إلى تحديث المغرب من خلال تزويد هؤلاء الطلبة ببعض

المهارات اللغوية الأجنبية والمعارف العلمية. وقد قوبلت عودة هؤلاء الخريجين بردود فعل متباينة؛ حيث حظي هؤلاء الطلاب بالتقدير لمهاراتهم العملية في نظام المخزن، لكنهم واجهوا شكوكاً وعداءً من النخبة المحافظة التي كانت تخشى من تحدي القيم التقليدية وخلخلة بُنى السلطة. ويستكشف المقال أيضًا الكيفية التي استخدم بها هذا التعليم كأداة للارتقاء الاجتماعي وكمصدر للانقسام الأيديولوجي، مما أدى إلى استبعاد بعض هؤلاء الأفراد من النخب المحلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إصلاح التعليم في المغرب، التعليم المغربي في القرنين التاسع عشر والعشرين، رؤية السلطان الإصلاحية، التقليد مقابل الحداثة، التعليم الأوروبي كإصلاح.

Titre: Pérégrination pour le savoir en terres chrétiennes: Les étudiants marocains dans l'Italie du XIX^{ème} siècle

Résumé: Cet article est une analyse de l'impact de l'initiative éducative marocaine de la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle et du début du XX^{ème} siècle, qui consistait à envoyer des jeunes marocains sélectionnés pour faire des étudie et bénéficier de quelques formations en diverses disciplines en Europe en particulier en Italie. Initié par le sultan Moulay al-Ḥassan, ce programme visait à moderniser le Maroc en dotant les étudiants de compétences en langues étrangères et de connaissances scientifiques. Le retour des étudiants diplômés a suscité des réactions mitigées: ils étaient appréciés pour leurs compétences pratiques dans le système du Makhzen, mais se heurtaient à la suspicion et à l'hostilité de l'élite conservatrice qui craignait une remise en cause des valeurs traditionnelles et des structures du pouvoir. L'article explore comment cette éducation a servi à la fois d'outil de mobilité sociale et de source de division idéologique, conduisant à l'exclusion de certains de ces individus des élites locales.

Mots-clés: Réforme de l'éducation au Maroc, éducation marocaine des 19ème et 20ème siècles, vision réformiste du sultan, orthodoxie contre modernisme, éducation européenne en tant que réforme.