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***UNESCO AND ISSUES OF
COLONIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION***

**Symposium organized by the International Scientific Committee for
the UNESCO History Project**

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**CONTRIBUTION OF FORMER UNESCO SERVANTS OF THE HISTORY CLUB
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INTRODUCTION

1. The History Club's methodological approach

Founded in 1999 within the Association of Former UNESCO Servants (AFUS), the History Club was set about to collect testimonies and impressions of former UNESCO civil servants in order to contribute to the elaboration of a memory of the Organization. Its focus was to uncover testimonies that could be of use and interest to historians, and would otherwise be cast aside from official records. The present paper was written up in that spirit.

The History Club first focused on general orientations and directives formulated by the Organization during the decolonization era; then on how they were perceived and interpreted; and finally on the way we actors/witnesses of that era put them in practice.

To reach its objectives, the club took three steps:

- Browsed through documents written by members on the topics of colonization and decolonization as they were understood at UNESCO;
- Organized round tables that could cast a new light on those subjects;
- Wrote up the present contribution to the symposium in Dakar.

2. Boundaries of this contribution

Given the short number of available witnesses, we had to put more focus on the following aspects:

- In terms of area, only a few African countries will be discussed.
- The historical focus will be on the first period of decolonization.
- Education policies will be the prominent topic of interest.
- Fieldwork, as opposed to conceptual elaboration at the Headquarters, is the main material of this investigation.

In the end, this paper does not claim to cover the whole theme. However, it should highlight some fruitful leads and directions for further exploration. It is with that specific purpose that it is transmitted to the scientific committee and researchers investigating the history of the Organization.

I. THESIS

1. Was UNESCO « prepared » to face the issue of decolonization?

We unanimously recognized that UNESCO could not possibly have not committed itself and its members to the process of decolonization. The Preamble to its Constitution defines the *Organization's ethic*. References are made in the Preamble to the « *democratic principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect of men* ». It also underlines the fact that World War II « *was made possible by the propagation in their place of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races* ». It also calls forth a « *sacred duty which all nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern* ». It finally establishes that « *peace must [...] be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the moral and intellectual solidarity of Mankind* ». The Preamble clearly emphasized the value of *justice, liberty and peace*. UNESCO was therefore compelled by its Constitution, as well as its purposes and functions, to act in the matter of decolonization.

The History Club's starting point in its investigation was thus the official recognition by UNESCO of its obligations as they were expressed and recorded in its legal corpus, which would serve as a legal and intellectual framework for several decades.

2. Legal setting

The Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples [1514(XV)] adopted on December, 14 1960 by the United Nations General Assembly constituted without a doubt the basis of the UN System's action and understanding of the issue. Simultaneously, UNESCO's General Conference adopted on December, 12 1960 a Resolution on « *the role of UNESCO in the attainment of independence* » (Res. 11 C/8.2). It defines « *[UNESCO's] vital part to play in promoting the freedom and independence of colonial countries and peoples through its programmes in the fields of education, science and culture* ». The Director-General is therefore given a lot of latitude. Similar resolutions would be adopted in 1964 and 1968.

On December, 11 and 12 1969, the UN General Assembly adopted a block of significant resolutions, especially on the implementation of the previously mentioned Declaration [Res 2548 (XXIV)] and *the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations* [Res 2555 (XXIV)]. Along with resolution 2621 (XXV), the latter would explain the adoption on November, 7 1970 of resolution 16 C/8 by the General Conference.

This three-part resolution (political, programmatic and prospective) establishes a framework for UNESCO's action in the areas of: assistance to refugees from colonial territories; assistance to AUO-recognized liberation movements; struggle against apartheid. It also puts an end to cooperation with any NGO tied to the South-African Republic, Southern Rhodesia and Portuguese colonies in Africa. It even more strikingly links, for the first time, the notions of decolonization and peace in Europe, whereas these notions were the subject of distinct resolutions up until then. Similar resolutions would be adopted every two years until the mid-80s. Among other factors, *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* in USSR would render these resolutions obsolete.

3. A preliminary chronology

Three distinct phases already appear with regard to legal texts:

- Before 1960, a few experiments aiming to reduce under-development – without ever directly addressing the issue of independence – can be seen as a gestation period, so to speak.
- In 1960 starts a period which would be later called a proper *Era of Independence*. It is characterised by the liberation of dozens of former colonies, mainly French and British and mostly in Africa. Of course a few precedents exist, such as Tunisia and Guinea in 1958, and most notably India in 1946.
- A third phase starting as soon as 1970 when UNESCO would commit itself to combating apartheid in the South African Republic and assisting AUO-recognized independence movements. All this while continuing its technical assistance to newly independent countries.

Although formally distinct, these three phases obviously overlap as UNESCO capitalized on its experience to adapt to new contexts.

4. How should the term « decolonization » be understood?

The term « decolonization » appeared quite late in UNESCO's legal corpus. It is first found in paragraph 15 of resolution 2548 (XXIV) in 1969. The question is whether this semantic change represents a conceptual evolution from older phrases (for instance, « the ardent desire of all colonized people for independence », « the right of all people to self-determination », « the speedy abolishment of colonisation in all its forms and manifestations »). This is doubtful as Resolution 11 C/8.2 of 1960 states that « *one of UNESCO's most urgent tasks is to help the newly independent countries and those which are preparing for independence, to overcome any harmful after-effects of colonialism, such as economic, social and cultural underdevelopment, illiteracy, and the serious shortage of trained personnel* ».

However, this 1960 terminology focuses essentially on the political and economic aspects of independence. From 1969 on, the social and cultural dimensions of independence started to be more prominent. The History Club's feeling is that this represents a major shift in priorities, as one of the conditions of successful independence then appeared to be *decolonization of minds*. Although formal political sovereignty is a vital step, the process of decolonization goes far beyond. Intellectual and cultural autonomy - as much as political - is the objective of struggles for independence. It is therefore clear that education and culture play a decisive role in this process.

This decolonization of minds is both *internal and external*. On the one hand, it must of course be realized within newly independent countries, as they strive to acquire their own political structures, legal and administrative systems, languages, mentalities and lifestyles, etc. They must especially avoid the tendency to mimic models and habits inherited from colonial powers. On the other hand, the decolonization of minds actually applies to the whole world, first and foremost individuals involved in international cooperation, be it bilateral or multilateral. In that sense, UNESCO staff as well as experts and consultants employed the Organization in particular are expected to operate a thorough intellectual and psychological personal reassessment, as good intentions in no way represent a guarantee of quality of work.

In the History Club's opinion, UNESCO deserves some credit for officially raising as soon as the 1950s the necessity to clarify the possible links between *decolonization* and *racism*. This investigation was inspired by the works of Michel Leiris and Claude Lévi-Strauss. However it met with a lot of resistance inside the Organization and did not leave a lasting and significant impression on the minds of UNESCO staff. Are the phenomena of decolonization and racism somehow interconnected? Do they exist independently from each other or are they concomitant? Views greatly differed on this subject: some believed racism to be a direct by-product of colonial domination while others argued that racism can appear outside of this particular historical circumstance.

5. What was the general state of mind at UNESCO?

Several European members of the Secretariat viewed decolonization as a positive process, as they had lived through the *great terrible war*. Having experienced occupation, they had felt « colonized » and seen their status reduced to that of second-class citizens by the Nazis' barbaric methods. They could therefore easily empathize with colonized nations, whose dignity and right to self-rule UNESCO was trying to restore and guarantee. Consequently, UNESCO was a place where staff members identified as « peace soldiers ». The trauma of World War II in Europe was the source of a very profound feeling of empathy towards those nations and individuals who did not enjoy similar standards of living and personal development. It also strengthened the desire to help solve the multiple issues that plagued those countries and populations.

II. Before independence

1. Promising experiments

Long before the United Nations System officially adopted the struggle against colonialism as part of its programme, UNESCO had undertaken projects which, *in retrospect*, foreshadowed decolonization, although obviously those projects did not contain any political undertones and were introduced as part of larger development policies.

A word must be said here on the role of the International Bureau of Education (IBE), which was created before UNESCO, and would only merge with the latter in 1968. It held International Conferences on Public Instruction (called International Conferences on Education after 1970), where ideas and experiments were shared with delegations from countries and peoples that were still colonized.

Within UNESCO, or with its close collaboration, anthropologists launched similar projects related to culture and social sciences. Other initiatives were taken under the term between 1948 and 1952 of Torres Bodet, who as a former minister of education in Mexico was strongly inclined to steer the Organization in that particular direction.

2. Mexico's innovative influence

Mexico's heavy influence on UNESCO's action and attitude in that initial period – based on its experience with « cultural missions » (centres for social and educational action) – was a surprise, if not a complete revelation, to many of us. The History Club feels that this rich and extremely original Mexican and Latin-American contribution should be strongly highlighted, given the fact that UNESCO was perceived at that time as being overly euro-centric (whether this perception was legitimate is another question altogether).

Indeed, innovative principles such as basic education and community development were integrated into UNESCO's doctrine and educational policies during Torres Bodet's term (see below). This is not an isolated occurrence. As a member of the Executive Board, Brazilian figure Paulo Carneiro contributed to the Organization's intellectual life in several areas with even longer-lasting repercussions.

3. Social sciences as a tool to better understand the Third World

During his term, Torres Bodet had the first book recounting Mexican experiments in basic education translated in French. It demonstrated the process of combination of indigenous and Spanish cultural heritage. UNESCO thus introduced several notions, such as the concept of « integration » (as opposed to « assimilation ») as they had been constructed by Mexican « indigenous » anthropology.

Some anthropologists associated with this experiment either closely worked together with UNESCO or joined the Organization as staff members, like Alfred Métraux, who had been conducting research in Haiti. They would spread new ideas, especially via the publication of several research papers in the « UNESCO Courier ». This monthly publication put in the spotlight cultural features of Third World countries, at a time when they were still mostly unknown. It helped educate and prepare the Organization and the general public for the dire aspects of under-development which would become distressingly ubiquitous in the news a few years later.

Mexico was also the main inspiration for France's attempt at an « integration » policy in Algeria. Jacques Soustelle, General Governor of Algeria between 1955 and 1956 and an anthropologist himself, used Mexican cultural missions as a model, as he had seen them set up by President Cardenas starting in 1932. His stay in Mexico made him realize the importance of bilingualism in order to respect the cultural identity and improve living conditions of indigenous populations. As a consequence, he recommended teaching North-African Arabic in Algeria along with French.

This initial phase also saw the CIPSH (International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences), newly created by UNESCO, consider a project on the *Sources of a general history of Africa*.

These examples illustrate the role of UNESCO as an open-minded cultural intermediary in the field of social sciences. Thanks to its authority and aura, the Organization could help spread and legitimize those novel ideas.

4. Basic education: a missed opportunity?

Some of our colleagues specialized in education (J-C. Pauvert, A. Lestage, R. Ochs) experienced the elaboration and implementation of the concept of basic education as a genuine historical milestone. Indeed it represented a promising renewal in education and literacy policies for the masses. Not only did it support new hopes in teaching countless populations who did not have access to schools, but it also intricately combined the notions of education and socio-economic and cultural development.

However the rocky history of this concept, which resulted in UNESCO in effect dispensing with it in 1958, often came up as a source of profound regrets, and an impression of a missed opportunity, in our meetings at the History Club. A few dates to illustrate:

- 1947, first publication by UNESCO: *basic education, a common resource for mankind*;
- 1949, UNESCO and Haiti reach an agreement on a pilot project for basic education in the Marbial valley. The concept of community development emerges. Some witnesses recall a surprising delayed repercussion in 1960: hundreds of elementary school teachers and experts from Haiti were hired in the Congo;
- 1951, CREFAL (Regional Centre for Adult Education and Functional Literacy for Latin America) was set up in Mexico;
- 1954, the diploma of basic education specialist is delivered to 162 students, among whom our colleague Miguel Soler Roca;
- 1956, an expert committee « redefines » the notion of basic education, seen by some as second-class education;
- 1958, activities related to basic education effectively disappear from UNESCO's programme.

We should not forget that these activities, abandoned as they were by UNESCO, would nonetheless be later on adopted and spearheaded by UNICEF. The concept of basic education would be reborn with spectacular general support at the 1990 Jomtien Conference, and later still in Dakar in 2002 at the Conference on Education for All.

III. On the eve of national liberations

The election of Amadou Mahtar M'Bow as Director-General symbolized a change of attitudes in Member States towards liberation movements in former colonies. Decolonization was beginning to become a political reality.

A. The concept of assistance to development: birth and evolution

1. Was UNESCO prepared to intervene?

Witnesses present either at the Headquarters or on the field at the time of this historic shift recall that UNESCO was not necessarily conceptually equipped to face it. Even though the Organization realized that it was confronted with an extremely significant event, the fact that this phenomenon was essentially unprecedented proved to be an intellectual and operational challenge. Improvising sometimes became the *modus operandi*. The gap between formulated principles and actual operations can be partly explained by certain hesitations in decisions and implementation. It can also be explained – quite obviously – by the very close monitoring that former colonial Member States were exercising on the Organization. These hesitations led to a disconnection between reflection and action and to a certain lack of consistency in policies. This separation between conceptual elaboration and operations culminated in the 1970s.

2. Birth of the Technical Assistance Programme

Inspired by President Truman's « fourth point », the United Nations appointed in 1949 a committee tasked with elaborating a plan to improve standard of living in poor countries. Jaime Torres Bodet, then Director-General, chose Clarence E. Beeby (Head of the Department of Education) along with Pierre Auger (Head of the Department of Science) to represent UNESCO at this important meeting. Beeby would later tell the story of how he drafted the *UN Technical Assistance Programme* in an atmosphere of utter improvisation for all institutions concerned – with the exception of « the old ILO » - . The programme was first approved on the phone by the Director-General before being formally adopted by the United Nations Committee with a few modifications.

Similarly in 1961, as several African countries were achieving formal independence almost simultaneously, then Deputy Director-General Malcolm Adiseshiah from India decided to make a lasting impression in order to rally governments from Africa and other regions. This was the objective of the *Addis-Ababa Plan*, which he drafted overnight with the help of a senior servant from the Indian education ministry, J.P. Naik, a member of the Statistics Department, Erwin Salomon, and finally René Ochs, from the Department of Education. Reliable data and figures were scarce. When René Ochs remarked that it was very difficult in those conditions to establish statistical forecasts, Malcolm Adiseshiah answered: « *I couldn't care less. They all say they love Africa. I want them to put a price tag on their love* ». This boldness would meet with success. This plan was of course the expression of strong political resolve more than it was the result of careful elaboration, as many elements were missing to effectively outline a proper course of action.

3. from assistance to partnership: genuine evolution or mere semantic drift?

Throughout the decades, UNESCO-sponsored technical interventions as well as assistance from other United Nations System institutions saw their denomination evolve significantly. “Assistance in development” became “technical assistance”, then “cooperation” and finally “partnership”. Terms describing former colonies benefiting from UN System intervention also saw a profound evolution, which is most likely not unrelated. The term “under-developed” gradually gave way to “developing” countries (with a sub-category of “least developed countries”), which in turn came to be known as countries of “the South”. Several terms were eventually in use: “least-developed” countries, “newly industrialised countries”. “Developed” countries became “industrialised” before the term “North” was coined. The fundamental cause behind these lexical evolutions came under our scrutiny. Did they mark an authentic evolution in the interactions between both groups of

States, as ever-more autonomous Third World countries gradually became equal partners in projects? Or did the relationship's dynamic remain fundamentally unbalanced between backers and beneficiaries, in which case this semantic evolution can only be seen as a not-so-subtle way to placate those countries?

One of the conclusions we reached in our investigation of the issue of decolonization is that even those States which lacked political and administrative personnel at the beginning gradually acquired greater autonomy, self-reliance and ability to defend their point of view. They also unquestionably became capable of supplying their own experts over time. However our debates often described structural adjustment plans imposed by the World Bank, and sometimes backed by UNESCO itself, as profoundly unfair and flawed.

B. The situation seen from the new States' side

1. Initial situation

Newly-independent countries found themselves in a very wide array of situations at first. With the exception of extreme cases, such as Belgian Congo where the UN was conducting a mass operation, the shapes and circumstances of independent countries directly resulted from the great African Scramble of the 19th century, when colonial powers had negotiated their respective spheres of influence. These countries often lacked any national unity, their administrative structures were dominated by colonial models, local and native administrative personnel had been kept away from decision centres and education institutions. Their cultures were at worst disparaged, at best considered with condescension.

In this situation education was considered an essential tool in the quest for mental decolonization, and of course further down the line for the construction of a proper Nation-State. The first political leaders were confronted with not only the inherent difficulties of this endeavour, but also considerable political, economic and financial difficulties. Most new countries' education policies were therefore torn. On the one hand, supported by a new sense of national dignity and identity, reform seemed paramount, even though this could lead to isolation. On the other hand, it seemed possible to graft a new education system taking into account traditions and cultural specificities on old colonial structures. This could represent a viable exit strategy from colonial times and habits, as it made benefiting from necessary international assistance in training skilled administrative personnel possible, who would in turn encourage research and higher education, etc.

Given these conditions, it is understandable that hesitations and doubts on the correct course of action gave birth to education systems which were fundamentally unbalanced. First they generated two standards of education: both basic education and community development, as well as literacy and primary teaching would be quickly forsaken (see above), even though they had been officially recommended at the Addis-Ababa Conference. Moreover a certain gap between intention and implementation appeared: for instance the teaching of native languages, highly symbolic as it was for the promotion of national identities, had to be swiftly abandoned after a few years of experimentation in the name of financial and administrative pragmatism.

New States were primarily anxious to set up a proper secondary and higher education system. These were designed after the education systems of former colonial powers, and thus prepared for European exams (Cambridge Certificate, Baccalaureate). Our colleague G. Bishop recalls a telling anecdote. In the Solomon Islands, dissection of a grasshopper was one of the questions for the biology exam at the King George V School. Thousands of live grasshoppers could be found just outside of the school, but animals had to be air shipped from England as the use of the native

species would upset the standardized system of allocating marks. In fact this double-standard education system was biased towards city-dwellers. UNESCO was pursuing an objective of basic education and so did not back the development of secondary education, and universities even less. Technical assistance being conditional, States adopted the programme without fully adhering to its objectives in terms of basic education or literacy in rural areas. In the Ivory Coast for example, UNESCO along with other institutions funded the Educational Television Programme (PETV) for primary schools, while public funding went exclusively to the University of Abidjan.

2. Technical cooperation: an asymmetric relationship

UNESCO technical assistance was therefore provided in uncertain or unknown political or socio-cultural contexts. General orientations for these policies were often confusing, if not contradictory. UNESCO-appointed experts often did not know local cultures, and were thus not prepared to face the typical difficulties of a newly founded state. The main setbacks were the lack of political structure, along with severe shortage of skilled leaders capable of autonomously determining a national education, scientific and cultural policy.

This initial shortage – or complete absence – of local counterparts was acknowledged with particular distress especially at first by UNESCO experts and servants on the field. Training quickly national leaders (individuals who could eventually replace international expertise), as an essential step, proved to be impossible almost everywhere.

Grants were among the technical assistance measures most appreciated in newly independent countries. They made it possible for hundreds of specialists to be trained abroad and come back to be appointed at government positions, which further accelerated the achievement of actual autonomy. However this unanimously praised system – to this day – was not devoid of risks. Often students would not come back and attempted to stay in the country where they had completed their education. This “brain drain” phenomenon gradually gained regrettable momentum under the influence of several factors.

During this period, *highly original experiments were conducted to try and remedy the aforementioned difficulties*. One revealing example: Mali's College of Education, created in 1962 as part of the national reform, found itself in dire need of local professors after a few years. This led to the experimentation in 1970 of a flexible and economical solution: foreign visiting professors would come to teach in the CPS (Centre Pédagogique Supérieur), and would in turn welcome and train students from Mali in their home Universities for short periods of time. In 1973, an international jury deemed these students worthy of a “speciality Doctorate”.

3. Experts and local authorities: a cordial understanding?

An essential guarantee for the success of local operations was the collaboration of UNESCO-appointed experts and national partners. But this absolutely necessary *cordial understanding was more often the exception and not the rule*. Fieldwork was affected by a fundamentally unbalanced relationship. Attributions and powers differed greatly between partners. Status, leadership, supervision of local and international personnel and competition for access to resources all were biased towards so-called international experts. This in turn negatively impacted human and working relations.

The differences in terms of status were particularly striking. Experts enjoyed the status of international servants. They earned a salary at least 15 times higher than their national partners, could afford comfortable housing and cars, whereas local experts often had to get about on foot.

Their families wondered why work conditions differed so greatly, especially when international experts' salaries were funded by international subsidies allocated to local governments.

In some cases, national staff even questioned the legitimacy of foreign assistance in solving local problems. How indeed could international experts know these local issues any better? Would it not make more sense to call upon local knowledge and know-how? Over time, *the figure of the national expert made its way at UNESCO*, thanks to senior experts Aimée Gnali and Baba Haidara (from the Sector of Education) among others. They were wary of foreseeable risks: technical assistance could become a new avatar of colonization and dependence; costs were getting out of control. Self-determination had to be preserved at all costs, even if short-term and targeted hiring of international consultants was still a viable and sometimes necessary option.

C. The issue at UNESCO

1. Insufficiencies and obstacles ...

As already mentioned, UNESCO itself was affected by a theoretical and pragmatic hesitation. This was most likely inevitable as the Organization had to react to radically new demands both swiftly and on an unprecedented large scale. It had to maintain its international aura and fulfil its tasks. *Facing entirely new challenges in such a wide array of national situations obviously resulted in strategic hesitations.* A significant example: the History Club focused on the ins and outs of Educational planning and its relations with the ability of States to make their own choices in the matter of education. Even though it would later constitute a key instrument for UNESCO, it was not at first elaborated as part of any thought-out long-term strategy and hence did not allow a global planning of operations in countries. Other internal factors thwarted these plans, among which a tendency for distinct UNESCO departments to defend their interests with detrimental consequences. A combination of education policies with social sciences studies so as to better adjust pedagogical approaches and their socio-economic and cultural settings would have been presumably positive, but could not be truly implemented.

It is foremost this inability to come up with education policies adapted to the new contexts of decolonization which led UNESCO – albeit under the pressure of urgency – to resort to easy ways out. UNESCO indeed exported solutions modelled directly after Western education systems, especially those of the two most influential States at the Secretariat, France and the United Kingdom. *Colleges of Education were the most striking examples.*

It should be noted however that positive local adjustments to those « alien structures » were made on an individual basis. As national experts came to play a larger role in the planning of education policies, this adjustment process accelerated.

The creation of Colleges of Education in newly independent countries (35 in Africa) was one of the most significant interventions of UNESCO in the first stages of independence. In spite of explicit reservations, this action allowed to train graduated staff that would be integral to future local education systems. A previously mentioned extreme example can be found in ex-Belgian Congo, where hundreds of teachers were trained in the College of Education while the country was being torn apart by multiple civil wars.

On a purely individual level now, so-called international experts can also be criticised for being overly euro-centred, with varying levels of self-awareness. Experts were hired in very large number and in a matter of urgency, and were therefore only selected on their professional and/or scientific merits. Many of them may have been driven by philanthropic aspirations; most notably the desire

to heal the scars left by colonialism, but these noble intentions in no way prepared them for working with other cultures. In their defence, very few of them had been exposed to cultural diversity. Essentially alien cultures and social situations represented a true professional or personal challenge for them. This attitude reflected deeply-rooted deplorable beliefs relative to the superiority of Western culture. Many experts at the time still saw progress as a sequence of steps which naturally led to western values and political systems. The Institution at large did not seem any more aware of this issue. Job descriptions for expert positions systematically ignored the aptitude of applicants to adapt to new cultures and share ideas on an equal basis with local authorities.

Somehow paradoxically then the History Club sometimes described this mentality as *involuntary neo-colonialism*.

The strategy of « pilot projects » was much more evidently questionable as they did not reach their targets. They were based on the hypothesis that highly innovative experiments could inspire local authorities to set up similar structures and institutions. These models and methods would be adopted and thus promote a far-reaching and swift renovation of the entire system. But this strategy was in fact delusional: pilot projects could only be described as time-and-money-consuming drops in the ocean. No following project would enjoy the same level of intellectual and political support, nor would it be granted the same resources. Consequently this experiment remained essentially fruitless, as pilot projects could never effectively be copied, let alone function on their own for more than a few years. Besides, the attached privileges for servants involved generated some hostility in local populations who felt mostly left out. Eventually these chain reactions negatively affected the very reforms pilot projects were supposed to set in motion.

How much technical assistance could have benefited from socio-cultural preliminary studies was never more apparent than when UNESCO debated and experimented significant innovations. One of the boldest and most original projects ever undertaken by UNESCO, the Educational Television Programme (PETV) in Ivory Coast, suffered greatly as a result. Starting in September 1969, this multimedia strategy aimed to generalise primary education, at a time when education experts were betting on technology transfer as a way of helping then-called « under-developed » countries quickly catch up with the Western world, so to speak, without having to go through intermediary steps of development.

Surprisingly enough, this partially successful project was simultaneously heavily criticised both in national and international circles. Naysayers, probably insufficiently informed, feared a possible eradication of traditions when confronted with the modernity of the project. Involved UNESCO staff may have thought that these concerns were not justified, but they still learned their lesson: what really matters is to what extent populations adhere to the project, in other words the way it is perceived. Disconnected from local populations' actual needs, the objectives pursued by the project's promoters could only be rejected. The absurd dilemma that pits tradition and modernity against each other could probably have been avoided with the active collaboration of social sciences specialists.

2. ... but also achievements and solutions!

At the other end of the spectrum, the « Dissoo » project was deemed a success. Dissoo means conversation in Wolof. A radio-based project, its objective was to promote democracy and development by creating an atmosphere of trust between farmers, herders and fishermen. From 1961 to 1971, this radio programme coordinated by Michel Bourgeois helped more than a million farmers express – sometimes desperately so – their needs and views on development policies in their country. Senegal deserves some praise for promoting freedom of speech at a time when many

authoritarian regimes chose the path of censorship. In spite of accusations of abuse of power and incompetence, President Senghor chose to defend this fundamental liberty. From that moment on, « listening groups » were set up and would in turn feed other radio programmes via local news coverage and an abundant listeners' mail. The main political, economic and social issues could then be discussed by the whole population.

In Cameroon, UNESCO assisted in reorganising the national press agency and in publishing a daily newspaper. Founded in 1965, the CESTI (Centre d'Etudes des Sciences et Techniques de l'Information/Centre for the study of information sciences and technologies) of Dakar was appointed with the task of further training local journalists. A similar institute was created in Lagos. In Eastern Africa, UNESCO developed rural radio stations.

Transcribing and teaching national languages would take on a new political and scientific significance when independence was achieved. However their introduction in schools' syllabi would prove very difficult due to a severe shortage of local teaching material, as its mass production and distribution remained very cost-ineffective for a long time. Teachers themselves met with obstacles when trying to teach them even when they mastered them. Secondary, and even primary, education was consequently still provided in the former coloniser's language. To close the gap between vernacular and instruction languages, our colleague Joseph Poth conducted a remarkable research study – based on years of field observation - on bilingual teaching in Sahel countries for more than twenty years. The papers that resulted from this research are still highly respected to this day.

In countries where classes were taught in the language of the former colonial power, it seemed paramount to develop a national textbooks publishing industry. Whereas in eastern Africa British publishers quickly set up subsidiaries which eventually became autonomous, in western Africa French publishers were anxious to maintain their lucrative monopoly. Without interfering with content, UNESCO backed local publishing houses by suggesting cost-cutting solutions, as well as by organising Conferences such as the one in Libreville. It also encouraged parents to get involved in the distribution of textbooks. Similarly the IIEP designed specific training courses for the development of textbooks.

Efforts were not spared in the areas of school building and pedagogical material. Regarding school buildings and furniture, it soon became obvious that solutions so far applied in developed countries would not function in the Third World. UNESCO architects, either at the Headquarters or in regional centres like Khartoum, had to convince financial institutions to support their recommendations to build schools that would cost less. Whereas the latter were devising grand modernity-inspired plans, the architects suggested local populations use traditional materials such as clay or bamboo, which were already in use to build houses. Regarding education material for science which had to be imported, UNESCO helped teachers come up with cheap solutions which could be produced locally in pedagogical institutes.

UNESCO promoted South-South cooperation along with North-South assistance. Politically, Regional Conferences where education ministers could share their experience were first organised. Regional offices (education, sciences, culture) were then founded in order to provide operational assistance. Finally UNESCO helped the development of regional networks: APEID for Asia, EIPDAS for Arab countries, NEIDA in Africa and CARNEID in the Caribbean region. They were a forum where ideas and innovations in the field of education could be shared, especially through field observation programmes in countries which shared the same language.

IV. Assistance to liberation movements and struggle against apartheid

1. UNESCO's help to liberation movements

UNESCO's contribution to the process of decolonization also took the form of direct assistance to liberation movements in countries that were still colonized. Our colleague Baba Haidara, former director of the Dakar regional office (BREDA), recalls that AUO-recognised liberation movements received some help for training projects and programmes thanks to UNESCO, especially in education. The aim of this training was to prepare future leaders for the responsibilities they would be given once independence was achieved. Political movements such as the ANC in South Africa, SWAPO in Namibia, FRELIMO in Mozambique, MPLA in Angola and PAIGC (Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau) all took advantage of *UNESCO's support to decolonization*.

Although the History Club acknowledged the significance of this particular aspect of assistance, we were faced with certain uneasiness when we attempted to investigate the subject. Our colleagues most involved in these programmes (Ms Fontaine-Eboué and Ms Cabral) were long gone. Moreover, other witnesses were obviously not eager to share their memories.

However an example, which could at first glance seem anecdotal, actually highlights the previously mentioned *pivotal role of textbooks in the process of decolonization* (see above). In 1969, an NGO requested UNESCO's help to supply textbooks to the PAIGC. UNESCO first agreed and stated that this form of assistance was suitable and could be extended to other liberation movements. However after careful examination it appeared that this programme threatened the Organization's neutrality. An incident in Gaza had seen some States demanding the complete withdrawal of textbooks they thought were prejudiced. From that moment on, UNESCO clearly saw the political implications of meddling with teaching material content and elected to provide exclusively technical assistance in the field of publishing. The promotion of pedagogical publishing in new States did remain a long-term primary objective nonetheless.

2. Struggle against apartheid

Compelled by its Constitution, UNESCO has always fought racism, racial discrimination and prejudice. Jacques Boisson, former member of the Human Rights and Peace Division, remembers that UNESCO committed itself to combating apartheid – one of the most despicable forms of racism - as soon as the late 60s. The apartheid regime did not show signs of weakness in spite of international sanctions and a formal condemnation from the United Nations. Apartheid was the subject of UNESCO publications under the supervision of Ms Marion Glean O'Callaghan from Trinidad and Tobago. She had carefully nurtured a network of informants, notably through her links to catholic institutions in South Africa, where she could not go due to aforementioned sanctions and isolation. Famous publications such as *Apartheid and its effects on education, science and culture* could not have existed without her, and showed the true face of the regime. The general public hence came to understand how political, economic and social structures could collapse under the weight of the denial of basic human dignity and rights.

No other organization would be able to pride itself in publishing similarly groundbreaking works until the late 70s. UNESCO was indeed the only place where thorough socio-political analysis of apartheid and other avatars of racism was carried out. Of course the Organization focused on negative effects of racism on education and culture. Prestigious experts and scientists also drafted the Four Statements on race under the tutelage of UNESCO during this period. These would provide a basis for the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice to be adopted by the General Conference in 1978. A first draft was presented to the Executive Board at the end of 1977. The

Board rejected this draft on the ground of the Secretariat's lack of communication and consultation. Karl Vasak was then put in charge of writing up a second draft, which was welcomed favourably by the Executive Board. The Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice was adopted with unanimity and acclaim. The role that UNESCO played within the United Nations System following this Declaration in the eradication of racism and connected issues deserves its own study.

V. Conclusion

The reader may have been surprised by the critical tone easily felt throughout the present paper. Suffice it to say we did not wish to appear complacent or rationalize/idealize a past in which we were involved. We attempted to remain unflinching when looking at the history of the Organization, as it is obvious that faced in those transition times with unprecedented challenges, the Organization often had to come up with new strategies, solutions and experiment. True History is not smooth but ebb and flows along lines drawn through trial and error. Far from being destructive, our critical outlook represented an opportunity to go back in time and put in perspective the results of the Organization's action. This evaluation was never carried out, either internally or from outside of the Organization.

We could not, and should not, have covered up blatant shortcomings – especially when it is very hard to imagine how they could possibly have been avoided – because they made a long-lasting impression in the careers and memories of those former UNESCO servants we interviewed at History Club meetings. We may in fact feel a certain pride in knowing that several countries our colleagues attempted to help to the best of their abilities did manage, over time, to build their technical and intellectual autonomy and take their fate as independent, sovereign and open nations into their hands.

The first conclusion we reached may very well not be original, but that does not mean it should be left unsaid. Sectorial Regional Conferences on education, sciences, culture and communication played a significant part in the Organization, as they allowed newly independent nations to freely voice their views and objectives. They also allowed them to share and confront their experience in these areas, and sometimes even cooperate in the pursuit of common goals.

The second conclusion is that a wide array of UNESCO-supported actions enabled formerly colonized peoples to seize again their memory and dignity: the creation of colleges of education to train national elites, the support for national textbooks publishing, the emphasis on mother tongues, vernacular languages and national languages and local history for instance. Baba Haidara wrote in his contribution that in colonial times the immense majority of African States did not truly have political or legal sovereignty. Their voice was muted. «It is only within UNESCO that these young nations would find a forum where their cultural specificities, spiritual and intellectual aspirations, as well as their view of the world, could be expressed in a climate of solidarity and dignity. »

The third and last conclusion of this paper is that the process of decolonization in turn changed the Organization and the community of its members, the programme that the Organization is compelled to implement which is no longer accused of carrying an overly European vision, and the Secretariat which no longer has to conform to any particular school of thought but can instead draw from multiple references. The Organization can now consider its cultural diversity as an asset.

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