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Stuck in the middle with you: the political position of teachers during the Algerian War of Independence

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Stuck in the middle with you: the political position of teachers during the Algerian War of Independence

Abstract

Teachers stand out amongst civil servants by virtue of their embedded position within governed communities, their moral authority within those communities, and the relative autonomy of their work. This paper investigates the political position of teachers in Algeria during the War of Independence from France (1954-62). Although teachers were agents of the French state, and active in facilitating French governance in Algeria, they were regarded with deep suspicion by the French security services, and subjected to a sustained surveillance and repression campaign from the very first months of the war. Teachers were caught in a no-man's land between the French State, which employed them, and the nascent Algerian nation, whose children they cared for in the classroom.

Based on oral history interviews with former teachers, the study of recently declassified public archives in France and Algeria, and a critical engagement with educational research on teachers working in disenfranchised communities, this paper investigates the difficult, and often dangerous, position teachers found themselves in as a result of the war. We examine the routine military incursions into schools by the French army, arrests and assaults of teachers, and how teachers sought to balance their duties of service to education with their political resistance to colonialism. However, we also recognise the heterogeneity of the teaching corps, and the relevance of this factor regarding relations between teachers and members of the armed forces. The data collected for this study indicates strong disparities in the campaign against teachers, depending on region, the teacher's ethnicity, and on the type of school they worked in. Finally, we use this research as a case study to discuss the tensions which can arise between the right and the left hands of state within a situation of armed conflict.

Keywords

Algeria, Education, France, War

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Author Biography

Faculty of Education, Cambridge. Alexis's research investigates the role of state education as a tool of governance and political influence, with a particular focus on the affect of armed conflict and political violence on schools and educational actors. His PhD thesis looks at these issues in the context of Algeria during its war of independence from France (1954-1962).

Introduction

The Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) precipitated the end of France's settlement colony in North Africa, which it had invaded in 1830. The war pitted the French security forces against an organized independence movement, principally represented, and ultimately won, by the *Front de Liberation National* (FLN) and its armed division the *Armée de Liberation Nationale*. The stakes in this conflict were particularly high on both sides. While for Algerians, the issue was to end over a century of repressive governance, for the French two factors determined their resolve to maintain control over the territory. First, France had recently been defeated and occupied by Germany, and had also been defeated by nationalists in the colony of Indochina. For many in France, and especially for career soldiers in the French Army, the Algerian War represented a test of French military prestige and political resolve. Second, European settlers represented approximately 1/10th of Algerian inhabitants, and for this reason, northern Algeria was administered as a part of metropolitan France. For many in France, and for many settlers of European descent, Algeria was viewed as an integral part of the French nation.¹

These high stakes created deep rifts within the French state during the war, in particular between the military and civilian powers of state. The outcomes of these rifts have been thoroughly researched, especially as they played out between key senior officers in Algiers and the civilian executive in Paris, resulting in the coup d'état that brought de Gaulle back to power in 1958 and the failed *Putsch des Généraux* that sought to depose de Gaulle in 1961 (see, for example: Horne, 1977; Evans, 2012; Stora, 2012). How this antagonism played out on a daily basis, between the lower echelons of the army and the civil services, is less well known.² In this paper, my aim is to examine the politics of division and suspicion between the French security services and the teachers in the French educational services, the *Education Nationale*. My exposition is based on research conducted in the French ministerial and military archives as well as on a series of interviews with former teachers and pupils about their professional and political activities during the war.³ It aims to

¹ A third factor that emerged during the war was the presence of large deposits of natural gas and crude oil in the Algerian Sahara, the first commercial discovery of oil being in 1956.

² One relevant study is Sylvie Thénault's paper on the judicial system during the war. See Thénault, 1998.

³ The two archives I draw material from are the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (ANOM) and the Services Historiques de la Défense (SHD), hereafter cited by their respective acronyms. Details of interviewees, who are referred to by pseudonyms, are included in the bibliography. The interviews referred to here are taken from a larger sample collected during my doctoral research on the politics

explain why members of the military and Interior Ministry perceived teachers to be a source of dissidence within the ranks of the civil service, and how teachers responded to this state-sanctioned persecution.

Measures employed by the security services against teachers were not significantly different from the broader campaign of surveillance and control exercised across social fields in Algeria at that time.⁴ These measures can be grouped into two categories: surveillance and containment. Surveillance measures involved the ideological screening of teachers applying for posts in Algeria, the use of informants to track teachers' political activities, and searches conducted within classrooms. Containment measures were more diverse as they had to circumnavigate teachers' constitutional rights and the legal and institutional protections afforded by their membership to the civil service. This was facilitated by the state of emergency instituted in Algeria in 1955.⁵ The application of the state of emergency opened the doors to a series of repressive containment measures, including summary imprisonment, house arrest, physical intimidation, reassignment within Algeria or removal from the Algerian territory, and torture during interrogation (Prefecture of Algiers, 1955; Oblie, 2012; Slimani, 2012).

While the surveillance and harassment of teachers did not differ in kind with practices carried out elsewhere in Algeria during the war, the reasons for targeting teachers were specifically linked to teachers' unique political position and function as members of the state embedded within the population. The sociology of education has often reinforced the image of the teacher as a social puppet characterized by conformity and compliance (Grace, 1978). Although I agree that such attributes are deliberately cultivated within teachers through a series of mechanisms which I shall discuss further on, my study seeks to contribute to a historiography of teachers as active resisters to the overbearing interests of state (Giroux, 1988; Girault, 2004; Gaffney, 2007). Rather than reducing the work of teachers to a technocratic function, this framework emphasizes their ability to exercise an intellectual autonomy that contributes to transformative political movements (Giroux, 1988). This does not deny that teachers are structurally positioned and constructed by the state to transmit a hegemonic ideology. Rather, the point is that when individual teachers manage to

of education during the Algerian War. Interviewees were identified through advertisements and snowballing. Interviews followed a semi-structured schedule and were conducted in French.

⁴ For a study of the broader practices of state-sponsored violence in Algeria during and prior to the war, see: Thénault, 2012.

⁵ Loi no. 55-385 du 3 avril 1955 relative à l'état d'urgence et en déclarant l'application en Algérie.

extricate themselves from that ideology, they can use the social and cultural capital inherent within their technocratic role to subvert dominant interests.

Insofar as teachers are trained as an intellectual class, they are particularly vulnerable to this sort of ‘defection’, which explains the high levels of official mistrust described in this paper. Interestingly, official anxieties about teachers in post-independence Algeria have received some critical attention (Alexander, Evans and Keiger, 2002; Kateb, 2006). But the period under French rule remains obscure in this regard. The thesis supported by my research is that teachers in this period were targeted by the security forces because they stood out amongst French civil servants as a potentially dissident force which could function within and against the state (Gramsci, 1971; Mayo, 2005). This view reflects the Marxian analysis that the state is the organ of one particular class, and that a key educational function of the state is to identify the interests of that dominant class with the common good (Marx, 2008; Gramsci, 1971). This view of the state’s vested interest in education is not strictly Marxian. Immanuel Kant emphasizes a similar point: “experience teaches us that the ultimate aim of princes is not the promotion of the world’s good, but rather the well-being of their own state, so that they may attain their own individual ends. When they provide money for educational enterprises, they reserve the right to control the plans” (1904, p. 120). It may be objected that within a liberal democracy the person of the sovereign is dispersed amongst the electorate. Whether or not that is the case, French Algeria was not a democracy in any serious sense of the word. This fact is documented in any historical study of the colonial period; Patrick Weil (2005), for example, offers an overview of legal restrictions placed upon Muslims, including their lack of citizenship status. In this context, the educational system very explicitly represented French interests over those of indigenous Muslims. Those teachers who sought to promote the political interests of Muslims as a group violated the institutional function they had been assigned by the French state.

1 The trouble with teachers

Hostilities in the Algerian War of Independence broke out on the night of October 31st 1954. Approximately one month later, on December 12th, the French Army circulated amongst its intelligence bureaus a series of maps depicting the distribution of communist teachers across Northern Algeria (fig. 1). These maps were printed on tracing paper so that they could be superimposed upon another series of maps depicting the distribution of “terrorist activities” since October 31st 1954 (fig. 2). Close observation of the examples shown does not reveal an obvious geographical correlation. Subsequent historical research has shown that communists within

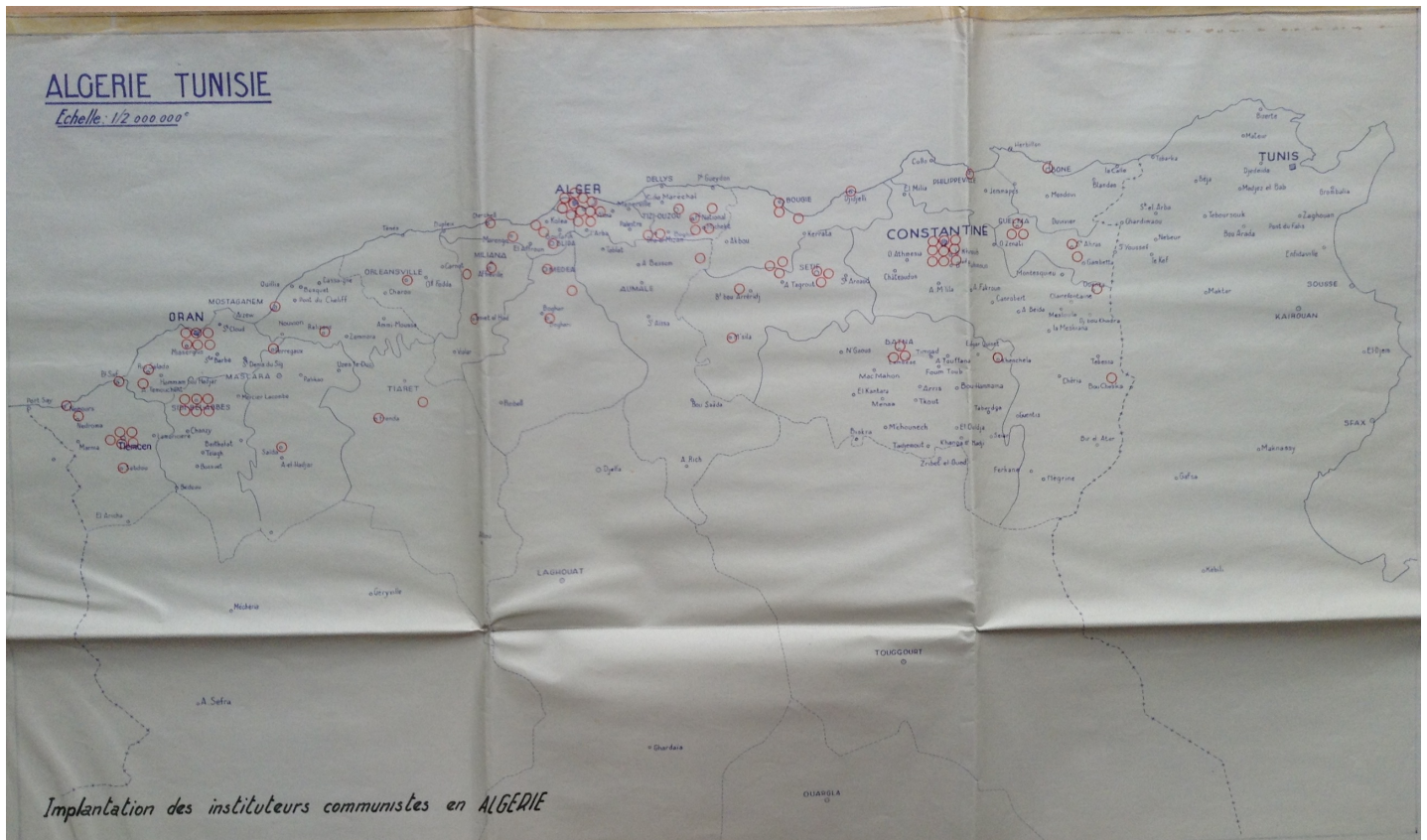


Figure 1: Distribution of communist teachers in Algeria, 12 December 1954. SHD, 1H, 1720, D1.

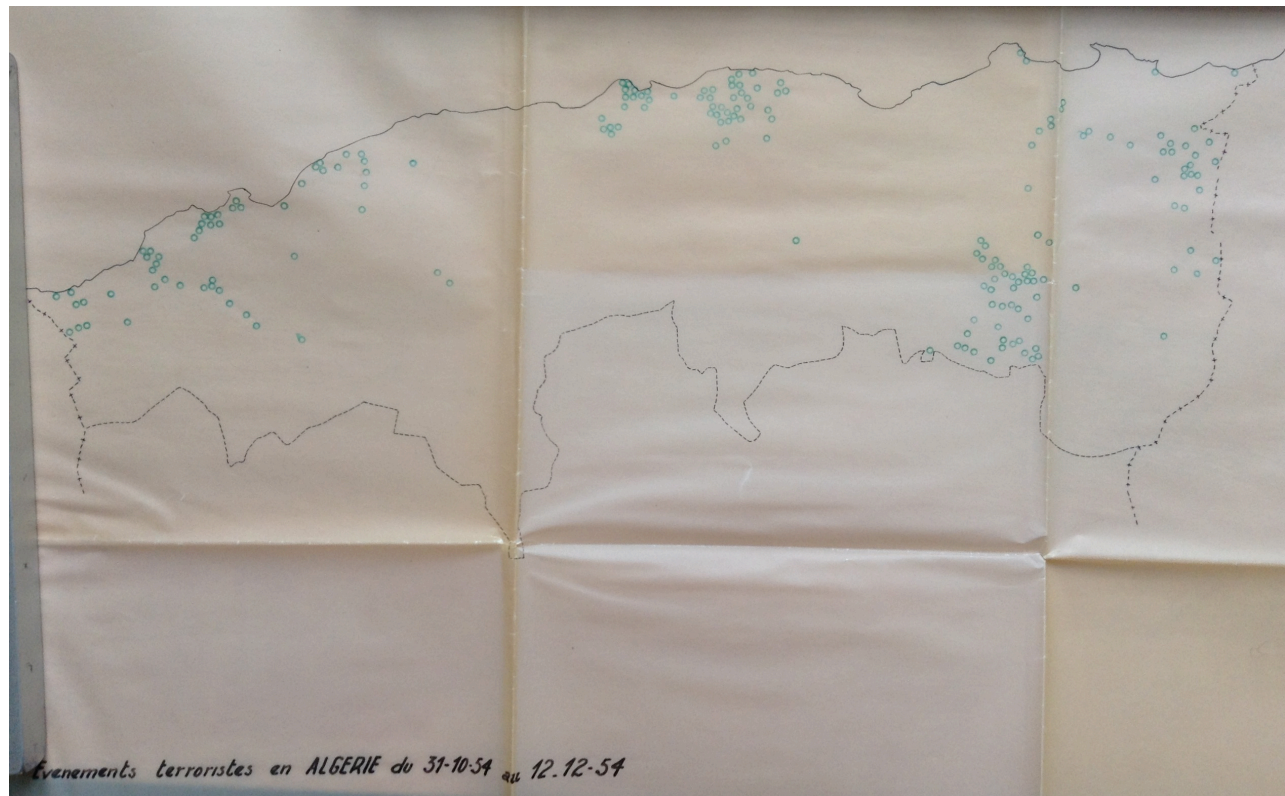


Figure 2: Distribution of insurgent activities in Algeria, 31 October—12 December 1954. SHD, 1H, 1720, D1.

Algeria were only modestly implicated in the fighting alongside the independence movement and they were not militarily active in the opening stages of the war (Horne, 1977). However, these maps are indicative of a strong anxiety amongst ministerial and military circles about the spread of ideologies hostile to French rule in Algeria. Within the context of the Cold War, anti-colonial struggles were often seen as a manifestation of a Soviet-backed geo-political strategy. A 1959 government report commissioned by the Prime Minister's office cited that "mass communist organisations are engaged in an intense propaganda effort in which arguments favourable to the FLN are rolled into Communist positions" (Cabinet du Premier Ministre, 1959, p. 47). For Governor General Jacques Soustelle, France faced a three-pronged ideological enemy in Algeria: "Russian imperialism disguised as communism; pan-Arabism directed from Cairo; and anti-Colonialism" (cited in Tyre, 2002, p. 103). The correlation conjectured here between the distribution of communist teachers and terrorist events stemmed from a broadly held concern about the potential subversive trickle-down effects of ideologically unorthodox teachers within the classroom. These maps signal the start of an aggressive campaign, sustained until the end of hostilities in 1962, on behalf of the French security services against what was perceived to be an inner threat within the teaching corps.

Bad teachers, it was feared, could poison the water: by undermining French dominance from within the state schooling apparatus, such teachers could ferment popular unrest amongst the Muslim Algerian population. Thus, teachers needed to be singled out for surveillance in order to identify subversive elements within the ranks who could then be contained or expunged. Crucially, this perception was not the product of over-zealous petty officers; it ran down from the high echelons of the French state. In May 1955 (five months after the outbreak of the insurgency), the Interior Ministry began corresponding with the Ministry of Education about the urgency of reining in the threat from dissidents within the ranks of the Republic's teachers. The preferred means agreed upon was to source teachers in the metropole and to root out the politically unsound ones before they could set foot on Algerian soil:

"If I may draw your attention to the necessity of securing the maximum guarantees concerning the civil servants called to serve in the Algerian departments. Because of the events in Algeria, it is obvious that certain attitudes will not be tolerated on behalf of civil servants who are called upon to exercise a certain influence amongst the communities in whose midsts they live. I imagine therefore that you will judge, as I do, that the recruitment for the Schooling Plan in

Algeria must be carried out with sensitivity to Algeria's particular situation and that it would be appropriate, in these circumstances, to give special attention to the advice requested from prefects on the candidates residing in their departments prior to the admission or direct nomination of any candidate for public employment." [Interior Minister, 1955]

This passage is typical of governmental correspondence on this topic, wherein the interlocutors employed vague generalizations to suggest adopting repressive measures. The issues of separatism and armed conflict that characterized the situation in Algeria are not evoked, nor is it ever specified which attitudes or opinions cannot be tolerated from teachers. These are taken as understood, and it is possible that the correspondents purposefully remained evasive so as not to inculpate themselves by proposing state-sanctioned discrimination against French citizens on the basis of party affiliations or political activities (these in themselves were not illegal at the time). Therefore, in order to ensure the political orthodoxy of teachers being sent to Algeria from the Metropole, the Ministry of Education agreed to defer to the Prefect of a candidate's department in order to vet a candidate's political orthodoxy:

"Certainly, the elements susceptible of being sent to North Africa must, in addition to their pedagogical competencies which the Ministry of Education is best placed to assess, be absolutely trustworthy from a national and political point of view. Nothing would be more dangerous than sending to the Algerian departments members of the National Education corps who, by their functions, would contribute to aggravating the current situation. Indeed, we should beware of certain extremist parties who might make use of this occasion to infiltrate their elements into the teaching body."
[Prefect of Pyénées Orientales, 1955]

This document lays out the desired division of labor between the Ministry of Education on one side and the Interior Ministry and Army on the other. While the Ministry of Education was responsible for the technical assessment and implementation of pedagogy, the overarching strategy of colonial education was directed by the right hand of state. In the words of the Prefect of Constantine: "it is important that we post teachers for political and psychological reasons"(Prefect of

Constantine, 1957).⁶ As the war progressed, the primary function of state schooling was co-opted in favor of the security agenda. In this optic, the Army and the Governor General's office collaborated in the surveillance and repression of dissident teachers — occasionally this brought the security services into opposition with the Education Ministry. In 1955, the Prefect of Constantine expelled Marguerite Chatou, a lycée teacher, from his department on the basis that she was a militant communist.⁷ When the Ministry of Education responded by posting her to a (more prestigious) lycée in Algiers this was perceived as a rebuke. The Governor General Jacques Soustelle wrote personally to the Interior Minister to ask him to “intervene with the National Education Ministry to have the concerned party posted in the metropole, her presence being in any case undesirable in Algeria” (Governor General, 1955). A recurrent point of annoyance for the Army was the reluctance on behalf of teachers to fly the French flag or allow their pupils to participate in patriotic activities during school hours, as well as the Education Inspectorate's refusal to intervene on behalf of the Army (Cabinet Civil, 1958). In one memo, the acting commander for the Eastern province of La Calle complains of the local inspector's refusal to allow primary school children to attend the Armistice Day parade on the basis of a legal technicality:

“In the current situation, where each occasion must be seized to give the population and to the youth in particular, a civic education which brings them closer to France to prepare them morally for a choice, it is profoundly regrettable that under the pretext of intransigently applying a legal clause, National Education civil servants deliberately obstruct an initiative organised for the common good.”⁸ [Chevalier-Chantepie, 1960]

While there is no indication that the Education Ministry wavered from the hard line adopted by the government with regards to repressing sympathy for the liberation movement, its actions were constrained by its own internal due process and (perhaps) a certain loyalty to its own agents. Any disciplinary action on the Ministry of Education's part could only be taken after an internal investigation was carried out by one of its inspectors. This took time. It also opened the possibility of the security

⁶ A historical note of interest: the Prefect of Constantine at this time was Maurice Papon, infamous for his active role in the deportation of Jews under Vichy and for the massacre of Algerians in Paris on October 17th, 1961.

⁷ Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

⁸ The choice referred to is perhaps the upcoming referendum on independence, although this was not officially announced until December 1960.

services being openly contradicted by a neighboring administration, and it implied a level of collaboration between the security services and the Education Inspectorate, which the former may have been unable or unwilling to engage in. The Algerian War was characterized by a climate of suspicion; the security classification for most archived cases involving teachers ranges between 'confidential' and 'secret'.

A good illustration of the inter-departmental friction that could arise between the security and the education services is the issue of conscripting teachers into the military. This raised the ire of René Billières, the Minister of Education in 1957. In January of that year, he wrote a letter to the President of the Council, Guy Mollet, as well as to the Algeria Minister and Defense Minister, to protest this practice of using planks from one end of a bridge to extend the other end. Noting that the recruitment and retaining of teachers was "an absolute priority" in Algeria, he laments the use of qualified teaching personnel for low-level surveillance and protection duties. Most of these teachers were not conscripted into the regular army but into local reserve units, called *Unités Territoriales* (UT's). While this arrangement did not completely remove teachers from their posts, it raised the separate problem of employing teachers to police the very communities in which they taught. Not only did this force them to patrol in uniform and armed in neighborhoods where their students and their parents could see them, they could also be called upon to search and interrogate students' parents. Billières, who himself had taught literature in a lycée, was sensitive both to the social standing of teachers and to the Muslim population's antipathy to the armed forces. He warns that the practice of employing teachers as UT's "can only ruin their credit with the local population" and continues:

"The very principal of incorporating teachers within the *Unités Territoriales* completely distorts the role of French culture and of those entrusted with transmitting it in the eyes of the indigenous populations. What authority can they maintain, what trust can they inspire amongst the locals, when they are forced to participate in policing operations, in identity checks, and searches alongside the police and the C.R.S." [Billières, 1957]

The main teachers' union (the *Syndicat National des Instituteurs* or SNI) adopted a similar position on this question, on the basis that the repressive activities of the security services were at odds with the ideal of the Republican educational tradition (Desvalois, 1988). In a letter defending one of its members in his refusal to serve in his local UT, the SNI argued that, "in its very essence, a teacher's position does not lend itself to certain activities, which may seem excessive in the eyes of the population and students' parents" (SNI, 1954). However, Billières was not against

the incorporation of education into the pacification campaign *tout court*. Rather, he found that confusing the military and the cultural/psychological campaign was a strategic misstep. “French culture must be the most effective link between the indigenous populations and metropolitan France” he pressed, “in ruining this pacific weapon, we would commit a political error” (Billières, 1957).

This view was not shared by his cabinet colleagues. In response, the Algerian Governor General’s office pointedly refused to implement any exceptions for teachers with regards to conscription. Members of the UT’s, they argued, “fight, without provocation, against adversaries who seek to destroy the very principles which the professor or teacher are entrusted with transmitting. What better mark of their attachment to their ideal could they offer than taking up arms, when necessary, to oppose those who aim to annihilate through terror their valuable work?” (Maisonneuve, 1957). This was an alternative notion of *l’idéal de l’éducateur*.

The Governor General’s office also disagreed with Billières’s empirical claim regarding Muslims’ hostility towards French forces. In keeping with the official line of the French government throughout the war, this memo argues that the FLN’s message did not have resonance with the Algerian population and that everyday Muslims in Algeria were opposed to the terrorist tactics employed by the ALN. Moreover, the memo suggests that this position was more than a factual observation; it was a tenet of faith necessary to the maintenance French rule in Algeria:

“The Resident Minister in Algeria considers that the law and order missions imposed upon members of the teaching corps *can in no way* ruin their credit amongst the local population, much to the contrary. He cannot admit [*Il ne peut admettre*] that missions protecting goods and persons can be considered as incompatible with the elevated ideal that the teacher conceives of his own mission.” [Ibid, emphasis added]

Indeed, the Algerian War of Independence was not simply an armed struggle. Both the FLN and the French Army recognized that the real stake in the war was political, not military; they had to compete for sovereign legitimacy over the land and people of Algeria (Alexander and Keiger, 2002). And for that to occur, they first had to believe themselves in that legitimacy. For the FLN, this belief could find root in religious or ethnic identity, or in a socialist opposition to imperialism. For the French, the military campaign could not be conceived of outside or in opposition to the French *mission civilisatrice* that was best exemplified in the Republican classroom.

A further problem with disciplining unorthodox teachers through the normal channels has to do with the isolated nature of teachers’ work. A teacher might be

suspected of using their classroom as a platform to disseminate subversive ideas, but obtaining proof of professional misconduct to justify disciplinary procedures was another matter. Teachers are perhaps unique amongst rank-and-file civil servants in terms of the amount of autonomy they have in their work and the lack of hierarchical oversight they are subject to. Teacher training colleges and unified educational bureaucracies are meant to limit teachers' professional independence. These exert covert forms of control by creating an institutional network bound together by a common professional demographic, a centralized administration, a shared curriculum and examination system, and unifying goals and values (Rousmaniere, 1997; Tardif and Lessard, 1999). However, once the classroom door is closed, teachers are invested with a social authority which they can employ to undermine their assigned ideological function. The only witnesses to what occurs in the classrooms are the students, who are in a submissive position with regards to the teacher. While inspectorate visits aim to provide some oversight for teachers, these are more useful for identifying cases of pedagogical incompetence than manifestations of political deviance, which would not be put on display for the inspector's benefit. French primary school teachers had a history of bristling at the centralized control to which they were subjected. For example, they were at the fore of movements to legalize union affiliation for civil servants, which only occurred in 1924 (Archer, 1979; Gaillard, 2000). Moreover, the bureaucratic oversight situation in Algeria was particularly precarious during this period. The conflict disrupted the normal functions of state in many areas and Academy resources were over-stretched in order to catch up with bulging deficit in educational provision for Algerian Muslim children.⁹ Teachers in this period were often minimally trained, might not be inspected over the course of an entire school year, and in rural areas one teacher often had sole control over their class with no other French official on hand (Bouazza, 2012; Moreau, 2012).

2 Bricolage surveillance and repression

Whereas systemic surveillance was difficult to implement through the Education Ministry, a bricolage form of surveillance was carried out through the use of paid informants to infiltrate the education profession, as well as through unsolicited denouncements from pro- colonist parents and teachers. For example, in May 1955,

⁹ Only about 15% of school-aged Muslims were enrolled in school in 1954, as compared with near-full enrolment in the European and Jewish populations (Commission du Plan d'Equipelement Scolaire, 1955).

a concerned parent wrote to the Prefect of Algiers to denounce the subversive activities of a teacher from his son's school. The teacher, he reported, had been in the rue d'Isly after school hours, selling copies of *Liberté*, an independentist newspaper which had already had one of its issues banned. The parent explained his concern thus: "In the present circumstances, it is in my opinion urgent to rid ourselves of educators who are preparing something other than little French [girls and boys]" (Anonymous, 1955). Archives from the Prefecture of Algiers show that the French intelligence services had informants implanted in the principal teachers' unions and civil society associations related to education, who reported on discussions during meetings and general political tendencies (Service Départemental des Renseignements Généraux - Alger, 1960).¹⁰

Where the Academy was reluctant to take action in the absence of clear proof of professional misconduct, the prefectures demonstrated a much lower threshold for the admissibility of guilt. Accordingly, they were more willing to dispense punishments against those teachers who had been denounced by colleagues or informants. Punishments such as house arrest and expulsion did not go to trial. Nor were they properly investigated. A security officer would write to the Prefect listing the accusations held against the teacher, but would not be required to produce any proof or original documentation validating such accusations. So long as the judiciary was kept out of the process, the division of labor between investigators and civil authority played very much in the security services' favor. A Prefect was not obliged to act on the recommendation of the security services, but nor were they held accountable if the accusations they brought forth were false.

Within the context of escalating violence, individual members of the military took more liberties with their authority. Practices of surveillance and harassment occurred at the initiative of soldiers low in the hierarchy. This was the experience of Mehdi Kadir, who worked as a primary school teacher in a Muslim neighborhood of Algiers during the war. While working in this district between 1959 and 1961, Kadir reports that Army patrols entered and searched his school on several occasions:

Sometimes, we had [military] patrols come in [the school]. They would arrive, they'd kick in the cupboard doors to see if anyone was

¹⁰ Associations monitored: Ligue française de l'enseignement, Association pour la sauvegarde et l'éducation de la jeunesse et le Centre Beausoleil, Groupe d'entreprises de l'éducation nationale, SNI/FEN, Synciat Indépendent des Instituteurs, Fédération d'oeuvres Laïques du département d'Alger, Comité National d'Action Laïque, Conseil Départemental d'Alger de l'Enseignement Primaire.

hiding in there. Well once, a patrol came in, they opened the cupboards and they found books by Mouloud Feraoun. He said, “who’s this?”. I told him, “he’s a teacher, he’s a writer and a teacher who taught Muslims” – back then, we said Muslims, you didn’t say Algerian because the Algerian nationality was ignored, simply banned, we said Muslims. I said, “he’s somebody who taught Muslim and French [children], he taught them their language”. The guy looked at me side- ways, he didn’t like it that I said that. For an Algerian to teach French to the French. So, I was about say, I was going to continue my discussion, I was going to tell him, “you for example, you would have been one of his students”, but I thought I’ll get an answer but the answer’ll be the machine gun. I shut up. He looked at me sideways but didn’t say anything. Thankfully, I didn’t say anything. He would have shot me in front of all my students, the whole class. I thought about that and I said no, not that. If I must die, I’ll die with a gun in my hand, but not like this. I won’t make a spectacle of myself. (Kadir, 2012)

It is unclear how common these sorts of occurrences were. I have not found any archival evidence to suggest that the practice of having patrols search schools was officially authorized. However, after 1957, the Army operated with little civilian oversight in Algeria and often resorted to extra-legal practices (Vidal-Naquet, 2001). Two other historical witnesses I interviewed also spontaneously recalled similar incidents of military inspections in schools (Bouazza, 2012; Lemmouchia, 2013). What is particularly rich about Kadir’s testimony is that it reveals the underlying racial-religious stakes at play during the Algerian War. The French Army’s task during the war was to maintain Muslim Algerians under European domination. The Republican school had historically been used as a tool to justify and reinforce that domination. It propagated the myth of France’s civilizing mission by institutionally validating the French language, history and culture. The incorporation of a Muslim teacher such as Mehdi Kadir could be seen as the accomplishment of that civilizing mission. But, it could also undermine the implicit French claims to racial superiority that justified the exclusion of Muslims from the colonial polity.

Kadir, the absent figure of Mouloud Feraoun, and the soldier instantiate a tenuous negotiation of power between the institution of the school and that of the army. What is at stake here is who has access to legitimate authority. The soldier is an agent of state governance, vested with the authority attributed by his race and legitimized violence. Kadir and Ferraoun, on the other hand, are governed colonial

subjects. Yet they are also vested with the legitimized authority of the teacher; they are integrated within the apparatus of cultural production and distribution with regards to French language and French culture. These two forms of authority derive from and serve a common source: the French state. But, within the field of state they jockey for ascendancy. The soldier may be able to intrude into the space of education, but while there he is exposed to the institutional codes of the Republican school. Sylvie Thénault has argued that the violence of the colonial regime in Algeria covered a deep anxiety over its own illegitimacy: "In the hushed atmosphere of their offices, in the subtext of internal memos, never are the colonial authorities sure of themselves" (2012, p. 307). The soldier's sideways glance at Mehdi Kadir may have betrayed that very insecurity.

In his ignorance of Mouloud Feraoun, a prominent Francophone writer, he loses face in front of the teacher. The social capital that is invested in the teacher's professional status is perceived as a threat by the soldier, all the more so because Kadir's status disrupts the colonial hierarchy which positions him as a subaltern. Kadir and Feraoun taught the French their own language (this was true in the classroom, but it was also true in literary circles where Feraoun became a distinct voice of *Francophonie*). The cultural authority of the Muslim teacher posed a symbolic threat to the colonial order.

Did the security services target Muslim teachers in particular for surveillance and harassment? This question evades a definitive answer because certain archival holdings remain restricted, while others are incomplete; also, as mentioned above, much harassment occurred outside of official channels. However, a review of the surveillance records from the Prefecture of Algiers can offer an indication. One list from 1955 records the names of forty-seven teachers engaged in activities "in favour of communist or nationalist doctrines"; twenty-three of which were Muslim (Prefecture of Algiers, 1955). Given that only 14% (approximately) of teachers employed by the French state in Algeria at this time were Muslim, a selection bias does seem to have occurred in this instance (Bureau psychologique, 1959). That is not surprising: all Muslims were somewhat suspect within the context of a war that pitted the two communities against one another. One of the reasons teachers were targeted by the security services was their close proximity to the Muslim population in an unregulated setting. Unlike other categories of civil servants, teachers had a vocation to interact daily with the Algerian population, and often lived alongside the Muslim majority, in the same neighborhoods and villages. Teachers who were themselves of Muslim extraction were that much more likely to be sympathetic to the liberation movement.

3 The uncomfortable middling position of teachers

Teachers were distinct amongst French civil servants because of their ambivalent relation to the state. Such ambivalence derived from teachers' professional identity, which divided their positional allegiance: on the one side to the state, whose cultural colonization project they enforced; on the other side to colonized communities, whose children they cared for in the classroom. Historical evidence indicates that this often stranded teachers in a middling position between the two sides of the war, resulting in the conflicts under discussion here. The notion that teachers, by virtue of their professional identity, occupy an uncomfortable middle ground in modern society has been advanced in other contexts. Gerald Grace has found that teachers working amongst the urban poor in Victorian England were often besieged by several sides:

“The teacher was at the focal point of class antagonisms which he was expected to ameliorate and contain. He faced the concrete manifestations of poverty, misery and exploitation and its associated bitterness and ‘lawlessness’. He was not infrequently attacked and abused in his attempts to ‘civilize’ the people and his ability to survive in such a situation depended upon personal resilience and tenacity, the evolution of a system of ‘management’ and the sustaining effects of a Christian or missionary ideology.” [Grace, 1978, p. 31]

Richard Johnson argues that teachers from working-class backgrounds were singled out as meriting particular suspicions in early Victorian England: “Identified with their own people, teachers might become, by their moral ascendancy, ‘active emissaries for misrule’. The [Education Department’s] ideal was clear: the teacher should stand mid-way between his patrons and his clients” (1970, p. 104). A similar analysis of the teacher’s middling position is found in Lee Rainwater’s study of youth workers in American urban ghettos in the 1960’s, whom Rainwater describes as “increasingly caught between the silent middle class which wants them to do the dirty work and keep quiet about it and the objects of that dirty work who refuse to continue to take it lying down” (1967, p. 2). On Algeria, Fanny Colonna’s study of Muslim trainee-teachers between 1883 and 1939 also points to an awkward middling position for teachers with the wrong background. According to Colonna (1973), Muslim teachers were assessed on their ability to function as mediators between the European and Muslim communities in Algeria. In order to perform this function, she argues that

they were socialized to maintain an “ideal distance” between the colonial and colonized cultures, making of them hybrid civil servants who did not fully belong in either camp. Such in-betweenness affected indigenous teachers elsewhere in the French colonial world as well. According to Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, African graduates of the William Ponty teacher training college in French West Africa were viewed with distrust by their own administration: “In the eyes of Europeans, they were ‘detrribalised’ and ‘semi-intellectuals’ suspected of being potential opponents of the colonial order” (2005, p. 528).

Teachers themselves also had to grapple with the ambiguity of their position during the war. In my interview with Mehdi Kadir (2012), he claimed to have been supportive of national independence and to have paid FLN dues during the war - while at the same time being employed by the French state in the colonial education project. Indeed, during his time at the teacher training college (*école normale*) in Bouzareah, he recalls that amongst Muslim trainee-teachers, sympathy for and financial support of the FLN were widely acknowledged – though never revealed to European peers or to college staff:

Interviewer: In 1957, you paid dues to the FLN and at the same time you were training to become a civil servant for the French state. Did you feel there was a contradiction between these two positions? Was it difficult for you to think that you were going to work for France at the same time as you were working for independence?

Kadir: Yes, it was bothersome. Especially for me as a teacher having to say to our students, our ancestors the Gauls... Two thousand years ago our country was called Gaulle and our ancestors the Gauls.

Kadir evokes a common passage in French schoolbooks, which evokes Gaulish ancestry and Gaulish resistance to Roman rule as a unifying identity narrative.¹¹ Although Kadir recalled being strongly committed to the humanist ideal of teaching, and even to the French Republican school model, he felt at odds with the work of acculturation that French schooling performed in Algeria.

However, in certain contexts, this middling position could be exploited in the exercise of an individual’s political agency. Just as the security services feared, the position of schoolteacher could be used in favor of the independence movement, as is exemplified in the testimony of Bilal Bouazza, a head-teacher in a village school

¹¹ Although this passage remains remarkably vivid in the public imaginary, it is unclear how extensively it was actually used in French colonies. See: Denise Bouche, 1968.

(Makouda) in Grande Kabylie. In an interview focusing on his experiences in the classroom, Bouazza recalled a curious ploy he had devised in cooperation with a student to pass intelligence about French troops based in the village to the Algerian National Liberation Army (ALN) posted in the surrounding hillsides:

Bouazza: There was intelligence passed with the students, indeed. There were children who brought messages. So, I would answer.

Interviewer: So, the children would bring you secret messages?

Bouazza: Not all. One or two. Not all.

Interviewer: And the messages came from their parents, or who?

Bouazza: They came from the *maquis*.¹²

Interviewer: And what did you do with these messages?

Bouazza: I would answer. There were questions. They asked the number of [French] soldiers there were. When they changed the guard.

Because at the time of this interview Bouazza was in very poor health, it was difficult to extract much detail or precision from his testimony regarding this practice of passing messages with the ALN through the mediation of school children. However, his daughter put me in contact with one of his former students, Adlène Lemmouchia, who remembered taking part in this activity. In the following passage, Lemmouchia describes how an ALN officer, either a aspirant or a *sous-lieutenant*, came to their home one evening and enlisted his services:

Lemmouchia: It was I think in '58 or '59, I only know that I was in class with Monsieur Bouazza. [The officer said to me], 'you go to school? I say 'yes'. 'What's your teacher's name? What class are you in?' I say, 'Bouazza'. He said, 'Bouazza? He's from my town!' So in fact, Monsieur Bouazza, whom you met, was from Great Kabylie, Fort National, and this *maquisard* was from Fort National and knew the Bouazza family, who were an important family [*des notables*] in that region. He said, 'I know him, he has an uncle who's a pharmacist, his father works in the courthouse in Tizi-Ouzou. [...] You tell him, such and such sends you, I'm from such and such a place, and he needs to

¹² i.e. the ALN operating in the surrounding country-side. The term *maquis* was originally used to refer to the French Resistance to the Nazi occupation during World War II, and was (controversially) appropriated by the Algerian independence movement to describe their own resistance organization.

give you such intelligence'. What that intelligence was used for... in any case I completed the mission.

Interviewer: So he told you exactly what they wanted?

Lemmouchia: Oh, yes! He told me for example, 'who's the officer in charge of intelligence? Who runs the interrogations?' To give a bit the organisation of the intelligence collection, 'how do they check the attendance in school, which days they check?' [...] He asked for names and also if there were [troop] movements, preparations. [...] So I did that. I got the information [from Monsieur Bouazza]. I remember he dictated and I wrote.

Interviewer: You wrote it down?

Lemmouchia: Yes, I stayed behind after class. He came back from the shop, I stayed behind so that we didn't do it in front of everyone. He gave it to me and I transmitted it. [...]

Interviewer: So you would wait for Monsieur Bouazza after class and he set you a dictation?

Lemmouchia: [...] Monsieur Bouazza would dictate and I would write. To remember. Because I can't remember the name of such a person and what he does.

The same attribute that made the Army suspicious of Muslim teachers was a mark of confidence for the ALN. Bouazza was identified as a trust-worthy source of intelligence first and foremost because he was not of European descent. In all interviews I conducted with former teachers and students from this period, Muslim Algerians always signalled this difference as a validating mark of trustworthiness. While not all Muslims could be trusted – indeed, Bouazza mentioned explicitly that he never shared light of his political activities with any of the other Muslim teachers in his schools – the fact that a teacher was European automatically invalidated them from being admitted into a circle of trust. Bouazza's 'security clearance' was further reinforced because of a common ethnic-regional heritage he shared with the ALN officer. They were both Kabyles and they came from the same district of Fort National. Even though they had never met, as far as the interviews indicate, they shared membership to a common network of social proximity. In my interview with Bouazza, he repeatedly referred to contemporary actors as either Kabyle or not Kabyle – the former being a mark of integrity that he trusted in his professional and

political activities. The third validating factor was the distinction of the Bouazza family within Kabyle society. They were *notables*, a respectable lineage who had retained their high social standing under colonialism. While in other colonial contexts, this might have counted against them, in Algeria, prosperous indigenous families were not seen as natural collaborators of the colonial regime. They held positions of esteem, but not of overbearing dominance. The ALN officer knew Bouazza's uncle was a pharmacist and his father a legal translator for the regional tribunal. In a European context, these were not top-of-the-pyramid occupations associated with old blood. But they represent above all access to learning and formal qualifications, which for Muslim Algerians were severely rationed by the colonial government.

Bouazza's personal indigenous identity, determined by his ethnic, religious and filial back-ground, confirmed his adherence to the Algerian nationalist cause, regardless of his status as a French civil servant. On the other side, his professional identity put him in a unique position to gather intelligence on the military presence in Makouda and transmit it to the ALN. Others have written about the ways in which armed conflict shapes human geography and built environments (Eyre, 1984; Lambert, 2012; Pullan, 2013). In rural Algeria, the conflict placed the school at a social intersection between the area controlled by the French Army and that controlled by the ALN. Like most schools in rural Algeria, Bouazza's school was situated within the town, while the majority of its students lived in small rural enclaves in the surrounding countryside, which is mountainous and covered by thick oak forests (see fig. 3). The French army's strategy of pacification in this area consisted in entrenching military units within the towns, from where they could launch operations in the surrounding villages and countryside. A principal motivation behind this strategy was to cut off the ALN from sources of material support within the local population, by securing roads and population centers. School buildings were often requisitioned by the army as barracks, operational headquarters and interrogation centers. This was the case in Makouda, where the Army occupied one courtyard of the school, while classes continued in the remaining facilities (see fig. 4). Thus, the schoolteacher and the local army unit were literally neighbors, in constant interaction, often in tense negotiation.

While the army controlled the towns, the ALN remained hidden and mobile under cover of mountainous vegetation, depending on small rural enclaves for provisions in food. Children from these communities who attended school, thus passed on a daily basis from a space in which the ALN could operate, into the town controlled by French forces. The position of the teacher was exceptional in that he

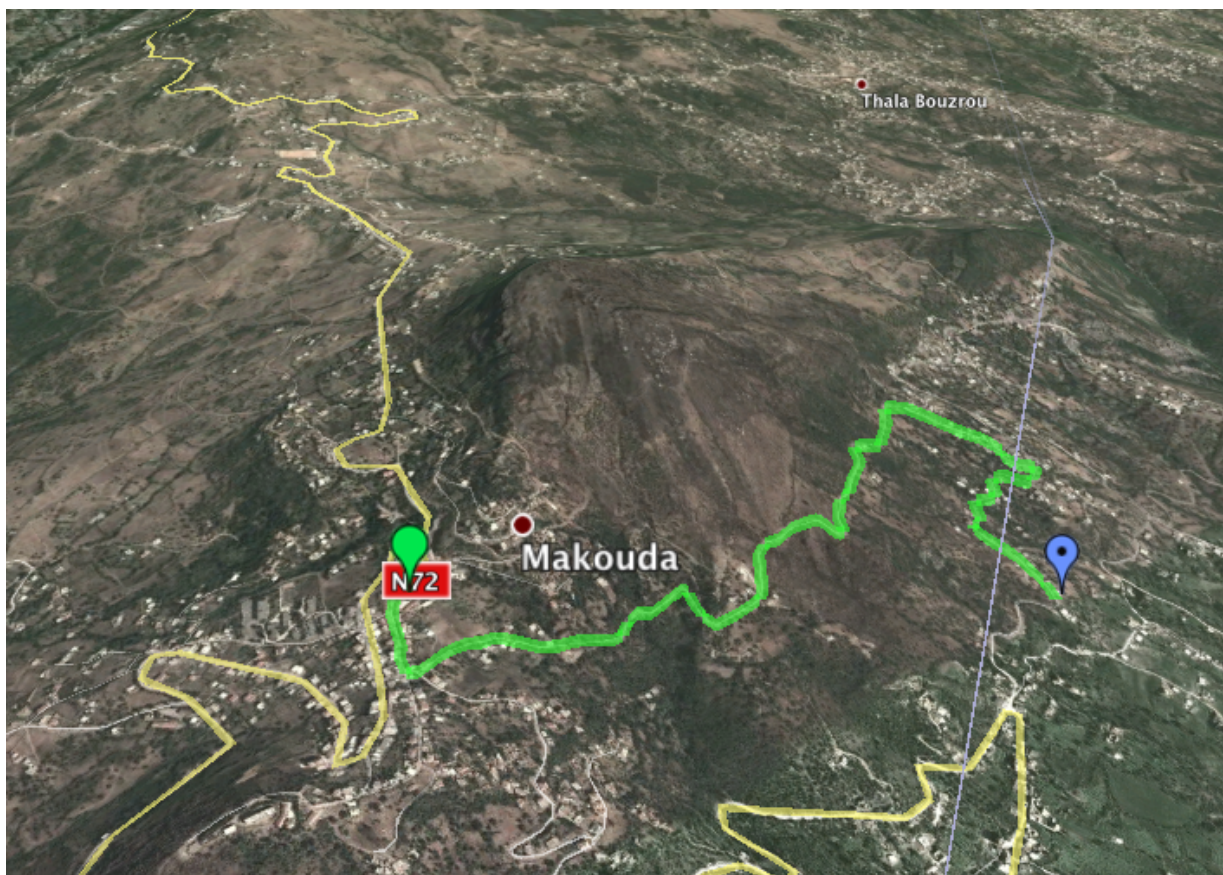


Figure 3: Route from Lemmouchia's home to school in Makouda, © Google.

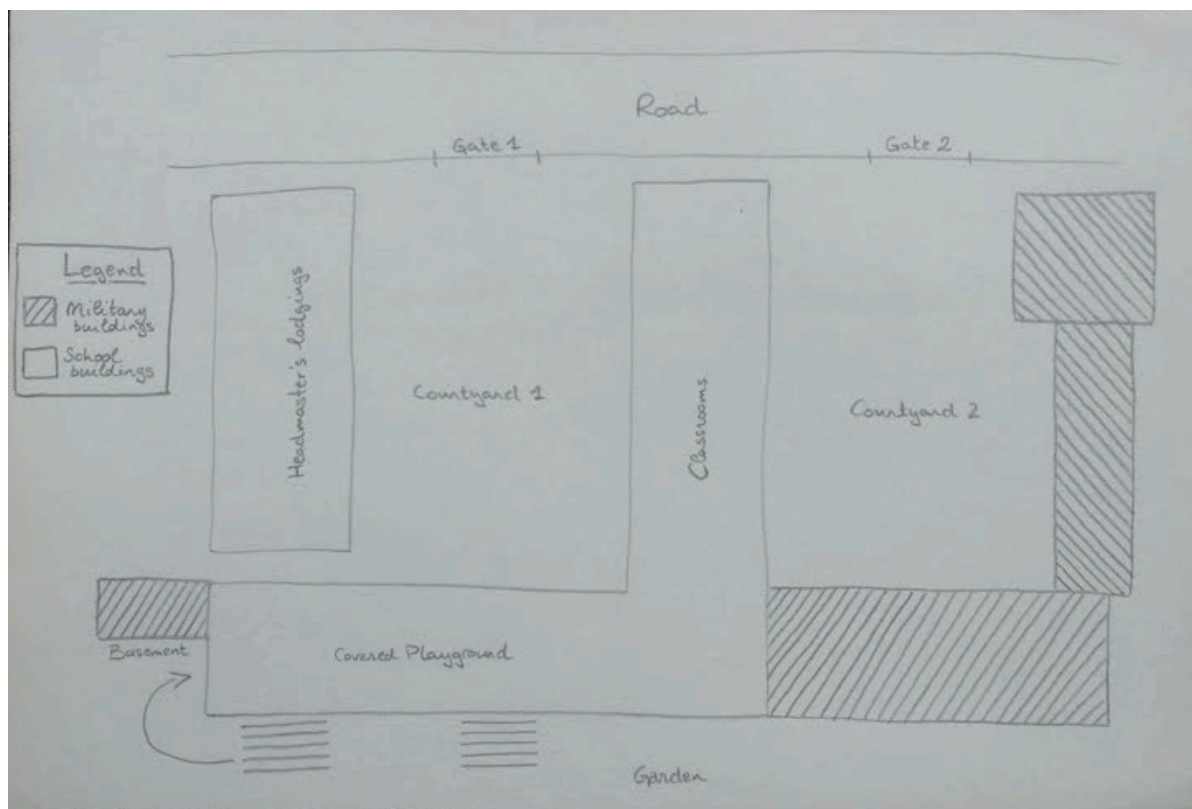


Figure 4: Floor-plan of Makouda primary school.

was in physical and administrative proximity to the French army (Bouazza reported that occasionally he would have lunch with the commanding lieutenant next door), while also being in daily interaction with the children of the surrounding countryside, who themselves were part of a wide network of logistic support for the ALN. It was by virtue of being placed at this social intersection that Bouazza was able to supply the ALN with information.

4 Conclusion

There exists an optimistic liberal inclination to consider the fields of education and conflict as inherently opposed to one another. However, the Algerian War of Independence encroached deep into the field of the Republican school. It is perhaps not surprising that schools in Algeria during the war became a space of conflict between the Army and teachers. Structurally, they already constituted spaces of conflict between the state and the governed population. Gerold Grace argues that “the sociology of the schools of the urban working class is inextricably associated with conflict – of class and culture, of ideologies and social processes” (p. 29). The same can be said of colonial schools. In support of his claim, Grace reviews a number of militaristic metaphors employed by English Victorian educationalists, comparing schools to citadels and teachers as soldiers. This notion is also advanced by Louis Althusser in his analysis of schools as the primary vector of the dominant ideology of control within society. These Ideological State Apparatuses, he argues, are “not only what is at stake, but also the locus of class conflict” (1976, p. 24). Once that conflict escalated into violence in Algeria, teachers were situated in the firing line.

If the French security services were particularly wary of the teaching corps it is because the French counter-insurgency campaign was based on a strategy of winning hearts and minds (Comité Armée-Jeunesse Algérie, 1960; Khane, 2002). Classrooms were a key instrument within that strategy. David Galula, the leading counter-insurgency theorist to emerge from the ranks of the French Army during the war, urges:

“Open a school in every occupied village with one or two soldiers as teachers. Ask the villagers to send at least one 8 to 12-year-old boy from each family; next, ask that girls attend school in the same way (if room is lacking, the boys in the morning, the girls in the afternoon).

Every absence must be justified.” [Galula, 2006, p. 285]

The Ministry of Education strongly embraced this strategy, perhaps in part because it raised its profile within the state: “the creation of schools, demanded by the Algerian

population, is one of the surest methods we have to win over minds and to oppose the propaganda directed against us in this region” (Minister of Education, 1955). However, the risk in this context was that left-wing teachers might use that platform to propagate subversive ideologies favorable to decolonization. While fighting the rebellion without, the army also had to fight subversion from within, in order to preserve the school network as an instrument of governance and linguistic/cultural dominance. It is perhaps surprising today to think that teachers (usually primary school teachers) were attributed such influence. However, the strategic position of teachers in the French system of state governance, as well as their social position amongst Muslim Algerians was much higher than that currently observable today. Since the foundation of the national teaching corps (*les hussards noirs*) in the 1870’s, teachers had been constructed as representatives of Republican moral and epistemic authority (Green, 1990; Dubreucq, 2004). In Algeria, this image of authority was reinforced by colonial power relations. In his memoirs, FLN leader Hocine Aït Ahmed (2009) identifies an inspirational teacher he had, Monsieur Thomé, as a key figure in his political awakening. He recalls from his childhood that Algerians around him had great esteem for teachers above all other French bureaucrats. Fazia Feraoun (1982), in her historical ethnography of a primary school in rural Kabylie, also notes the high esteem which villagers had for teachers, an esteem she compares with that previously reserved for the *marabout*. So successful was the cultural encroachment of the French school within this village that in the 1930’s villagers began to refer to the school bell in order to tell time. Using the school bell as a time reference is historically significant in that it marks a temporal reorganization of village life in favor of a French secular model, and reflects cultural positioning in ‘time clashes’ between city hall and church bells in rural France at this time.¹³

There exists a dialectical tension within the project of state education. State education is both hegemonic, insofar as it conveys a state-sanctioned ideology, and liberating insofar as it distributes resources of knowledge and critical reflection which can be used to negotiate or oppose a governing polity. Such a dialectic was particularly fragile in the Algerian context, where the discourse of a Republican education had to be maintained within an explicitly colonial society. Teachers’ central role in managing that dialectic on the ground positioned them as the keystone in the project of cultural colonialism — and insofar as France ruled Algeria by means

¹³ On the politics of clocks and time-telling, see: Morelli and Dierkens, 2008.

of cultural domination, dissident teachers represented a distinct threat to French rule in Algeria.

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