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ASPECTS OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN NORTH AFRICA

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The governments and people of the developing nations are attempting to accelerate economic development in their respective countries through the use of various developmental models which they adapt to fit their particular needs. These attempts are aimed at improving the social, economic, and political opportunities within their national boundaries. In the three North African countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, one of the several models that has been tried, particularly in the agricultural sector, is cooperatives. This paper deals specifically with some of the aspects of this cooperative movement. It is not to be inferred that the cooperative model has been or presently is the only model applicable to the Maghrebian situation. In fact, the cooperative model has been one of the least successful of the various avenues of economic development tried within the region. This limited success has not been because of lack of effort. The cooperative idea has been extensively used and misused within the three countries. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate some of the historical, political, and social factors which relate to cooperative development within the Maghreb and to ascertain some of the causes of this limited success.

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Analyzed according to Schaars' "hard core" principles for cooperatives ([1] service at cost, [2] democratic control, [3] limited return upon equity capital), most but not all cooperatives in North Africa are lacking.¹ There are many "true" cooperatives in the Maghreb, particularly among those started during the colonial period. The French colons brought with them the active cooperative movement that was developing in Metropolitan France.² The initial cooperatives they established were in agricultural credit. These and other cooperatives developed during the colonial period were similar to those in Metropolitan France in that both were developed in a manner "fairly intimately bound up with the State."³ Yet even with this intimate involvement of the State, most cooperatives during this period remained generally autonomous and democratic.

The extent of this cooperative development can be seen in data of North African cooperatives just before independence. Algeria as of 1955 had 490 cooperatives, almost half of which were for wine production and marketing. Others were in marketing of fruits and vegetables, cereals, and dairy products. Supply cooperatives as well as those for insurance and credit were also found. In the same period there were over 100 cooperatives in Tunisia, mostly in credit, insurance, and marketing of wine and fruits. In Morocco there were also more than 100 cooperatives which dealt mostly in marketing of agricultural products and purchasing of supplies.⁴

¹Marvin A. Schaars, "Basic Principles of Cooperatives: Their Growth and Development" in Agricultural Cooperation, ed. by Martin A. Abrahamsen and Claud L. Scroggs (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 191.

²Sheila Gorst, The Structure of the French Cooperative Movement, Occasional Paper #10, Horace Plunkett Foundation, November 1955 (London, England), p. 2.

³Gorst, p. 17.

⁴International Labour Office, International Directory of Cooperative Organizations, Eleventh Edition (Geneva, Switzerland, 1958), pp. 15, 133, 189.

Yet it should be noted that the cooperative idea was a European import brought by the colons for their own exclusive use and benefit. Although these cooperatives generally satisfied Schaars' "hard core" principles for cooperatives, they did so for Europeans only and not for the indigenous population.

An example of this exclusiveness can be seen in the area of agricultural credit in Morocco. "Two distinct lines of agricultural credit were set up under the protectorate, one for Europeans and the other for Moroccans."¹ Through the government supported credit cooperatives, the Caisse de Prêts Immobiliers for medium and long-term loans, the Caisses Mutuelles de Crédit Agricole for short-term loans, and the Caisse Fédérale de la Mutualité et de la Coopération Agricole, the European found ample sources for capital improvement. On the other hand, most indigenous Moroccan farmers (fellah) were required to be a member of the Sociétés Marocaines de Prévoyance (S.O.M.A.P.) and to pay into them a certain amount each time he paid his tax on any property or crop he owned. This fund was ostensibly the basis of a "credit cooperative" that the fellah could borrow from. But, in fact, during the protectorate period, little was loaned out of S.O.M.A.P. and what small amount was loaned was short-term credit only to "modern" farmers. "The great mass of the fellahin was getting no assistance at all from the S.O.M.A.P."²

Yet during the colonial period there was one major exception to the strict limitation to the European population of the cooperative idea as defined by Schaars. In March, 1946,

¹ Charles F. Stewart, The Economy of Morocco 1912-1962, Harvard Middle Eastern Monograph Series XII (Cambridge, Mass. 1964), p. 107.

² Ibid., p. 108.

Erik Labonne became Resident General of French Morocco. He was aided by a small group of French liberal intellectuals, among them Jacques Berque and Julien Couleau.¹ Labonne and his coterie sought moderation and reform in the colonial policy. The sociologist Berque, in particular, was interested in rural and agrarian reform and modernization, especially through the Berber tribal councils, the Jemaâs.

The Jemaâ was a tribal council made up of the head, or a representative of each family in the tribe. It acted in a democratic fashion to resolve disputes within the tribe.² Berque had hoped that this indigenous local democratic institution could be the basis for true local participation and rural reform.³

During Labonne's brief epoch as Resident General, Berque and Couleau established a program of rural reform built on what were called Secteurs de Modernisation du Paysanat (S.M.P.). This plan was conceived on the principle of multiple impact on the lives of the peasant through special secteurs, each given intensive attention in a broad-based program of agrarian, social, and political reform. Each S.M.P. was to have a literacy program, primary school, and rural dispensary as well as a machine-tractor station for the modernization of agriculture. The farmers were to form a supply cooperative for mutual buying of inputs and a marketing cooperative to store and sell their products. The entire S.M.P. was to be run through the direction of a revitalized Jemaâ with assistance and advice from a French technician.⁴

¹Douglas Ashford, National Development and Local Reform: Political Participation in Morocco, Tunisia and Pakistan, (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 28.

²Bernard G. Hoffman, The Structure of Traditional Moroccan Rural Society, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1967), p. 57.

³Ashford, p. 28.

⁴Ibid., p. 197.

However, this program did not fully materialize. Although the S.M.P.'s were established, Berque's and Couleau's reforms never developed. The French colons were opposed to the idea of rural reform and autonomy for the fellah, and the Moroccan nationalists did not feel they could support the reforms because such reforms would make France seem benevolent. This could undermine their objectives of independence.¹ In the end, the program died; Labonne was replaced in May, 1947, by General Alphonse Juin, a hard liner strongly backing the interests of the colons. After the reformists' efforts failed, the S.M.P.'s lost their democratic and social missions. Eventually, the S.M.P.'s were reduced to the role of service stations performing work as needed for the middle-sized peasant.² The idea of the S.M.P. (without its social and educational overtones) has been used without marked success in various forms in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco in their development plans.

POST-INDEPENDENCE COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

With independence, cooperative development changed. Many of the cooperatives developed by the colons continued in operation, but as the colons returned or were forced back to France, they were replaced by rich North African farmers who bought them out or who through other means found themselves in control of the colons' farms.

But for most of the fellah the situation remained the same or became worse. More and more a peasant farmer found himself compelled either directly or indirectly to join state "cooperatives." State cooperatives existed before independence, but now they became ubiquitous.

¹Douglas Ashford, Political Change in Morocco, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 65.

²Ashford (National Development...), p. 194.

The state "cooperatives" have two characteristics differing from Schaars' basic cooperative principles: (1) Central government control of all major decisions (non-democratic), and (2) in most cases, mandatory membership. These state "cooperatives" really are not cooperatives as we understand the term in the United States because they are undemocratic. Furthermore, as Schaars has noted, "The concept of cooperation is also based on Voluntaryism. Coercion or compulsion is the antithesis of cooperation. Freedom to belong or not to belong to a cooperative is basic to its underlying philosophy."¹

An example of two such state cooperatives are Cooperative Marocaines Agricole (C.M.A.) and Sociétés Cooperatives Agricole Marocaines (S.C.A.M.). The International Labour Office referred to these as non-cooperatives.² A Moroccan government official responded to this sort of criticism: "It has sometimes been said that the C.M.A. and S.C.A.M. are not true cooperatives and that they are rather government stores. The criticism is not fully justified. Indeed, they are cooperatives according to Moroccan legislation because they are constituted and are run within the framework of the laws establishing the cooperative organization under state control. Although they do not always comply with all accepted cooperative principles, they are nevertheless a first attempt to introduce cooperation in rural areas."³ In other words, they are cooperatives not because they follow cooperative principles but because the government says they are!

John Simmons describes the state cooperatives of North Africa by saying: "With few exceptions Arab cooperatives are state farms; the majority of the routine and policy decisions are

¹Schaars, p. 186.

²International Labour Office, p. 133.

³Georges Monnet, "Extra Cooperative Services of Some Moroccan Cooperatives" in Yearbook of Agricultural Cooperation 1964, p. 225.

made by non-members. The term cooperative is a cold war convenience which assists some of the nations of the Middle East and North Africa to obtain the aid and favor of both East and West."¹

The post-independence development of cooperatives and of state cooperatives differed with each country of the Maghreb.

Tunisia

Of the three, Tunisia has had initially the most vigorous and subsequently the most disastrous experience with cooperatives. Briefly, the Tunisian use of cooperatives went through three stages: (1) Status quo, (2) gradualism, and (3) crisis.²

After Tunisia gained independence in 1956, Bourguiba was faced with the problem of keeping his still heavily dependent country from tail spinning into economic chaos. In order to take a pragmatic position, he chose to maintain the economic status quo while trying to reform social institutions. In the period just before independence (1947-1950), there had been a spontaneous grouping of private farmers by free association into supply cooperatives for the purchase of inputs. During the status quo period after independence, the government also gradually began to expand its role in cooperatives through state cooperatives used to manage expropriated colon farms.

After a few years with the status quo situation, pressure began to mount within the government for a more dynamic control of the country's economy. The gradualism period began with the introduction in 1962 of the Ten Year Plan developed primarily by Ahmed Ben Salah.

¹ John L. Simmons, "Agricultural Cooperatives and Tunisian Development", in The Middle East Journal, 24:455, Fall, 1970.

² Ibid., pp. 456-465.

During this period the state cooperatives expanded as more colon land was bought. The state cooperatives also began to extend into other tribal lands, forming them into Unités for irrigated farming under state management. The government also began to involve itself with the previously formed free association supply cooperatives.

The third stage of crisis began in May, 1964, when, after Bourguiba seized the remaining unsold colon lands, the French government retaliated with economic sanctions. To meet this crisis, the Tunisian government under Ben Salah's direction expanded the state cooperative program into wider and wider areas, even into retail commerce. This led to increasing inefficiency in production due to overloading of the now centralized government controls and greater resentment and rebellion among the population at their lack of economic freedom. In September, 1969, the entire program collapsed. Tunisia is presently reevaluating its prospects for cooperative development.

Algeria

The violence of the struggle for independence tore apart the social and political infrastructure more in Algeria than in either Tunisia or Morocco. Thus, the Algerians had less to start with. Under Ben Bella the government took a strong "progressive socialist" stance that has continued until today. This was not a good environment for cooperatives.

Although agricultural reform was one of the first promises of the Ben Bella government, little happened until January, 1972, when the program for the "Agrarian Revolution" was presented.¹ In terms of state cooperatives, certain "principles" were laid down. There will

¹Michael Wall and Sue Dearden, "The Maghreb: A Survey", The Economist, March 11, 1972, p. 18.

not be forced membership in state cooperatives for farm management (i.e., collective farms) for small land owners. They will be free to farm their land as they please but will be "encouraged" to take advantage of the state farm management cooperative. There will be enforced membership into "service" cooperatives handling credit, supplies, and marketing of farm products.¹ It is too early to see how this "revolution" will develop.

Morocco

Moroccan use of cooperatives has not been as widespread as that in Tunisia or Algeria. Most of the cooperatives developed by the French colons continued even after independence; but as more of the colons left, the cooperatives either died or were taken over by rich Moroccan farmers. State cooperatives existed before independence particularly in the area of credit. Since independence the credit role has been taken over more and more by Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole (C.N.C.A.) which hopes to establish local cooperative agricultural credit banks.² For the smaller farmers, most seeds and fertilizer are handled through the Sociétés Cooperative Agricole Marocaines (S.C.A.M.), a state cooperative store.³ Larger farmers use S.C.A.M. or the local market for buying inputs.

The major agricultural cooperative activity in Morocco has been with groupement or precooperatives. These groupements are a method used by the Moroccan government for the contact, control, and education of peasant farmers to increase agricultural production. They are

¹ Jean-Pierre Séréni, "Peut-on Revolutionner l'Agriculture?", Jeune Afrique, 586:42-43, April 1, 1972.

² T. M. Kelso, R. E. McKnight, J. L. Nevins, and R. A. Russel, Morocco: Role of Fertilizer in Agricultural Development, (Tennessee Valley Authority, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 1967), p. 67.

³ Ibid., p. 47.

supposed to lead eventually to full scale farmer cooperatives. They are established by 7 to 20 farmers grouping together to undertake a specific economic task such as buying fertilizer or a tractor. Each farmer in the groupement takes full liability for a loan from the government to the groupement to complete the economic task desired. The groupement is used by the government as a basis for extension programs, and, in some cases, various other government programs, often through coercion. In theory it is a program to develop autonomous, member-controlled cooperatives, but in practice it is an indirect means to establish government control over peasant farm practices.¹

Why has the Maghreb taken a course generally toward state cooperatives, collective farms, government stores, etc., rather than toward cooperatives following Schaars' hard core principles, particularly his principle of democratic member control? Why, for example, did none of the three countries attempt to reestablish Berque's and Couleau's ideas concerning the S.M.P? Why is it typical to find in North Africa laws such as the 1963 Tunisian agricultural cooperative law, which "was different from most cooperative laws, as it left out the usual definition of a voluntary organization of people to obtain a certain goal as a basic description of a cooperative?"²

In progressive socialist Algeria, this situation follows fairly logically. As Smith observes concerning cooperatives in a progressive socialist system, "It would seem that cooperatives or other farmers' organizations can exist only as a branch of the Civil Service unless an organic concept of society is accepted. According to this concept an individual has certain natural rights in society; and when he forms an association, it too has rights which are not derived

¹ Josué Bensimon, "Le Groupement Precooperatif", Bulletin Economique et Social du Maroc, 108:89-101, January, 1968.

² M. P. Moore and M. S. Lewis, "Agrarian Reform and the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Tunisia," Yearbook of Agricultural Cooperation 1968, p. 42.

merely from the State."¹

But what about Morocco and Tunisia? These are two countries that did not follow the progressive socialist path. Why did they too use state cooperatives in lieu of true cooperatives?

To answer this question it would be helpful to know the position the North African countries found themselves in upon achieving independence. The major agricultural problems the Maghreb faced included:

1. The need to return to Maghrebian control of large acreage of modern French colons' farms without losing their high productivity.
2. A general lack of trained indigenous cadre to undertake a major role in agricultural development.
3. Lack of capital and savings for investment.
4. Large numbers of peasants with little or no knowledge of farming wanting to return to "their" land.
5. Increasing rural misery with a corresponding massive migration to spreading urban slums.

In trying to find a means of resolving these problems, the leaders of the North African countries sought some model they could emulate. For many of them, "the Eastern European models of large mechanized farms run by a technical elite for the benefit of the peasant were very attractive."² These models were attractive because the East European countries had just developed from a position like that which North Africa was experiencing at the time.³ They were

¹Louis P. F. Smith, The Evolution of Agricultural Cooperation, (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Press, 1961), pp. 114-115.

²Simmons, p. 52.

³Manfred Halpren, The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1963), p. 163.

economically backward and sought "to achieve progress, status, and power in a hurry." Another attractive feature of these models was the fact that they had begun with a lack of capital, "hence, (they) would find it useful to force savings and use the state to direct investments." Among all of these models, that of Yugoslavia was the most attractive because it was "at once European in style and status yet still in process of overcoming its economic development problems." ¹

Yet while the Eastern European models of collective farming were becoming more popular among North African officials, "the East Europeans were becoming disillusioned with the large centrally controlled state farms."² In Yugoslavia for example, the "working cooperatives" or collectivized farm program started slowly in 1945, went through a rapid expansion in 1949, and reached its peak in 1950-51, then rapidly began to decline. By 1953 the Yugoslavian cooperatives had entered into a process of disintegration.³ Although many factors were involved in this collapse, "the primary cause was realization (by the government) that collectivization had failed to alter basic attitudes and to enlist the cooperation of the peasants."⁴

The young North African nationalists were strongly influenced by the seeming success in the early 50's of the East European model but apparently were not aware of its eventual outcome. After independence they were anxious to apply this model to their own problems. But now as Simmons notes, "ten years after the mistake, Tunisia has the dubious honor of being the first

¹ ibid.

² Simmons, p. 52.

³ Jozo Tomasevich, Chapter 7, "Collectivization of Agriculture in Yugoslavia" in Collectivization of Agriculture in Eastern Europe, ed. by Irwin T. Sanders, (University of Kentucky Press, 1958), p. 172.

⁴ ibid., p. 192.

Arab country to do away with this unsuccessful model."¹ Morocco and Algeria do not seem to have learned much from the lesson of Tunisia. Algeria in particular is plummeting headlong into the same situation with its "Agrarian Revolution."

The question still persists: Why did the Maghreb choose to develop agriculture in a collective state-control fashion rather than through the use of cooperatives? Blind infatuation with the Eastern European models does not seem the full reason. A possible answer might be found by examining the reasons North Africans themselves give. A typical answer is one Simmons reports an official in the Ministry of Agriculture in Tunisia gave him concerning the development of the cooperatives there: "The original model had the peasants running the cooperative, with assistance from the state. But when the cooperative got started, (the officials') colleagues realized that the peasants were not capable of running such an operation, and that the state would have to take responsibility for their direction."² The assumed inability of the peasant to control his own affairs is used again and again as the reason for direct state intervention in his affairs. For example, in an article supporting state controlled groupement precooperatifs in Morocco, the peasant is pictured in such a way that if he had a true cooperative where he had a voice in his own concerns he would believe he was a privileged citizen and would only demand gifts, aids, and other supplements from the government. Thus he would "tend less to use the cooperative than to abuse it."³

¹ Simmons, p. 52

² Ibid.

³ Bensimon, p. 89.

Does this idea have substance in reality? Are the indigenous North African farmers unable to control their own affairs and do they require state intervention to direct them? No. View for example the spontaneous growth of free association supply cooperatives in Tunisia just prior to independence when the French liberalized local control. And after the disastrous experience with state cooperatives ended in 1969, these free association cooperatives have come back to life unaided.¹

It should also be noted that North African farmers are not a monolith of traditional, fatalistic, uneducated peasants; there is a wide variety of education, wealth, and experience among the fellah. To generalize that they are unable to control their own local affairs is as erroneous as the same accusation at a minority group in the United States such as the American Indians.

And still another factor to note is the traditional rural society's means of self-government, especially among Moroccan and Algerian Berber tribes whose councils, or Jemaâs, handle tribal matters in a sophisticated, democratic fashion.

The ability to regulate one's own affairs is not as foreign to the peasant as some may want to believe. Ashford, in studying minutes of local Moroccan communes, which were established briefly after independence, came to the following conclusions: "The commune minutes are perhaps the best available evidence of the untapped energies and unused cognitive skill at the local level. This is not to suggest that complex development programs will be spontaneously supported by villagers, but that the local citizen may be much more prepared to evaluate his position in life and to relate his affairs to the needs and goals of the higher

¹Simmons, p. 57.

echelons of political affairs than most Moroccans and Westerners have been willing to admit."¹

The argument that the local farmers are unable to organize and support a local cooperative venture by themselves seems a bit dubious. Thus, the question still is: Why have not the North African countries encouraged the development of true cooperatives? The answer, I believe, is found in the social, political, and economic dichotomies within the region. The tensions and infighting between the rich and the poor; the powerful and the weak; the European and the Maghrebian; the Arab and the Berber; the city dweller and the country dweller; the educated and the uneducated; the landed and the landless create so much distrust and self-protectiveness that people fear any uncontrolled association which might rearrange the power structure to their disadvantage.

Several examples show how the cooperative mood has been retarded. When the French arrived in North Africa to establish their social, political, and economic dominance over the inhabitants, they found that they could slip into an already existing dualistic society represented by the Sultan's or Bey's authoritarian rule of the countryside. The French centralized bureaucracy merely enforced, expanded, and made more coldly efficient the centralized, downward-flowing authority that was the traditional government of the Arabs. This semi-feudal form of government had not changed markedly by the time independence arrived in North Africa. In such a situation, no matter what the polemics, "when the State (or a group) has absolute right to override the individual...cooperation of

¹Ashford, p. 49.

individuals can only obstruct that right."¹

Observers have noted that the King of Morocco has often expressed the opinion that "if he permitted others to voice opinions and take action that detracted from his monarchical position he might lose control of events."² In the same manner, other officials and notables in government and private life down to persons as insignificant as petit fonctionnaires have the same fear. Thus, in Tunisia we find that while state cooperatives were spoken of in glowing terms by Bourguiba, they were in fact "obviously a convenient device to control and supervise the activity of thousands of Tunisians. The entire cooperative movement (had) been centralized in Tunis and (was) closely managed from the provincial level by the governors and the Regional Cooperative Federation composed of party reliables and high officials."³

Any attempts to organize or give a voice to the lower echelons is looked upon with apprehension. In 1956, for example, a Caid, Lohcen Lyoussi, an intimate of the King of Morocco, tried to organize a conservative peasant movement, but the King stopped it because of its overtones of Berber tribal parochialism.⁴

This pattern is repeated again and again throughout North Africa. It is not limited to any one type of government or a particular leader. Be it a traditional monarchy in Morocco or a progressive socialist state in Algeria, the powerful rule the nonpowerful and feel threatened by any means used to change that situation. The attitude extends beyond government down through tribes to the individual.

¹Smith, p. 113.

²Ashford, p. 40.

³Ibid., p. 213.

⁴Halpren, p. 95.

Berque gives an example of such a situation with cooperatives in Egypt, although the example would fit in any of the Maghrebian countries. In 1955, the cooperative movement in Egypt held a congress in Cairo. The cotton cooperative had problems with selfish village bosses and their misuse of the credit bank. To counter the influence of the village notables, the cooperative was limited to farmers of less than five feddens; but it turned out that a three-fedden farmer was already a petty exploiter and the reform shifted the advantage to him from the village notable. The exploited became the exploiter.¹

The situation facing cooperatives in North Africa is best typified by comments by Poncet on cooperatives in the Sebou project in northwestern Morocco. "It is generally feared that the cooperatives will succeed and become too popular or they will waste previous resources and block the free expansion and the prosperity of the new capitalist,"² the rich Moroccan farmer who replaced his former master, the colon.

CONCLUSION

The future of cooperatives in North Africa is difficult to predict with the exception of Algeria. As long as Algeria feels it must fulfill its revolutionary, progressive socialist destiny, voluntary free association cooperatives have little chance to develop. But in Morocco and Tunisia, there appears to be no major theoretical blockage to cooperative development but at governmental and upper echelon levels there is a persistent reluctance and/or resistance to actively supporting cooperative development. When it comes to cooperatives, words are spoken, but deeds are not done.

¹ Jacques Berque, The Arabs: Their History and Future, (London, England: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 159.

² J. Poncet, "Grand Projets et Difficultés Marocaines" in Revue Tier Monde, (Paris, France 41:210), January, 1970.

Cooperative association is not foreign or unknown to these societies, nor is democratic control of affairs at the local level. Middle-class farmers have the capital and political expertise to make a cooperative work. Even among the peasant class there are a number of "rich" peasants who could undertake a cooperative venture. For the truly poverty-stricken peasantry, some assistance would be needed in terms of political guidance and the lending of capital and technical inputs; but with enlightened application of this assistance, there would be no need for direct control by the State. Yet very little has happened in free cooperative development and what does occur is often discouraged by the State.

The social and psychological elements of fear, distrust and the protecting of one's own wealth and position through dominance over others seems to hold back any active cooperative expansion. Before such expansion could ever develop, these social and psychological barriers have to be examined and probed in detail so that some way can be found to offset them.

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