

**The Sarrajine Street School (3S), Tunis, (1948-1958), A Modern Koranic school  
for young Tunisian Muslim girls**

المدرسة الابتدائية نهج السراجين، تونس، (1948 – 1958)، مدرسة قرآنية عصرية للبنات المسلمة التونسية

**L'école de la Rue Sarrajine, Tunis (1948 – 1958), une école coranique moderne  
pour la jeune fille musulmane tunisienne**

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**ملخص:** يهدف المقال إلى فهم الرهانات التي أحاطت بإحداث مدرسة البنت المسلمة القرآنية، 44 نهج السراجين بتونس، وهي مدرسة ابتدائية خاصة، وأساسا تحديات السياسة التعليمية الفرنسية الموجهة إلى البنت المسلمة التونسية (الجزء الأول من المقال)، وفكرة البديل التي مثلت الدافع إلى إحداث المدرسة من قبل جمعية الشبان المسلمين وحكمت برامجها المحافظة (الموجهة نحو تأكيد الهوية). وقد حاولنا تقييم حصيلة التجربة من خلال مسيرة عدد من تلميذات المدرسة. واعتمدنا من أجل ذلك مقارنة متعددة الاختصاص بين الكمية والكيفية، مستفيدين من مصادر جديدة بفضل شهادات تلميذات المدرسة وأرشيفهن الخاص. وتوصلنا إلى عمق تأثير تلك التجربة في ثقافة بناتها وتكوينهن والذي امتد إلى مستقبلهن سواء من خلال مسارهن التعليمي أو خيارهن في الحياة. كما أن هذا المدرسة مثلت نموذجا لشبكة من المدارس الابتدائية في جهات البلاد ضمن المشروع التعليمي لجمعية الشبان المسلمين. لكنها انتهت بالتأميم سنة 1958.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مدرسة البنت المسلمة القرآنية؛ الشيخ محمد الصالح النيفر؛ نهج السراجين؛ جمعية الشبان المسلمين؛ مقبرة سيدي بوخريسان

**Abstract :** We tried in this arto understand the stakes surrounding the creation of the Sarrajine Street School, mainly the challenges of the French educational policy, and the idea of an alternative that represented the impetus for the creation of the school by The Young Men's Muslim Association. We have tried to assess the outcome of the experience through the path of a number of schoolgirls. For this, we adopted a multidisciplinary approach between quantity and quality methods, making use of new sources thanks to the testimonies of schoolgirls and their own archives. we have discovered the profound influence of this experience whether it is on the path of young girls or their culture and even their choices in life. But it ended with nationalization in 1958.

**Keywords :** Koranic Muslim Girl School ; Cheikh Mohamed Salah al-Nayfar; Sarrajine Street; Young Men's Muslim Association; Cemetery of Sidi Boukhrisan.

**Résumé :** Quels enjeux pour une école de jeunes filles musulmanes (celle de la Rue Sarrajine à Tunis) ? C'est à quoi vise à répondre cet article, que ce soit de la part de la politique éducative coloniale ou bien celle de l'alternative nationaliste qui a guidé l'initiative de l'Association des Jeunes Musulmans à instaurer cette école et choisir des tendances conservatrices dans ses programmes. Nous avons essayé d'évaluer son bilan à travers le parcours d'un certain nombre d'écolières. Pour cela, nous avons adopté une approche pluridisciplinaire entre méthodes quantitative et qualitative, profitant de nouvelles sources grâce aux témoignages et des archives privées des écolières que nous avons contactées. Et nous avons constaté le profond impact de cette expérience sur leur culture et même leurs choix dans la vie. Mais cela a pris fin avec l'étatisation de l'enseignement en 1958.

**Mots clés :** école coranique pour jeunes filles musulmanes ; Cheikh Mohamed Salah al-Nayfar ; Rue des Sarrajines ; Association des Jeunes Musulmans ; Cimetière de Sidi Boukhrissane

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The Sarrajine Street School (3S), Tunis, (1948-1958), A Modern Koranic school for young Tunisian Muslim girls

Transliteration (‘ = ع                      ħ / H = ح)

*Education is never an innocent enterprise, let alone in an imperialist framework (SMITH, 2000, p. 2)*



(façade of the current Sarrajine college, former Koranic School for young Muslim girls in 44, Sarrajine Street, in front of Bab Mnara)

## **Introduction :**

Educating the young Tunisian Muslim girl under protectorate was a contentious issue. This is why it was, and for a long time, a state monopoly, unlike that of boys on which the colonial authorities made a concession. In 1907, the reformed kouttebs project developed by the Young Tunisians Movement saw the light under the name of Modern Koranic Schools (MKS). Yet, and against the aspirations of the Tunisians who insisted on taking part in the charge, young Muslim girls would not have the right to access these schools before the end of World War II (1944). The Sarrajine Street School (3S) for young Muslim girls appeared in the wake of that socio-cultural development, under the aegis of a cultural association, the Tunisian Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA).

Was this a palliative act of a severe lack in the educational infrastructure dedicated to the Muslim girl? Surely, it was, but only in part. The project had also an alternative character. The 3S stood out as the anti, if not the competitor, of another private and public-school model, namely the colonial school, which had invaded Tunisian space and society since the 19th century, and the most prominent of which was the Pacha Street School (PSS) (BAKALTI, 1990/2, pp. 258 - 264). Both, 3S and PSS, symbols of the two competing school networks, were targeting the Muslim girl, but in

antagonistic approaches. If the PSS, (and the missionary schools prior to them) embarked on the conquest of the space and the society of the medina since the beginning of the century in the service of the integrative colonial project, the 3S could not begin only about half a century later, following the 1944 law, and within the framework of a broader identity struggle.

In this article, and through the study of this pioneer private school (the 3S), we suggest exploring the issues of the patriotic project with regard to educating the young girls: In what context did the project appear? how did it evolve? What human resources was it draining? What ideas did this school convey? and finally, what assessment can we draw from the experience?

## 1- Teaching the Muslim Girl: Conflictual Issues between Colonization and Colonized

### 1-1. The Muslim girl in colonial school policy

#### 1-1-1. Colonial stakes of the Muslim girl's education

Woman was a Trojan horse for the Western colonizer. Home acculturation was the best choice to guarantee the most durable integration of the colonized peoples, among which the Tunisian people. Thus, on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress (May 1930), Cardinal Lemaître announced that women were the best means of infiltration into the Muslim family (433 صفحة، 2003، الطباي، <sup>(2)</sup>). On the Protectorate side, teaching the Muslim girl had further and broader goals consisting in home-based acculturation. From this perspective, appointing women like Ms. Eigenchenk, headmistress of the PSS or the teacher sisters at the head of European schools was considered very useful to achieve that goal as it was believed that “only a woman could unveil a Muslim woman”. The ultimate colonial mission was to “give birth to French civilization within Muslim families through moral instruction, setting real examples and introducing progressive ideas such as childcare” (SMITH, 2000, p. 2; 10). It was the best way of a smooth integration via a cultural dependence which could legitimize and perpetuate any other form of dependence. On the other hand, and just as colonization had entrusted the school with producing an elite of bilingual intermediary agents with the society (translators-interpreters and teachers) (CHABCHOUB, 2000, p. 70), it needed a bilingual female elite. as an intermediary with the native female community.

However, we cannot neglect another challenge which influenced the protector's policy, embodied in the “Italian threat”. Indeed, from 1881 until the onset of World War II, a Franco-Italian cold war went on to control the country, making of the school yard the deadliest battlefield (SMITH, 2000, p. 2). The presence of the Italians was so feared that the colonial administrators proposed: “... to establish a friendly contact between French and Muslim women in the Regency (of Tunis), so as to clear the misunderstandings resulting from reciprocal ignorance” (SMITH, 2000, p. 10). It is in this perspective that the PSS was born.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, by these words, he was only taking up a discourse that was already circulating in the 19th century. Father François Bourgade devoted his work “Soirées de Carthage”, published in 1847, to criticizing the situation of Muslim women and their inferiority to European women in a contemptuous and arrogant style (BOURGADE, 1847).

### **1-1-2. Colonial school policy towards the young Tunisian Muslim girl: an imposing monopoly.**

The Protectorate imposed a monopoly on female education, whether in French or Franco-Arab schools, to ensure that young girls were taught only the ideas of the official colonial curriculum. And although it was more or less lenient towards patriotic attempts to penetrate private male primary education, it was firm on the same aspirations regarding female schools. He vigorously opposed any attempt to clone the boys' private MKS experiment. In response to the first attempt to create one, the head of the **Directorate of Public Instruction (DPI)** highlighted in a note: "There have never been any Koranic schools for girls in Tunisia. To admit one would be to admit others, and the DPI was firm on refusing Muslim girls' education". When a notable from Sfax suggested opening an MKS for young girls profiting from the absence of legal texts opposing it, the protectorate authorities resorted to the Bey who declared "his opposition to this dangerous innovation" (AYACHI, 2003, p. 306). And faced with the intention to create female classes in male MKSs at the end of the 1930s', the law of 1938 was promulgated, prohibiting in article 28 "the directors of MKS from admitting female students in their establishments" (AYACHI, 2003, p. 307). In parallel and from the same year, the DPI would engage in establishing new girls' schools or expanding the already-existing ones in order to empty the national project of its usefulness. As an example, it created a sixth class at the secondary school for young Muslim girls "Armand FALLIERES", (currently Russia Street School) with the aim of halting the experience of Sadikia, the nursery of a pure patriotic education (العياشي، 2012، صفحة 273) (BAKALTI, 1996, pp. 148 - 150). In 1941-42, the DPI tried to anticipate patriotic attempts by training a dozen Muslim girls at the same high school, providing them with lessons in Arabic, French, hygiene and general education. The goal was to make of them, within a four-year period, teachers in schools for Muslim girls. The head of the DPI, in fact, believed that, by improving the teaching of the Arabic language and Islamic instruction in public schools, the government would probably cut off these patriotic attempts to free women education. He even suggested that the example of boys' MKSs proved that it would be good to nip girls' MKSs in the bud (AYACHI, 2003, p. 308). But under the patriotic pressure, as well as the geostrategic changes in the region and in the world, the Protectorate finally gave in to the aspirations of Tunisians to have their own female educational institutions.

In fact, the August 19, 1944 decree extended MKS to young girls after it had been limited to boys. It regulated the conditions for the opening of private Koranic schools and defined them for the first time as "schools for boys and girls"<sup>3</sup>. Henceforth, the Muslim girl could take part in the examination for the primary school leaving certificate (CEPE) (تقويم تونس، 1951 - 1952، صفحة 28) (تقويم، 1946، صفحة 19). But this decision also reflected the changing attitude of Tunisians towards the education of their daughters.

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<sup>3</sup> This decision is part of French policy aimed at containing the rise of nationalist tendencies in the colonies towards the end of WWII. A conference was held in Algeria under the leadership of General De Gaulle on December 10, 1943, with the aim of examining the situation of the three Maghreb countries. The French Resident General in Tunis, General Mast, felt that France should adopt a constructive policy which leads Tunisian public opinion instead of leaving it under the influence of anti-French parties. He was afraid of a gathering of Tunisian patriots, including even the Communists, to take advantage of France's difficult situation in the war and dare to raise demands that they would not have raised under normal circumstances. It was therefore necessary to anticipate events (SRAIEB, 1991, pp. 101; 111 - 116). This necessitated expanding the FAS programs male to female Koranic schools (تقويم تونس، 1946، صفحة 19).



## 1-2. The Tunisians and the teaching of young girls,

### 1-2-1. From an elitist position to a matter of public opinion

The evolution of attitudes of the Tunisians in favor of girls' education was the result of several changes. As early as the 19th century, the subject was raised within the framework of the debate on the status of Muslim women. The country was under pressure from both Western and Eastern cultural influences and the internal changes that accompanied them (الهدلي، 2017، صفحة 307). (KHAZDAGHLI, 2000, p. 320) (BAKALTI, 1996, pp. 25 - 67). The women's initiative to raise the issue of teaching Muslim girls has helped break social taboos on the subject. Reference can be made here to the role of women's associations such as the Muslim Women's Union (الاتحاد النسائي الإسلامي) headed by Bchira Bin Mrad and the **Instance of Muslim Ladies** (IML) (هيئة السيدات المسلمات) branch of the YMMA, and which was founded basically to educate young girls (BAKALTI, la femme tunisienne au temps de la colonisation 1881 - 1956, 1996, p. 81).

Despite its defects, the dissemination of education did contribute to these socio-cultural changes. The emergence of Tunisian female models in public life such as Doctor Taouhida Ben al-Cheikh provided a social model to follow. Likewise, the educational imbalance between girls and boys created a social situation which provoked particularly the bourgeois circles. It was because the newly educated in French schools no longer showed any interest in marrying their illiterate compatriots to whom they preferred foreign women (المناعي، 1996، صفحة 118). Consequently, education became a social need for these circles. Their daughters were to be entitled to marriage with this new modern elite. They had to learn the savoir-vivre for a "social update".

The interference of all these factors forced the Tunisian position on girl's education to evolve from a nuanced elitist position between the 19th century and WWII, to a matter of public opinion. This was reflected in the evolution of the number of female schools and pupils.

### 1-2-2. The Outcome of a clash: The evolution of private education for young Muslim girls under the protectorate

The reluctance of the majority of the Tunisians to send their daughters to school for fear of French education on the one hand, and colonial obstructions on the other, meant that the number of young Tunisian girls attending school remained limited. in general. Until 1944, it did not exceed ten thousand girls (9755) against more than ten thousand (10533) for the French and more than fifteen thousand (15319) for the rest of the mainly European girls (330 صفحة، 1946، تقويم تونس). Three quarters of Tunisian young girls were concentrated in Franco Arab schools (FAS), while they were non-existent in MKSs as they were forbidden for them until 1944. However, a first Tunisian attempt to open an MKS for young Muslim girls dates back to October 1922 at the initiative of Manoubia al-Wartani. It failed for lack of public subsidies (العياشي، 2012، صفحة 274).

The Beylical decree dated August 19, 1944 can be considered as a historic turning point in the teaching of the young Tunisian Muslim girl. In this context, patriotic initiatives aiming at creating MKSs for young girls gathered pace. Sfax distinguished itself there by its precedence and by the multiplicity of its initiatives. Some of its schools became a benchmark, such as al-Abbassia (العياشي).

(274 صفحة 2012). All these initiatives resulted in an increase in the number of MKSs (without distinction of gender) by almost four times (196 schools in 1955 against only 48 in 1944).

Statistical data concerning Franco-Arab schools reveal a rapid increase in the number of young Tunisian Muslim girls during the decade 1944 - 1954 of the order of 330% (against only 220% for Tunisian boys) (BAKALTI, 1996, pp. 143 - 147)<sup>(4)</sup>.

**Table 1: growth in the number of Tunisian students in Franco-Arab schools between 1944 - 1954**

	1944	1954	Growth rate
Young Muslim girls	7130	30697	330%
Tunisian Muslim Boys	20329	94063	220%

(BAKALTI, 1990/2, p. 256)

The birth of the 3S is a result of this historical process. It is the concretization of it through its course and its place in patriotic cultural resistance.

## **2- The Sarrajine Street School**

It's thanks to the meetings with its various actors (teachers and pupils especially) that we were able to draw up a sketch of this school's course, contrary to the various archival sources that have provided us with only fragments. The contact with the teachers and the students of the 3S was extremely fruitful to us with their testimonies mentioning even the daily details, as well as the access to their personal archives such as copybooks, notebooks, certificates, and photos. It would be good to point out from now that these personal accounts and archives represent the main source of this sketch. So, we will be content to cite only the other references where necessary.

### **2-1. Creation and development of the school:**

#### **2-1-1. The beginnings:**

Two almost simultaneous events in the mid-1940s were behind the initiative to create a school under the aegis of YMMA. First, the law of August 19, 1944 prompted the YMMA to think about the project. Then, the acquisition of the Madrasah (habous student home of the Great Mosque) of Bir Lahjar located at No. 40 Pacha street (summer 1945) enabled the association to carry it out. It started with two classes for the young girls from the nearby neighborhoods. Yet, the veritable project will be with the 3S inaugurated in 1948. But that does not prevent this early experience from preparing the ground for it. In fact, the administration of the YMMA was not very demanding with regard to the admission of students (age, registration period ...). This made their number exceed the capacity of the two rooms, and pushed the association to accelerate the construction of the new building (مجلة الشبان 1947). However, the location was not the only obstacle.

#### **2-1-2. Administrative and technical obstacles:**

The authorities sought to control the school in different ways. They offered their help during the construction phase through public works. Based on a subsidy of five million francs granted by the

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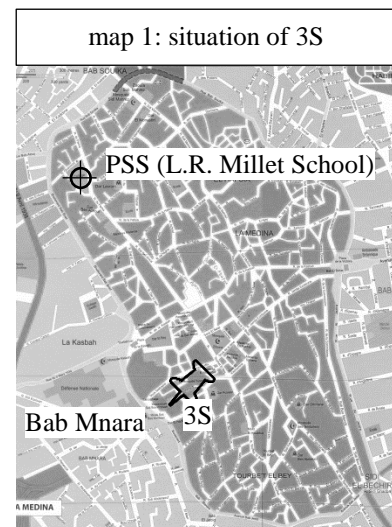
<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the total number of Muslim girls in the late forties did not exceed eleven thousand (11,000) (277 صفحة 2012), nearly three thousand of which (exactly 2,764) were in MKS (30 صفحة 1952 - 1951). (نقويم تونس).

Grand Council, the DPI wanted to become the owner of the building by invoking the annual public subsidies (281؛ 271، صفحة 2008، التميمي). And to solve this problem, the association resorted to making the school habous in favor of the students of the Great Mosque. The Department of Antiquities, too, opposed the expansion of the school onto the cemetery grounds, as it was an archaeological area<sup>(5)</sup> (1950/2/17، الزهرة).

At another level, the association faced, following the repercussions of the WWII, a shortage of building materials which generated an increase in prices on the black market by 20 to 30 times (العيادي) (51 - 48، الصفحات 1991. It also suffered from the problem of construction waste due to the conversion of the cemetery into a two-meter-high landfill (صفحة 151، النيفر، 2007). So, the first works have exhausted the big chunk of the donations collected without much result except the laying of the foundations (صفحة 151، النيفر، 2007). This posed the problem of financing the project. But the audacity of the Tunisians to teach young girls, the conservative nature of the association and its religious aspect, have all given the project great popular support. Donations came from all sides, in cash and in kind. The largest donation that the association received was one million francs from Muhammad Al-Akhdhar ben Attia (a great farmer) and five million francs from the Grand Council through Al-Taher ben Ammar thanks to an intervention of his sister Wassila ben Ammar. For its part, the IML, a female branch of the YMMA, organized charity parties to collect donations (صفحة 282، التميمي، 2008). And thanks to these grants, the school kept growing continuously.

The school was built on habous (waqf) land, which is the Bani Khurasan (Sidi BouKhrisan) cemetery<sup>(6)</sup> in the western part of the Medina, near Bab Mnara. Here is the center of the city. To the north of the cemetery lies al-Kasba where sits the central power (the government). All around were neighborhoods that housed notable families such as the Ben Ammars, the Mohsens, the Ben Mahmouds and the Tamimis. More than one habous were adjacent. These real estate assets will form a living space for the school through which it will experience an extension beyond the planned.

The location inside the medina, conversely to the public schools located in the European districts of the city, responded to the prevailing social values in a conservative environment and wary of the Europeanized extramural public space. It was the same concern among private European initiatives such as the St Joseph Sidi Saber missionary school, (صفحة 63، مشرفية، 2009) or the PSS (SMITH, 2000, p. 6).



<sup>5</sup> Late Cheikh Al-Bashir Al-'Aribi told us in his testimony that the Director of Antiquities, Sliman Mustafa Zbiss vigorously opposed the expansion of the school at the expense of and including what remained of the cemetery. the dome of the Zawiya north of the school. The Grand Vizier supported him in his opinion. (Al-'ARIBI, 2011)

<sup>6</sup> Beni Khorasan Cemetery (Sidi Boukhrisane): It is attributed to the princes of Beni Khorasan who reigned over the city of Tunis from the eleventh to the twelfth centuries AD. It stretched from the Kasbah to the Qasr Mosque (south of it). Sadiki Hospital (Aziza Othmana) was built there, as well as the surrounding markets (al-Sakkagine and al-Sarrajine). It seems that the presence of a dome in the middle of it has pushed the popular imagination to distort its name from Beni Khorasan to "Sidi Boukhrisane". (ZBISS, s.d., p. 2)

Thanks to the skill of its headmaster, the school continued to expand horizontally as well as vertically. In the following table, and which we have traced in the evolutionary plan, we try to concisely trace the spatial and architectural evolution of the school.

**Table°2 : 3S evolution**

Dates	Spatial evolution	Architectural evolution
1945	Acquisition of part (618 m <sup>2</sup> ) of the habous cemetery of Sidi Boukhrissan (التميمي، 2008، الصفحات 271 - 289)	
1946-47		Creation of 5 classes (A.N.T.) (النيفر، 2007، صفحة 153) <sup>(7)</sup>
1948-49	Annexation of the koutteb habous Ben Mahmoud (east of the school) (A.N.T.) <sup>(8)</sup>	Transformation of the koutteb Ben Mahmoud in a classroom. Construction of the workshop on the 1st floor (الزهرة، 1949/2/17) <sup>(9)</sup>
1950-51	Annexation of the habous mosque of Sarrajine (southwest of the school) *	Construction of a classroom adjacent to the koutteb east of the school *
	Annexation of habous al-Hadded (southeast of the school) dedicated to kindergarten	Construction of two classrooms and annexes (kitchen + administration room) for kindergarten on the habous al-Haddad *.
1952-54	Annexation of a section of the Habous cemetery (north of the school)	Construction of two classrooms on the annexed section of the cemetery <sup>*(10)</sup>
1954	Acquisition of the Habous al-Bsayliya cemetery (Bab al-Khadhra) (12,000 m <sup>2</sup> ) annexed to 3S.	
1955-56		Construction of a kindergarten annex to the 3S kindergarten on the grounds of al-Bsayliya cemetery (Bab al-Khadhra)

\* cf. (الهلالي، 2017، الصفحات 443 - 451)

This development resulted in spatial growth from the initial 618 m<sup>2</sup> to nearly 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> through snacking on the cemetery, annexations of adjoining habous and vertical constructions on three levels. Likewise, the number of classes increased from 5 inaugural classes (1948) to 14 classes in addition to a workshop which served as a screening room and meetings when needed. The school also had two annexes on which were erected two kindergartens, bringing the final total area of the project to over 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> (after the 6000 m<sup>2</sup> concession of the Bab al-Khadhra land to the Red Crescent).

It is noticeable that this expansion of the school was taking place in best areas of the Medina. This explains the obstacles the project encountered. Behind this resistance to obstructions stood the

<sup>7</sup> The preliminary school plan called for 6 classes (A.N.T.).

<sup>8</sup> A file in the National Archives includes a set of correspondence relating to the koutteb and the dates of which confirm that its cession to the AJM began at the beginning of 1949 or at the end of 1948, that is to say during the school year 1948-1949. But it seems that administrative obstacles delayed its preparation until the end of this school year and the start of its operation in the following year 1949-1950. The oldest document at our disposal, dated March 24, 1949, mentions the complaint of the director of the 3S of the koutteb (without specifying when?). While a document dated January 30, 1949 indicates that the school obtained the koutteb (without specifying when?). (A.N.T.2)

<sup>9</sup> A "Statement to the Sections and Subscribers of the Young Men's Muslim Association" (الزهرة، 1949/2/17) refers to the showing of films at school, which means that the hall was present. Its prefabricated material ceiling facilitated the acceleration of its installation.

<sup>10</sup> On an inscription above the entrance to a classroom we read: "Class of the late Princess Qmar, widow of His Highness Muhammad al-Nasir Pasha Bey, the 1st Shaaban 1371".



social network woven by the headmaster of the school, himself president of the YMMA. This network extended to circles of power, in this case the Beylical family and the Al-Ka'ak government, both in crisis of legitimacy. In October 1948, the Grand Vizier Mostafa Kaâk, in the midst of conflict with the neo-Destour, inaugurated the school for its first year. He wanted to deflect the boycott that the party imposed on him by approaching the Beldi, the Zaitounian circles and civilian actors. Mohamed Lamine Bey, in the meanwhile, sent his crown prince Chedhli Bey to re-inaugurate the school on September 9, 1950. Sheikh Mohamed Salah al-Nayfar also enjoyed the support of the Djem'ia of Ahbes (Foundation of the awqafs) through his relations with the Zaytounian environment and through his family, too. (الهدلي، 2017، الصفحات 256 - 272)

## 2-2. Human potential (teachers and students):

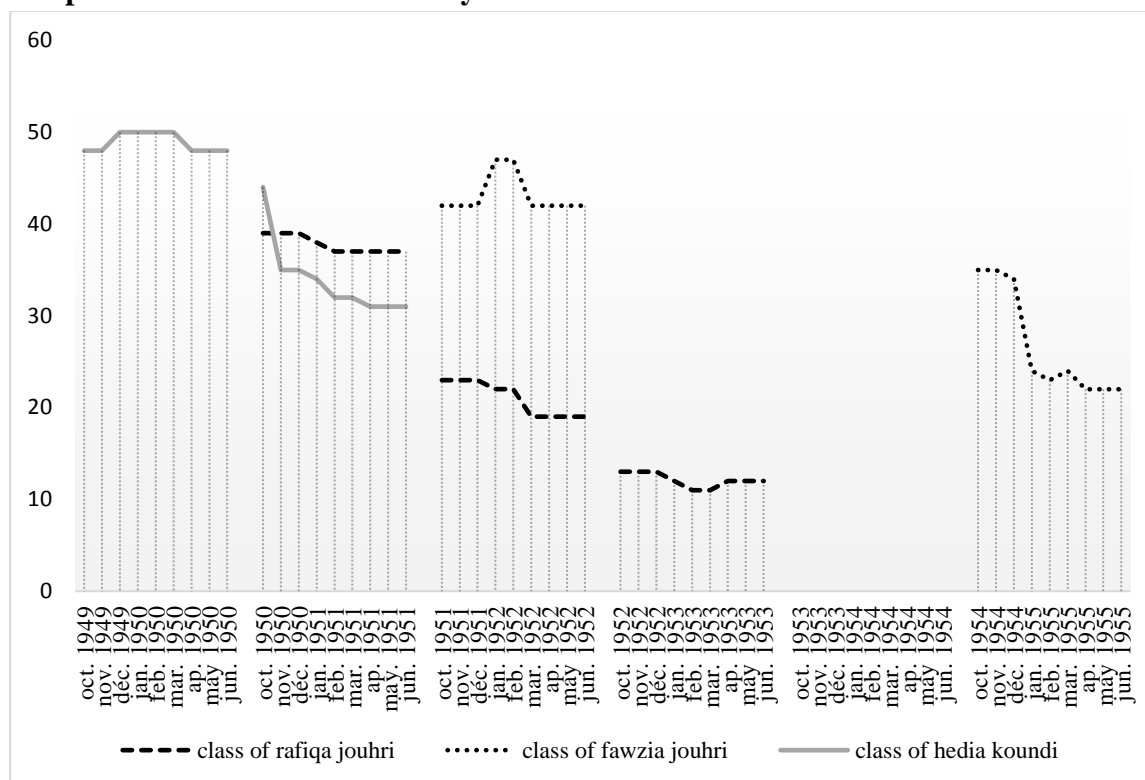
### 2-2-1. Students:

The education was launched in 1945 at the new local n° 40, Pasha Street, with only eight girls. The number increased rapidly to reach 170 students within two years (مجلة الشبان المسلمين، ماي 1947، صفحة 23). The number far exceeded the capacity of the rooms, thus creating anti-pedagogical conditions. The decision was therefore to relocate the project to the 3S even before its first classrooms were completed.

It is difficult for us to give exact figures about the number of young girls who have attended this school. However, we can estimate it at 200 for the inaugural year (1948), based on the number 170 reached just before the exodus to the new location. After that, the number of pupils will be influenced by two contradictory factors: the flow of new enrollments on the one hand, and those leaving by success and above all by school dropout. Graph n°1 clearly reflects the constant decrease in the number of pupils in the classes. In the end, and relying on different indicators (in particular the photos (like photo 1) and some notebooks of pupils kept in their private archives, the press, the number of classrooms and their capacity), we can say that the school would have had five to six hundred pupils during its exercise until its nationalization (1958).

The influence of the school can be estimated at the social level and at the spatial level as well. Socially, the witness students agree that the school was open to all social classes. At Pasha Street, the project began with young Dwiriya girls (from the Dwirat in southern Tunisia). These families lived in the vicinity of the Medersa Bir Lahjar as caretakers of the houses of the well-to-do who summered in La Marsa. In al-Sarrajine, wealthy families like the Tamimis, the Al-Jouhris and the Ben Mahmouds came to integrate the new school. The end-of-year photos prove the social mix shown by the differences in the girls' portraits. It is a success for the school to bring together the different social strata into a national unity on the basis of a conservative perception of the education of young girls. The school taught its students social solidarity. The rich donated to the most vulnerable and took them home from time to time. Another sign of openness, the school did not impose an age limit at the start. This made the classes heterogeneous.

**Graph 1: evolution of the monthly and annual number of students of a few classes at 3S.**



Source: notebooks of the witnesses cited in the graph

**Photo 1: Class of khadija Boujem'a accompanied by Cheikhs Mohamed ben Isma'il and Abderrahmene ben Khlifa.**



Source : Private Archives de Khadija Boujem'a, Photo of the end of the school year (1948-1949)

Students were predominantly Tunisians but there were some Algerians too. They were refugees whose families had fled French colonial repression. Witnesses still remember a certain 'Aqila Bourannene whose father was a resistance fighter who sought refuge in Tunis, and settled in the rich

man's street (نحج الغني) near Dar Jallouli. Hence, the school instilled the spirit of social and national solidarity into students, thus achieving the democratization of education.

The influence of the establishment extended far beyond the surrounding neighborhoods to attract young girls from more distant areas such as al-Mallassine, Bab Souika, Tourbat Al-Bey and Bab Mnara. It also housed the Zaytounian branch of young girls.

Finally, this spatio-social influence was confirmed during the 1950 congress when the YMMA undertook extending its network of schools to the country. It even aroused the admiration of certain Algerians who considered it as a model to be reproduced at home (الهذلي، 2017، صفحة 530).

## 2-2-2. The supervising body (administration and teachers):

The school license held the name of Mrs. Souad Khattech, president of the IML, and who was but a screen to the effective direction of her husband Sheikh Mohammad Salah al-Nayfar, president himself of the YMMA. We can therefore predict the trends of the project. But, already, archival and oral sources do not leave us much effort to make to discover this reality. The YMMA had specially created its branch (IML) in order to supervise its school project. Speeches at the founding meetings were all conservative.

As for the teaching staff, we note an almost equitable representation, whether in terms of gender (men / women) or in terms of training (Zaytouni / Madrassi). But in terms of training levels, the recruitments were not of equal value. Most of the teachers were of primary education. To overcome this lack, the director Cheikh Mohamed Salah al-Nayfar as well as the supervisor General Abdelaziz Sahib al-Tabi' (retired from Sadikia) were to give pedagogical training to these young teachers.

Moreover, the school was cosmopolitan. The teachers, all like the students, were, undoubtedly, predominantly Tunisian. But the principal sheikh managed to recruit foreign teachers but who were from the same cultural sphere, namely from the East. Madiha Machrafia, was a Christian of Lebanese origin; Sheikh Mohamed ben Ismail and the two sisters Jalili and Mudhaffar were of Turkish origin, Bouthayna Soua came from Egypt, the trio 'Adawia, Nihed and Batoul (whose surnames are no longer rememberable for the witnesses) came from Iraq. Thus, the students felt that the school was an embodiment of the idea of Arab-Islamic unity. One of the witnesses, Rafiqa Jouhri, concluded on this point: « our school was an Arab and Islamic league». And it was not without merit.

## 2-3. School curricula, textbooks and assessment system

The 3S was governed by the law of August 19, 1944, which required it to implement FAS curricula. However, it has stood out, like many private schools elsewhere, for the high priority dedicated to Islamic and Arabic instruction (and its ramifications) among all subjects taught. The testimonies and private archives of some students, such as notebooks and school-reports, reveal to us the content of the programs they received as well as the textbooks adopted.

The image of a page from Rafiqa Jouhri's school-report contains the different subjects taught: Scientific subjects, mainly calculation and physics (things = الأشياء), literary subjects (expression, recitation, language, French...), religious education such as learning the Koran, fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), etc. It shows us the assessment grid for the different subjects. As for the preserved notebooks, they reveal to us the ideas conveyed by the school. Apart from modern science subjects, educated programs can be grouped into three major groups

### **2-3-1. Identity subjects:**

They include religious subjects, those taught in Arabic, history and geography.

#### ***Religious education:***

In the pupils' school-reports, the Koran covers all other subjects. It is graded out of twenty points while the other disciplines are graded only out of ten. According to the testimony of former schoolgirls, they started daily by learning and reciting the Koran. The school aimed at enabling each student to learn and memorize the last six parts (hizb) of the Holy Book before leaving the primary school. This was, within the framework of patriotic cultural resistance, another way of safeguarding one of the foundations, if not the most important, essential of national identity to stand against colonial identity politics.

Another sign of the importance the school gave to the Koran was assigning this mission to a specialist teacher recruited for this purpose instead of leaving it to teachers untrained in the field or to masters (moueddebs). Sheikh Mohammad bin Ismail (died 1952) is one of the most prominent teachers of the Quran. The YMMA went even to conclude a contract with an Egyptian graduate of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Youssef Rozza, during the school year 1955-56 (301 – 300 التميمي، 2008، الصفحات).

Along with the Koran, the school delivered lessons in religious sciences such as the interpretation of the Koran, jurisprudence, hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad), beliefs and jurisprudence of women. And for that, it chose Zaytounian teachers like Sheikh Abdul Rahman ben Khalifa. It also adopted textbooks of different levels, but mainly imported from the East. Some student witnesses kept some of these books for us. We will cite "The Book of Elementary Principles of Monotheism and Maliki Jurisprudence for Primary Schools for Boys and Girls" (kitab al-mabadi al-awalia fi al-tawhid wa fiqh al-malikia lilmadaris al-ibtida'iya banin wa banat) and a booklet of hadiths and songs dedicated to children.

And as a school dedicated to young Muslim girls, women of the future, we were curious to know what model of woman the school envisioned. We focused on a few courses in women's jurisprudence. One that caught our attention was titled "What to hide from the body". It is interested in the clothes of the Muslim. In the section that deals with women's clothing, he defines the different social situations in which a woman can find herself, and the appropriate dress for each of these situations. The following table summarizes all of this.

**Table 3: Case law relating to the dress of Muslim women.**

Situation	Dress behavior
With the incest family	Cover the whole body except the limbs (head, legs and hands)
With the non-incest family	Cover the whole body except the face and hands In case of fear of sedition, wearing the burqa.
With unfaithful women	Cover the whole body except the face and hands
With muslim women	Cover what is between the navel and the knees

**Source: extract from Fawzia Joughri's notebook, dedicated to jurisprudence and monotheism, during the school year 1954-55, (his final year), 1st lesson dated 10/27/1954**

Two things should be noted: the first is that this lesson is given the last year of primary education, that is to say around the age of twelve and when the girl is on the threshold of puberty and will move on to secondary school. The second is the conservative view of women's attire code, which



goes to the point of requiring the burqa in cases of fear of sedition and leveling between unfaithful women and foreign men.

Notwithstanding, and strikingly, the reality was other than these sharp theoretical positions. In the photos of the private archives that the witnesses provided us with, we notice a total tolerance towards the dress code, whether for pupils or for teachers. The former witness students confirmed to us that the school did not impose any specific attire on them.

### *Languages (Arabic and French)*

The school was obliged to teach the language of the colonizer. However, it gave priority to subjects in Arabic (score of 180 points against 130 only for French). The rule of parity between Arabic and French was only applied during the last two years before the final exam without any existence of real parity. Besides, it was not exclusive to the 3S. The Arabic timetable varied depending on whether the school was run by the DPI or by prominent Tunisians. And even in private schools (Koranic or not subsidized), the hours differed from one school to another. This was the case, for example, with al-‘Abbassia (in Sfax) and al-Tamimia (in Menzel Temim). (A.A.N., 1967, pp. 48 - 49)

Arabic was divided into nine subjects. There were not only written subjects such as writing, grammar, spelling, dictation, but also oral subjects like reading, recitation and conversation. The school used oriental textbooks, such as 'Matn Al-Qatr', a grammar book by Ibn Hisham Al-Ansari, and the grammar lesson book for primary school students (kitab ad-durus an- nahwia litalamidh almadaris al-ibtida'iyah) (in 3 parts) by oriental authors, officially approved by the Egyptian Ministry of Education. Some witnesses recall having had Lebanese textbooks. The Arabic classes targeted three main goals: social education to prepare the girl to be a good and skillful housewife, religious education that supports what she receives in religious education sessions, and patriotic education and pan-Arab.

Yet, the students suffered from major shortcomings in their training in the French language. These shortcomings appeared during the CEPE exams as it was reported in the testimonies of some students (Hayet ben Saber and Baya ben Rjeb) who lived the experience. Wealthy families filled these gaps with extra home courses outside the official schedule. This is what Fatma en-Nayfar (daughter of Cheykh Chedhli en-Nayfar) and Hedia Koundi told us. This reality was not only the result of the lack of time allocated to French, but it also stemmed from the weakness of the staff teaching it.

With the exception of Abdel Aziz Saheb Al-Taba'a and Hsan Al Gtari, most of the French teachers were young girls with primary education level. They had not received any teaching- related training, and only some of them had the secondary level. In counterpart, those teaching Arabic subjects were highly qualified.

### *History and Geography:*

According to official documents, the program is devoted to Arab-Islamic history. (تقويم تونس، 1946، صفحة 321). But the private archives of the pupils, particularly their notebooks, offer us only scraps. According to the remaining notebooks, the history lessons, can be divided into two parts: the history of the Middle East on the one hand (the second year), the ancient history of Tunisia and the beginning of its medieval history with the Arab-Islamic civilization on the other hand. In a notebook, we have discovered notes that refer to a Tunisian textbook entitled "khulasat tarikh tunis" (= summary of the history of Tunisia) by Hassan Hosni Abdel Wahab. As for the geography program, if we

exclude the principles of general natural, human and political geography, it can be divided into geography of Tunisia (fourth year) and geography of the Middle East (second year).

Thus, we can say that the courses in this subject tend to consolidate within the pupils the feeling of belonging to the East, as space, history and civilization. This would be another form of resistance to the policy of colonial integration via French education. And to resist the reality of annexation to colonial space, the school edified another opposing mental reality that draws inspiration from history. It was another fight for the decolonization of minds, a condition for any cultural, political and economic decolonization in the opinion of those responsible for the project.

### **2-3-2. Vocational education subjects: preparing a housewife**

Manual work was glorified even in theoretical lessons such as recitations. A song (in the book of recitations of Fawzia Jouhri) was entitled "my needle". The girls also received practical lessons in the large workshop on the upper floor of the school. The main purpose of this vocational training was to promote the skills of the future woman who should not ignore these elementary things, and should consider them as important as being cultivated. The school thus reproduced a typical housewife.

Embroidery was the main activity of the young girls. One of them testified that an Algerian m'allma (= worker mistress) supervised them during their primary years. Rafiqa Jouhri still keeps pieces embroidered at the time and which she will take later in her wedding trousseau (photo 2).

Photo 2 : embroidered piece of fabric  
by Rafiqa JOUHRI (17x16 cm)



In the same context, we cannot fail to mention the concern of the school for the students' skills be it aesthetic or artistic. For example, it signed a contract with a nationally renowned professional calligrapher, Abdulaziz Al-Khammassi. This left remarkable traces on the notebooks of the students we consulted. The care of the calligraphy was not only an educational and artistic stake, but also one of the dimensions of the identity conflict, namely the battle of the Arabic letter, support of the Arabic language, against the conquering Latin letter. We should not forget that one of Mustafa Kemal's means of severing Turkey's relations with Islam and the Arab world was to abandon Arabic calligraphy considered the support of the Ottoman language to replace it with Latin calligraphy as a sign of adherence to the modernity. Arabic calligraphy is therefore one of the components of identity and cannot be isolated from the global identity struggle that the national movement was leading, including Arabization.

### **2-4. Outcome**

The school, in itself, was a success in a hostile environment despite the school dropout which represents a black spot in its course. Although 500 students attended it during its eight years under the Protectorate, a considerable number of them have not completed their school career. This was mentioned by former students in their testimonies, and was confirmed by certain school-reports where we notice the remarkable drop in the number of students.

However, and taking into account the general context on the one hand and the goals prescribed for the project on the other, we can only see a roughly acceptable result. We could cite the most significant successes:

### 2-4-1. Solid training in Arabic

These are the findings of those who contacted the young girls, such as Salah Ben Youssef (secretary general of neo-Destour) and judge Mohamed el-Malqi during an end-of-year party (الزهره، 1949/6/29). And this is confirmed by the subsequent facts such as the personal journeys of the students. In fact, some of them benefited from it in their school and university careers. Many of them specialized in Arabic literature such as Arwa en-Nayfar, Khadija Boujem'a, Hayet ben Saber, Baya ben Rjeb while others such as Sarra Dh'hab opted for Islamic studies (Shari'a). Still, some of them were recruited into the administration, such as Maryam ben Saber who was appointed to the education ministry immediately after independence due to the lack of women fluent in Arabic. Mounira Al-Touati and Fatima Al-Bahri, became nationally renowned actresses and respected figures on the Tunisian radio.

### 2-4-2. Dissemination of education for young girls

The school emphasized the thorny area of teaching young girls. Horizontally, it became a model to emulate in Tunisia and in Algeria too<sup>(11)</sup> as well. It was at the heart of a network of schools set up by YMMA across the country. Vertically, it nurtured, upstream, the Zaytounien branch of young girls, a new creation which began in the late 1940s. Downstream, it reattached a kindergarten which would supply it.

### 2-4-3. Diffusion of patriotic consciousness

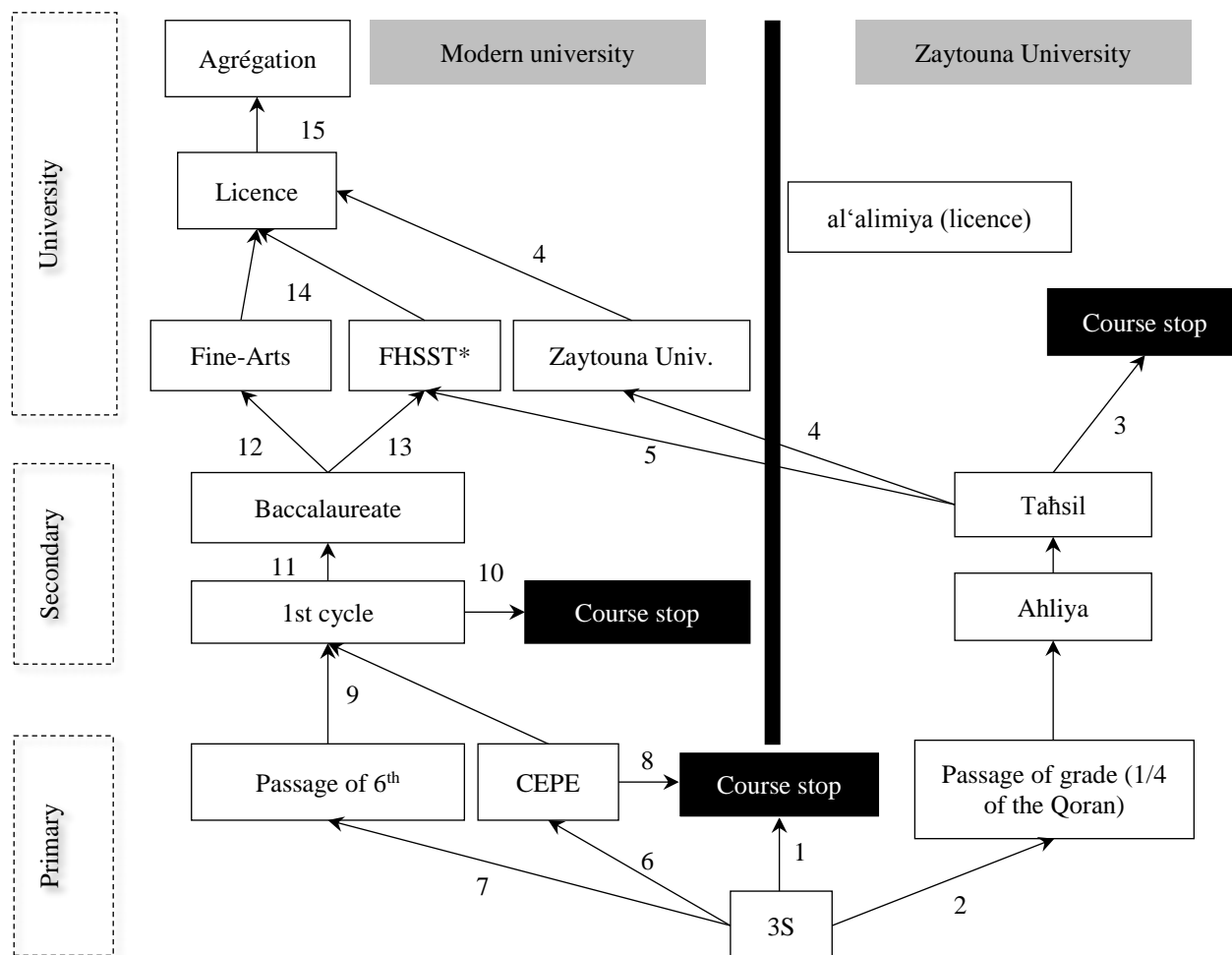
The school was an incubator for patriotism. Through the patriotic tendency which was diffused in the lessons and the words of the teachers, and through the general surrounding atmosphere, the school planted the seeds of resistance and helped immunize its female students against colonial influences and make them, though still young, aware of disagreements with the colonizer and even to oppose them. The witnesses among the former pupils of the school, remember how, during the period of the revolution (1952-1954), they sang the national anthem to provoke the French soldiers, and how they wanted to take part, despite their young age, in the demonstrations which passed near the school unless the school administration prevented them. They still have memories of the young Fatma Ben Ali, a student from the Zaytouna branch, who led the demonstrations in the schoolyard. They have not forgotten Bourguiba's visit to school in the early fifties and how they took photos with him (BOUJEM'A, 2013).

### 2-4-4. Outlook

Generally, and like any private Koranic school, the 3S opened onto the two educational circuits that existed at the time: the traditional "zaytounien" circuit and the modern circuit. In the diagram below, we have reconstructed the path of former students from their personal testimonials and archives.

<sup>11</sup> In her testimony, the former student Rafiq Jouhri quoted us that she remembers that some members of the association of Algerian Muslim Oulemas visited the school. (JOUHRI R. , 2012)

**Fig. 1: school paths of some students of the 3S**



\* FHSST=Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Tunis (9 april)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Hédia koundi  | 8. Khadija al-Banna   |
| 2. Rafiqa Jouhri + Fawziya Jouhri + Radhia al-Nayfar + Arwa al-Nayfar + Khadija Boujem'a + Sarra Dhahab + Zayneb ben Hamda | 9. Fatma al-Nayfar + khadija al-Nayfar + Baya be Rjab + Hayet Ben Saber                                   |
| 3. Rafiqa Jouhri + Fawziya Jouhri + Radhia al-Nayfar + Zayneb ben Hamda  | 10. Fatma al-Nayfar   |
| 4. Sarra Dhahab.   | 11. khadija al-Nayfar + Baya be Rjab + Hayet Ben Saber  |
| 5. Arwa al-Nayfar + Khadija Boujem'a   | 12. khadija al-Nayfar   |
| 6. Fatma al-Nayfar + khadija al-Nayfar + Khadija al-Banna  | 13. Baya be Rjab + Hayet Ben Saber  |
| 7. Baya be Rjab + Hayet Ben Saber  | 14. khadija al-Nayfar + Baya be Rjab + Hayet Ben Saber + Sarra Dhahab + Arwa al-Nayfar + Khadija Boujem'a |
|  | 15. Hayet Ben Saber   |

The journey of young girls that emerges from this diagram can be qualified in three major groups:

- 1st group (n° 1): includes only Hedia koundi, victim of an unfair family decision which forced her to give up studying at the end of primary school.

- 2nd group (n° 2): this group opted for the female Zaytounian branch of the Great Mosque (inaugurated in 1949). It was the best orientation that fitted their training.



- 3rd group (n° 6+7): those who joined modern secondary education.

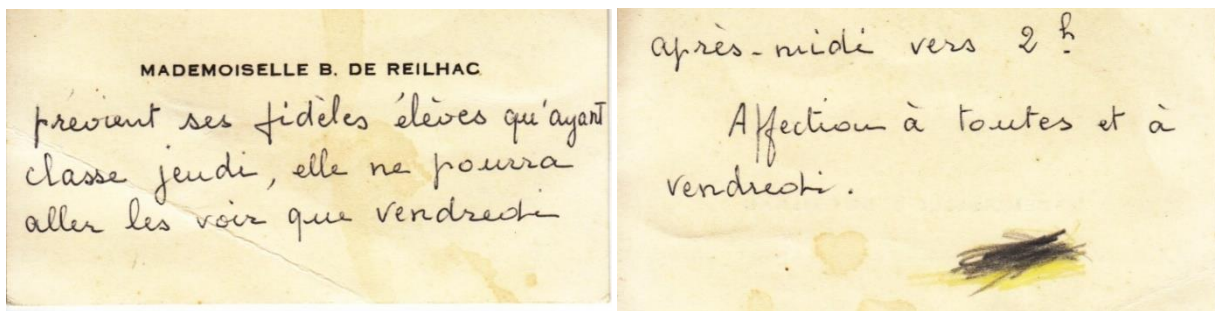
Divergent at the start of their secondary education, these last two groups converged at the stage of university studies. The students of the Zaytounian branch, except those who stopped their studies to join the matrimonial home (n° 3), found themselves obliged to head towards the modern university after the new national state imposed the unification of education (reform of 1958) and the closure of Zaytounian education.

In what follows, we have reconstructed the path of each of the witness students. We present them in the order of the groups we have marked.

### **'1'- Hèdia Koundi**

She was born on January 27, 1942 in Bab Souika. Her parents are Hedi Koundi (grain merchant in Nahj Al-Qa'adine) and Ouassila Boutouriya (housewife). She started at Bir Lahjar school (at Pasha Street), then at 3S. But she did not complete her final year because her father refused to let her join the civil service. To compensate her, and under the pressure of her mother, she was home-schooled. Among her tutors, we find a Christian teacher named Miss B. de REILHAC who taught her French (KOUNDI, 2013).

#### **Annex 7: business card of a teacher who supervised Hedia Koundi at home**



### **'2'+ '3' Rafiq et Fawzia Jouhri**

Their father is Chedhli Jouhri, (a farmer owner from Djedaida) who studied at Carnot School. Their mother belongs to the Temimi family. Their maternal grandfather, Haj Ali al-Tamimi, was the grandson of Judge Ismail al-Tamimi, the author of the Response to Wahhabism. The family home was near Turbat Al-Bey.

Rafiq, was born in 1936. For six years (1943-1944), she attended a French school, "Dar Jallouli", located in *the rich man's street* (Nahj al-Ghany). Two factors pushed her to change school: first the colonialist behavior of the French teaching staff at school<sup>(12)</sup>, then an accidental visit to the Chalabi family (parents of the Jouhri family) whom she heard glorifying the 3S and the importance dedicated to Arabic. So, she joined that school in 1949-1950. But because of her poor level in Arabic, she had to register in the fourth year (1st year of the middle cycle). But she managed to catch up with this delay when she joined the Zaytouna branch in 1954-1955. She was therefore enrolled directly in the last year of the first cycle and brilliantly had her Ahliya the same year, her Tahsil in 1957-1958. But she settled for it and quit school to marry Mr. Ali Darghouth at an early age.

<sup>12</sup> According to Rafiq's testimony, the first thing they were taught was to draw and color the French tricolor. The headmistress, Madame Sigomé, also taught them the French anthem and forced them, against their will, to line up in the courtyard and sing it.

As for Fawzia, she was born in 1940. She spent two years at the Dar Jallouli school, then joined the 3S in 1948 but re-enrolled in the first year due to her total ignorance of Arabic. She later joined the female Zaytounian branch and had her Tahsil in 1959. She was not different from her sister as she opted for getting married rather than pursuing her university studies. (JOUHRI, 2012) (JOUHRI F. , 2012)

***‘4’- Zayneb ben Hamda***

She was born in December 1940. Her father was a farmer in Ras al-Jabal, her hometown. The family lived in Torbet al-Bey. Her father refused to enroll her in school to prevent her from frequenting the streets. And he refused even more firmly to enroll her in a Franco-Arab school. He only gave in under the influence of his maternal uncle, and sent her to the 3S at the age of nine. She joined the Zaytounian branch in 1955, directly in second year and then in fourth year to compensate for this delay. She ended up having her tahsil but settled for it to marry her teacher Rashid Badr. (Ben-HAMDA, 2013)

***‘5’- Sarra Dh’hab***

She was born in 1941. She is the daughter of Sheikh Muhammad Dhahab, mouharrik (responsible for observing mosques and opening them at prayer times). He was so conservative that he refused to enroll her in a French school for fear that he could not control her. When YMMA began teaching at Bir Lahjar school, her father took her there along with her older sister Najat (b.1939). She joined the Zaytounian branch and ended up having her Tahsil in 1959. Her father refused her recruitment into primary education, so she joined the Sharia University (Zaytouna). She was among the first five girls to study there. She led a fight to withdraw the Egyptian chador (Al-Lahfa Al-Masria). When she graduated, she joined the secondary education. (DH'HAB, 2012)

***‘6’- Khadija Boujem’a***

She was born in January 1940, daughter of Mohamed Boujemaa, musician in the Bey's army, then postman. The family lived in rue Bir Lahjar, near Madrassa Bir Lahjar (YMMA headquarters) at Pasha street. After her PSS registration failed (due to eye disease), she was registered in 1945 at Madrassa Bir Lahjar, discovered by chance, and then at 3S. She then joined the female Zaitounian branch and eventually obtained her Tahsil in 1959. After passing a competitive examination, she joined the Tunisian University in 1960 and graduated in Arabic literature in 1965 from the Ecole Normale Supérieure. She still remembers the French orientalist Jacques Berque, a member of the oral exam jury, during his first year at university. Her university career was crowned not only with her degree in Arabic literature, but also with her marriage to her late professor Farhat Dachraoui. She was recruited directly into secondary education (BOUJEM'A, 2013).

***‘7’+ ‘8’ Arwa et Hanifa (Radhia) al-Nayfar***

Both are the daughters of Sheikh Muhammad al-Salah al-Neyfar (teacher at Zaytouna and president of YMMA) and Souad Khattech (housewife of Beldi origin).

Radhia was born on January 1, 1940, while Arwa was born in 1941. They attended primary school from their start at Madrassa Bir Lahjar (1945). They then joined the Zaytounian branch and had their Tahsils in 1959 (Radhia) and 1961 (Arwa).

Unlike Radhia who chose motherhood to higher education, Arwa continued her university studies at the FHSST and had her BA in Arabic literature. She remembers Minister Mahmoud Messa‘di who joined the jury during her final oral examination. She was soon recruited into secondary

education as an Arabic teacher. She later had the audacity to found (in 1981) a private educational institution, called Beit al-Hikma High School, which she has tried to run drawing on her experience in the 3S. (NAYFAR A. , 2012) (NAYFAR R. , 2012)

***‘9’ Khadija Al-Banna***

She was born in 1934 in rue Boukhriss (Bab Mnara). Her father is Sheikh Al-Sadiq Al-Banna, Zaitounian sheikh who devoted himself to the craft profession of chechia. She attended the Pères Blancs School for four or five years in La Marsa. When the family moved back to Tunis, Rue Boukhriss, she enrolled in the 3S and had to start over from the beginning, as she was bad at Arabic. However, she surpassed her classmates in French which allowed her to get her CEPE. But her father's death and her health problems prevented her from pursuing her studies. Then Sheikh Mohamed Salah al-Nayfar offered her to supervise kindergarten and adult education as well. (Al-BANNA, 2013)

***‘10’ Fatima and Khadija al-Nayfar***

They are the daughters of Sheikh Chedhly Nayfar. Fatima was born in 1945. She joined the 3S between 1951 and 1957. She obtained her CEPE thanks to the extra French courses she received at home. She then joined the high school of Bab Al-Jadid. Thanks to this training in French, she did not feel inferior to her schoolmates coming from the FASs. But for personal and family reasons, she cut her school career in the 3rd year of secondary school.

As for her sister Khadija, she joined the 3S two years later. She continued her secondary studies in the same high school (Bab al-Jadid), then at the University of Fine Arts. (NAYFAR F. , 2013)

***‘11’ Baya ben Rjab***

She was born on January 1, 1946 in a middle-class Djerbian (from Djerba) family. Her father was a small trader in Mellassine. Her mother was keen to enroll her in a school for white sisters. But her father's laxity deprived her of it, and she, against her mother's will, was enrolled in the 3S around 1953, when she was seven. She continued her secondary studies in public institutes between Bizerte and Tunis (at the al-Zahra secondary school), where she obtained her baccalaureate in 1964-1965. She continued her graduate studies at the FHSST, with Hayet Ben Saber, where she obtained her BA in Arab Literature. She, then, was recruited into secondary education. When we met her, she was a member of a cultural association and was envisioning investing in a property to build a school based on the 3S model. (Ben-RJAB, 2013)

***‘12’ Hayat ben Saber***

She was born on April 18, 1946 in Bab Menara, Boukhriss street. Her mother insisted that she be educated at "the Nayfar School" (as it was called) after she had intended once to enroll her in the Nahj Al-Marr Primary School, known as Al-Murali school (in relation to its owner Abdelaziz Al-Mourali). But she was shocked to hear the teachers speak French, so she cancelled her registration and transferred it to the 3S. During the year 1957-1958, and due to the relocation of her family to Hammam Lif, she was obliged to take the final examination of primary studies in a public school and succeeded in passing to secondary without having her CEPE because of her French language weaknesses. She graduated from the Ezzahra secondary school in 1964-1965, and got her BA in Arabic literature at FHSST (Boulevard 9 April) four years later, then, the aggregation in the same field of study after which she started teaching secondary levels. Today, she chairs a Quran learning association and draws on Sheikh Mohamed Salah al-Nayfar's experience in the field (Ben-SABER, 2013).

In the end, these brief biographies reveal the most important elements that we have underlined in the analysis of the characteristics of schoolgirls: the diversity of their social origins, the age differences between them, the plurality of their post-school paths, the role of a certain number of them in supplying the Zaitounian branch, the influence of the school on the national consciousness of its students and the intellectual orientations and their insights into life

### **3- Conclusion**

The efforts of the Tunisian elites in favor of the education of the Muslim girl as a *sine qua non* of any rebirth and independence of the nation, ended up paying off, both on the protectorate authorities, and on the mentalities of the Tunisians themselves. The growing openness of Tunisian society to the idea of sending their daughters to school was overwhelmed by the fear of the colonial school. To stir up this fear, patriotic demands have been directed towards expanding Koranic schools, and private Franco-Arab education to young girls. This fight, together with the post-WWII economic situation, forced the colonial authorities to finally give in to the aspirations of the Tunisians (law of 1944), albeit late.

The 3S was the fruit of this politico-socio-cultural evolution. With the context of its creation, the abundance of aid received from all sides, its human potential, and the programs provided, it offers us a model of a patriotic female school. Its record, just like the career of its students, give us an idea of its achievements and limits. Although the general context favored high school dropout, which was not restricted to this school (n.b. the national enrollment rate on the eve of independence did not exceed 30%) (TARIFA, 1971, p. 152), it succeeded in freeing conservative circles from their reluctance to teach their daughters by providing them with an education which respected their cultural choices and dispelled their fears of colonial education. This school, which stood at the heart of a network of satellite schools created by the same association, embodies the patriotic effort for the dissemination of education in general, throughout the country, especially among young girls. By “going beyond” official prescriptions, its lessons awakened in the little minds of young girls a patriotic conscience, a commitment to national, Arab and Islamic causes. The school not only produced a housewife, but also a committed woman.

As opposed to PSS, through which the Protectorate tried to impose modernity on Tunisians, 3S worked for desired and measured modernity. If the Protectorate planned to produce a woman intermediary between its civilization, its society and those indigenous in order to integrate them, the 3S represents the patriotic work with a view to a woman open to modernity, but faithful to her homeland and her identity.

However, the cultural choices of the leaders of such a school were not unanimously accepted among the actors of the Patriotic Movement and especially its French-speaking leaders. At the dawn of independence, the 3S, just like any modern Koranic school, will be in the crosshairs of the educational policy of the new national state guided by the Westernized elite, which previously turned a deaf ear to the subject.



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