"Normative influence of the Bologna Process on French-speaking African universities"

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Abstract

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Normative influence of the Bologna Process on French-speaking
African universities

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The Bologna Process experienced a rapidly growing and an unexpected level of support. The authors revisit the key moments of the strategic promotion of the Bologna model and address the issue of the advantages other countries from other continents might gain from lining up with versions of the Bologna model. During the first years, the Process drew on a wide variety of practices and methods, but once it was taken out of Europe, it turned into a closed system based on strict principles. Europe still expresses doubts but it spreads its certainties as it integrates them in its new Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) system, which is presented as universally relevant, even though they represent only one particular means of conceiving, addressing and resolving the problems of higher education systems. The example of the export of such a model in Africa can lead people to worry that it might add up to nothing more than a ‘sovereignty bubble’ in a political system that sorely needs to encourage creativity, critical stances and collective endeavours.

**Keywords:** Bologna Process; higher education; LMD; African universities

Introduction

When it was launched at the Sorbonne in 1998, the promoters of what was not yet called the ‘Bologna Process’ aimed at reforming higher education in European countries in order to resist the competition of the USA and the Asian countries. Supported from the beginning by the European Commission, although its initiators tried to push it aside (Croché 2009a), the Bologna Process was embraced with an unexpected degree of enthusiasm. It reunited all the countries of Europe and stood out as a significant event to the rest of the world: it was the model to be reproduced or the expression of the expansionist will of Europe, or even both.

It was no accident that the Bologna architecture aroused such interest. The promotion of the ‘European model’ was backed up by the Commission and the countries that wanted and supported the creation of the European higher
education area (EHEA). Despite the fact that the characteristics of this model are difficult to identify, and that it has not been fully realised, its promoters’ arguments continue to point to the attractions of the Europe of knowledge.

This article aims to consider the key moments of the Bologna model promotion strategy. It pursues the distinctive lines and identifies the instruments on which it is based, so as to compare them with what is proposed in the other world regions, in particular in Africa, where a very particular version of Bologna has been installed. Furthermore, it elaborates the advantages that the countries in other continents find in aligning themselves with versions of Bologna.

In the early years of the Bologna Process a very wide variety of practices and methods were introduced, including some quite daring institutional experiments such as the recognition of learning achieved under particular conditions. For European universities, this was expressed by the adoption, in 2005, of a ‘qualifications framework’. This was a huge portmanteau, which included very heterogeneous practices. At the same time, when it was transposed outside of Europe, it was presented as a closed set of indisputable recipes. It was not necessarily a question then of relocating a reappraisal of the functioning of the university in contemporary societies. Europe remained doubtful, exporting its certainties by integrating them into its tools by setting-up the Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD), which was presented as universally relevant, while they had only limited means for conceiving, treating and resolving the problems of higher education.

This article extends the analysis of the Bologna Process presented in previous papers of Éducation et Sociétés and of Globalisation, Societies and Education by the same authors (Charlier and Croché 2003, 2010; Charlier 2006, 2009; Croché 2006, 2009a, 2009b).

The Bologna project and its extension to other world regions

For its initiators gathered in the Sorbonne in 1998, the Bologna Process had the authority only to harmonise European higher education systems. ‘The international recognition and the attractive potential of our systems’ (Sorbonne declaration 1998) were evoked, but in a secondary way. The emphasis was on reforming national systems. It could even be argued that one of the major concerns of the ministers of the four initial signatory countries was to resolve national problems for which they could not find national solutions through traditional forms of dialogue (Ravinet 2009).

At the turn of the century, the argument which held together the European countries in the Bologna Process was not the mobilisation of national systems to strengthen Europe in the competition with the other big world regions, but student mobility. The Erasmus programme of the European Commission had set up administrative procedures allowing massive exchanges of students. On this basis, the Bologna Process drew up a project to enable a significant proportion
of European students to complete a part of their programme in an institution of another country of ‘big Europe’ as defined by the Council of Europe.

If it initially aroused fewer comments than the project to make national systems converge and to encourage exchanges between their students, the objective of building a European higher education system capable of resisting the competition of the other continents was never hidden. It appears in all the official texts presenting the process. At the Bologna summit of 1999, the ministers of 29 signatory countries agreed on the need to build a more complete and more ambitious Europe, asserting their wish ‘to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attractiveness equal to [Europe’s] extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions’ (Bologna Declaration 1999).

In 2001, the ministers of 32 signatory countries ‘agreed on the importance of enhancing the attractiveness of European higher education to students from Europe and other parts of the World’ (Prague communique 2001). The Bologna Process was still fragile, with ministerial meetings dedicated to managing urgent matters and to strengthening its basis. By requesting membership of the Bologna Process in 2001, Australia forced the Bologna supporters to draw a line between those who would lead it and those who would be only authorised to follow it. This clarification was welcomed, and in Berlin in 2003 interest in the effects of the process globally came out from the cold. The ministers conceptualised them as the ‘external dimension of the Bologna Process’. In this way, they set up a process of collateral effect, by definition difficult to control, towards the explicit object of their policies. They thus asserted their will to develop grant programmes for students coming from third countries, encouraged cooperation with other world regions and stated their desire to welcome representatives of these regions to the seminars and the conferences of the Process. As such, they were delighted by ‘the presence of representatives from European countries not yet party to the Bologna process as well as from the Follow-up Committee of the European Union, Latin America and Caribbean (EULAC) Common Space for Higher Education as guests at this conference’ (Berlin communiqué 2003).

The international interest in the Bologna Process did not appear spontaneously, but was aroused and supported by powerful allies. From 2000, before its promoters had created a strategy to take advantage of the ‘external dimension’ of the process, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the World Bank and UNESCO presented it as a valid reference for all countries. The Commission promoted the Bologna architecture in its call for the Tempus III project 2000–2006, intended to provide universities of the European Union member states with a means of collaborating with their colleagues of the Tacis (Eastern Europe and Central Asia), Cards (the Balkans) and Meda (the Maghreb and the Middle East) zones. Aligning the architecture of higher education in three cycles or ‘the adaptation to the Bologna Process development’ then became explicit objectives of the
cooperation with the third countries (European Commission 2004; Tempus 2005). From before 1998, the European Commission had wished to promote a European higher education model (Kehm 1997). The Bologna Process constituted a concrete consistency in this model, which was the object from then on of steady promotion: 58% of the Tempus project of 2005 financed actions to help the participating universities to adapt themselves to the ‘Bologna model’ (Tempus 2005).

At the Bergen summit of 2005, interest in the ‘external dimension’ of the process remained strong. The ministers were reminded that the EHEA had to be, ‘a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions’ (Bergen communiqué 2005). They also asked the Bologna follow-up group to elaborate a strategy to develop the external dimension of the process. Their objective of opening up collaboration with other continents was evident in the standing of their guests, who counted among them representatives from Australia, the USA, OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and IAU (International Association of Universities).

The rhythm of the initiatives to strengthen the influence of the Bologna model in the world accelerated at the London summit of 2007. The ministers announced the importance of installing a strategy called ‘the European higher education area in a global setting’. They demonstrated the ambition to make Europe the first destination for students from other continents. They were delighted by the global interest and noted the efforts of numerous countries to move their system closer towards the Bologna principles. They adopted a strategy aimed at, ‘improving information on, and promoting the attractiveness and the competitiveness of, the EHEA; strengthening cooperation based on partnership; intensifying policy dialogue; and improving recognition’ (London communiqué 2007). As at every conference, the ministers accepted some observers to join in their initiatives; on this occasion, they came from Australia, Canada, Chile and New Zealand.

Recapitulating the terms in which the relationship of the European higher education system in the rest of the world was expressed in every ministerial summit shows an abrupt change of tone between 1999 and 2001. The years 1998 and 1999 were a time of self-congratulation; the unique qualities of the European system were showcased to the world, and they were received with admiration and gratitude. At the same time, the discourse was seen as ‘européocentrique’ (Beya Malengu 2012), and it was heavily criticised (e.g., Espinoza Figueroa 2008; Khelfaoui 2009). After 2001, the tone changed; the architects of the Bologna Process recognised the need to make it attractive in the eyes of the students of the other regions. They congratulated themselves on every advance, and they implemented strategies intended to appeal to their partners.
These tactical changes were associated with modifications of the balance of power in the piloting of the process. The European Commission took control (Bruno 2008; Croché 2010) and it intended to recognise the Bologna model by using all the means at its disposal. In 2005, it financed a study on the image of European education in the rest of the world (ACA 2005). With this study, it opened the Bologna Process to the age of publicity, where the qualities of the product are set forth without nuance or discernment. This most subtle marketing tries hard to include the needs and preferences of the potential users before proposing the product, which is then presented as if it had been finalised to fit perfectly.

The work of the Commission in promoting the Bologna Process depended on the multiple exchanges programmes it piloted. These included Tempus (cooperation between European and non-European universities); Erasmus Mundus (grant exchanges for non-European students with very high potential so that they come to study in Europe); and programmes of cooperation between the European Union and the USA and Canada, Asia-Link and Edulink (cooperation with the Asian countries), Alfa and Alban (cooperation with Latin America), and Nyerere/Erasmus (which allows African students to complete their studies in Europe; Figel 2007). Since 2007, the Commission has strengthened the propagation of a positive image of European education in the other continents. It adopted, in particular, the Erasmus Mundus Global Promotion Project, with the intention of promoting the attractiveness of the systems of European higher education, and of exporting its tools and key programmes throughout the world.

The ministerial follow-up conferences of the Bologna Process (2009, 2010, 2012) continued these tendencies. At Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, the drivers of the process created a partnership with the other world regions by organising a ‘Bologna policy forum’, which brought together representatives of the member countries of the process and the other regions (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve communiqué 2009). In 2009, this forum welcomed African representatives, the only continent that had not yet been invited to the biennial follow-up summits of the process. The objective of opening the EHEA to collaboration with all the world regions was reiterated during the Budapest and Vienna summit in 2010 (Budapest/Vienna declaration 2010). In Bucharest, in 2012, where the Bologna actors reiterated that ‘cooperation with other regions of the world and international openness are key factors in the development of the EHEA’, they agreed that they would by 2015 evaluate the implementation and impact of the external dimension strategy they adopted in 2007.

The initiatives taken in 2009 and 2010 mark the third period in the management of the external dimension of the Bologna Process. Following ‘triumphant publicity’ and ‘subtle marketing’, 10 years after the launch of the process came ‘partnership’. Nevertheless, from the beginning, it had been evident that the modifications which had been developed in Europe were going to have direct consequences on the southern countries where higher education
systems are copies of those of European countries. During this decade, the southern countries participated neither in the reflections nor in the negotiations which led to the reforms in Europe. They were presented with a *fait accompli* and were required to adapt themselves to the risk of being disconnected from the northern universities and from the world system.

**A flexible model which becomes rigid by being exported**

The situation of the European higher education can sometimes seem vague. In spite of the triumphal declarations of its promoters, the Bologna Process is far from a complete success, as is evidenced by the decision, in 2009, to continue with the construction of the EHEA, which was to have been completed in 2010, until 2020. European higher education continues to contain a large diversity of practices (Croché 2010), which is understandable both because countries entered the process in a disorganised manner and because many jealously guarded their right to organise their higher education as they understand it. Even if they agree on some major principles, countries continue to pursue policies that prioritise national objectives. They respect the Bologna rules only as far as it suits them. Every country integrated the Bologna Process into its legislation in its own way. In France, it was the text ‘LMD’ (Ministère de l’enseignement supérieur 2005). Moreover, in every country participating in the process, unpopular reforms of higher education were justified by the need to adapt to the requirements of the process, which they sometimes had nothing to do with. Very diverse representations of the process thus developed in countries, and each of them included unique local variations. Given this, it is important to try to find the central elements of the Bologna Process and to compare them with what is proposed in Africa by going back to the original conferences.

The Sorbonne (1998) and Bologna (1999) conferences demonstrated the objective of creating a system based on two cycles, ‘undergraduate and graduate’. The first was to last three years and result in a diploma. The duration of the second was never officially defined, but was mostly considered to take two years. This model was completed by the integration of lifelong learning at the Prague summit (2001) and of the third cycle at the Berlin summit (2003). It was variously named in the countries where it became established: 3-5-8, BA–MA (bachelor and master), LMD, etc. While it was supposed to impose the same architecture on the higher education systems of the participating countries, it did not bring about the expected standardisation.

If most of the States decided that the first cycle would be three years, in some cases it could be realised in four. The second cycle variously extends over one year, one and a half years or two years. This lack of homogeneity, denounced in diverse reports (Eurydice 2005; Reichert and Tauch 2005), forced the ministers of the 45 countries of Europe, gathered in Bergen in 2005, to adopt a ‘framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education
Area’ (BWGQF 2005). This created new durations of studies and fixed the minimum and maximum number of credits by European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which must be obtained for every cycle. This framework authorised the number of years of study and ECTS and is presented in Table 1 (BFUG 2005).

If the number of ECTS obtained in one year of study is not at issue – uniformly 60 – the proposed student workload is not clearly defined. The ECTS user guide issued by the European Commission (2009a) stated that 60 ECTS correspond to a workload of between 1500 and 1800 hours. An ECTS thus requires 25–30 working hours for a student: in Germany, in French-speaking Belgium and in Hungary, the number is 30 hours, in Finland 27 hours, in the Netherlands 28 hours, in the UK between 20 and 30 hours. In 29 of 30 countries participating in the Bologna Process and eligible for inclusion in the Erasmus-Socrates programme, an ECTS is equivalent to 25 hours or more. Only the UK makes an exception, by allowing that an ECTS takes between 20 and 30 hours (European Commission 2009a, 59–60).

There is as yet no inventory of the differences between the reality and what was proposed as standard by those driving the Bologna Process. These two illustrations concern the prescribed number of years in a cycle and of hours in an ECTS. The differences are significant and suggest that those prescriptions where the level of execution is more difficult to verify (because they are not expressed numerically) could have been even less respected. We can deduce from this report that the European higher education model is characterised by a significant degree of flexibility. However, this flexibility is an essential condition of its acceptance in the countries of Europe.

Which Bologna in Africa?

The examination of the Guide to setting up the LMD for the institutions of higher education of French-speaking Africa (AUA et al. 2008) demonstrates this. Published by the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the REESAO (Network for the Excellence of the Higher Education of Western Africa), it is available on numerous sites: UNESCO, ADEA, AAU, CAMES (African and Madagascan Council for Higher Education), REESAO and

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**Table 1. Framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>ECTS (one year = 60 ECTS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First cycle</td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
<td>180 or 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second cycle</td>
<td>1, ½ or 2</td>
<td>60, 90 or 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third cycle</td>
<td>Non-specified</td>
<td>Non-specified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CRUFAOCI (Conférence des Recteurs Francophones Afrique de l’Ouest et de l’Océan Indien). As can be seen from the authority of its publishers, it is an uncontested reference for universities and French-speaking African governments. However, from the first line of the foreword, confusion is created between the Bologna Process and the reforms in France: ‘in 1998, with the Bologna process, the European countries decided to make a commitment to the reform of Licence-Master-Doctorate’. Following other inaccuracies, the guide advances the idea according to which higher education in French-speaking Africa is, ‘confronted with the challenge of the adoption of this plan of higher education, which is currently taken as the educational aspect of globalisation, and is already current in the Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries, as well as most emerging countries’. The authors are quite clear that the LMD is the only implemented expression of the Bologna project, and leave no room for any examination of the way the other European countries have implemented it. The content of the bibliography is also revealing; it contains no official document produced by the authors of the Bologna Process, but only representative scientific works and practical guides drafted in French-speaking African universities where only the French modalities of Bologna application were presented. No primary sources are found there, only French-speaking secondary sources.

In the guide, the LMD system is presented as based on two axes: semestrialisation and capitalisation. Courses are organised in semesters; neither the study year nor the issue of the shift from one year to the next is any longer relevant. The license (Bachelor’s degree) takes six semesters, the Master’s degree four, and the doctorate six, each semester corresponding to a period of between 14 and 16 weeks of teaching and evaluation. This division is the 3-5-8 model presented in Attali’s (1998) report. This report, ordered by the French Minister Allègre, obviously inspired the project of harmonisation of higher education that he put forward at the Sorbonne meeting. But the 3-5-8 model was not taken up by the promoters of the Bologna Process. More awkwardly, the guide suggests that deviation from the markers 3-5-8 is inconceivable, thus strengthening the strict capitalisation of the credits, with each unit having a value measured in credits. Every semester contains 30 credits, the license 180 credits, the Master’s degree 120 credits and the doctorate 180 credits.

On these two points, the duration of each cycle, and the workload a modal student needs to obtain a credit, the LMD system described in this guide deviates strongly from the agreements concluded between the partners of the Bologna Process. The synthesis proposed in Table 1 shows that in Europe, maximal and minimal borders leave many fields open to the creativity of local actors, while there is no such space in Africa.

Other elements of the LMD project are advanced as being obvious, such as the system of compensation. The guide makes the distinction between intra-UE [teaching unit] compensation: a below average grade in one element of a UE can be compensated with an above average grade in another element [...]
of the same UE; and *inter-UE* compensation (between different UE): ‘a below average grade in a UE can be compensated with the grade from another UE’.

This system of compensation has not been set up in all the participating European countries and would be even considered as unacceptable by several of them. If the Bologna Process aims to reduce failures in higher education, the manner in which this can be achieved differs considerably from country to country.

Since 2000, leading African organisations – CAMES, REESAO, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ADEA, AUA, CRUFAOCI, UEMOA (Monetary Union of western Africa) and CMAC (Monetary Community of Central Africa) – have chosen to encourage African universities to adopt the Bologna model. The outcome is that this version seems like a caricature, emptied of the doubts of its initiators. It presents itself as a catalogue of incontestable recipes, while every element of the model is the result of complex negotiations, and the shape of each of its modalities owes a great deal to the balance of power between those who negotiated it. What is exported in Africa is not the Bologna model, but certain French recipes for application. More recently, France presented in many institutions of higher education of its former colonies its higher education reform, that it assimilates to the Bologna Process. This reform, with the peculiarities of the French system, is far from making it unanimous. But no matter, even though all the French people would find there only qualities to improve the functioning of their establishment, its transposition to the African countries would not guarantee by any means that the most relevant system is set up to meet their needs.

The harmonisation of the duration of study, initially sought by the European countries – but not realised – could become a reality in Africa. Standards stabilise, but at its periphery, rather than in the heart of the model, which is rather unusual. The evolution of these differences raises some issues: the initiators of the Bologna Process want to maintain a flexible and evolutionary study architecture because they do not intend to give up their sovereignty; the countries of the South which join the LMD model accept that it is the most codified, even if the most constraining possible, to guarantee recognition of equivalences. This is possibly a fool’s game because it is highly unlikely that recognition will become automatic, given the different weightings of the credits and the system of compensation. A credit is equivalent to 25–30 working hours of study in Europe and 20–25 hours in Africa. At the extreme, the European student has to work 5400 hours to master the skills sanctioned by his or her first cycle diploma, while their African counterpart has to work only 3600 hours. The difference between them is 1800 hours, the equivalent of one working year for a European student. This difference seems obviously unacceptable. The second reason which will prevent automatic recognition is the generosity of the system of compensation, which means that a student can
successful complete one year without having obtained the necessary level in the central disciplines of his/her field of study.

Exportation of tools and institutional, political and cultural references

There seems to be no credible alternative organisation of higher education to the three-cycle model. By joining this model, Europe powerfully contributed to its becoming universal. All world regions are undertaking reforms to make their higher education systems compatible. Asia and Latin America responded quickly to the launch of the Bologna Process; today it is the turn of Africa. The reforms feed on exchanges and on comparisons between the systems which no longer recognise borders. From the 1990s, the ECTS has inspired the Asia Umap Credit Transfer System, which is a perfect replica. The ECTS seems to have become the unit of measurement and comparison of the higher education programmes of many countries in and beyond Europe.

Since 2000, the European Commission and some of those propelling the Bologna Process have tried to promote their expertise in change management in the higher education system in other world regions. They have not, nevertheless, exported the Bologna Process, which raises new questions of university–society relations. On the other hand, through the medium of the techniques they recommend, they orient and frame the ways of treating this question in the countries where it is asked, whether or not these countries want to put these issues on their political agenda. To give strength to this assertion, we need to put in perspective the history of the appearance of tools connected to the Bologna Process in Europe and the history of their implementation in Africa. This comparison highlights the questions asked in Africa on higher education, which follow the development, in Europe, of methods or techniques that shape the means of answering them, rather systematically. These ‘ultra perfect’ adjustments can lead us to believe that the answers shaped the questions, or swamped the subtleties of authentically local questions.

Some recent events are illuminating. In August 2007, during the third ordinary session of the COMEDAF (Conference of Ministers of Education of the Countries of the African Union), the ministers gathered in Johannesburg proposed a harmonisation of their programmes of higher education. Asserting that it must be driven by Africa, they sought the implementation of a comparative qualification framework based on a system of credits and the definition of skills and learning outcomes. In December 2007, a common European–African Union strategy was introduced in Lisbon. Its first action plan (2008–2010) emphasised cooperation in higher education (European Council 2007; European Commission 2009b). In November 2008, the creation of an ‘African higher education area’ was identified as a fundamental objective of African societies during the regional Africa higher education conference (CRESA), preparing for the world Conference of July 2009. The conference ‘Developing links: EU-Africa cooperation in Higher Education through
‘Mobility’ of December 2008 underlined the necessity of reforming African higher education and of bringing back structures and compatible systems to facilitate mobility within Africa, and between Africa and the other continents (EU-Africa cooperation in HE 2008).

From 2008 to 2010, in the period of these declarations, the European University Association (EUA) and the AAU led the project ‘Access to success: fostering trust and exchange between Europe and Africa’, which was financed by the European Commission. The green book (EUA et al. 2010) which resulted from this work, suggests orientations in the cooperation between Europe and Africa and makes reference to two key projects of the European Commission in Africa: Tuning and Nyerere-Erasmus. These two projects can be considered as answers, the financing of ‘Access to success’ having been allowed to be identified with appropriate local questions.

The idea to have a Tuning project for Africa based on the European and Latin American model was launched in December 2008. This Tuning method aims at conceiving, implementing and estimating the curricula of three cycles of all the diplomas, as well as developing level descriptors of cycles for some of them. The method introduces the conditions of real systems transparency, the standardisation of sectors and their harmonisation. Launched in 2000 by some European countries, and financed by the European Commission, European Tuning was taken as a model by the Latin American countries, then by others, who developed it differently by putting it in the service of their concerns. As a consequence, four different forms of the European Tuning exist in Latin America, the USA, Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

Before Tuning, the European Commission had introduced Erasmus-Nyerere in Africa. This programme was part of the ‘EU Strategy for Africa: towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa’s development’, which was approved in October 2005 during a joint meeting of the European and African Commissions. Its objective was to facilitate the mobility of students within Africa, and between Africa and Europe, in particular through the programme Mwalimu Nyerere, which was inspired by Erasmus and Nyerere-Erasmus Mundus, among whom a predecessor, Erasmus World, had been introduced in 2002 by the European Commission. It aims to help brilliant African students to complete their studies in Europe (European Commission 2010), but it produces the secondary effect of increasing brain drain from Africa towards the North (Maingari 2011).

The most urgent concerns of the French-speaking African universities are not those related to the mobility of their students through the continent or the coordination of curricula with the establishments of neighbouring countries. These universities are first and foremost confronted with an influx of students, which they are incapable of handling. The creation of regional universities is an attempt to deal with this issue, but it is not accompanied by the recruitment of professors, the construction of buildings or the acquisition of teaching equipment so that effective teaching can be provided. These establishments do not resolve the problem; at best, they fragment it. The gap between these
difficulties and the tools which Europe proposes to help African countries to intervene in their universities is enormous. European attempts to export the way it conceives, treats and resolves such problems without recognising the lived realities of local actors deny them the capacity either to establish a correct diagnosis of the difficulties they face or to think of ways of overcoming them.

Those in charge of the African universities know that the Bologna model does not represent a solution to their most acute and urgent problems. With no other alternative, they are forced to accept it as a reference point, for since independence, the academic and technical conditions of equivalence in the French titles that had to be satisfied for the second-cycle diplomas of the French-speaking countries of Central or western Africa were well known. Thanks to these equivalences, which were sometimes agreed on questionable criteria, Africans were able to complete their programme in a French university, to obtain their doctorate there and to return to teach in their initial establishment. They then continued to provide the French universities with exceptional candidates for the third cycle, leading in some cases to the doctorate. Some academic renewal could be guaranteed, even if shortages became evident in several disciplines. The LMD model requires the creation of doctoral schools to ensure the existence of a scientific elite for universities and local centres of research. Their current state does not allow them to be self-sufficient; the exchanges between the universities of French-speaking Africa and their counterparts in the North thus remain vital to raising academic standards and the continuity of the teaching service. Under these conditions, it does not matter if the LMD generates false hopes, so long as it brings about the means of immediate scientific survival.

Conclusion: from governmentality to sovereignty

One of the readings of the increasing stature of the Bologna Process in Europe is based on the view that the French Minister Allezègre activated a ‘European higher education apparatus’ by convening the Sorbonne meeting in 1998. As a result, this established stronger links between four systems of higher education, who housed more than 50% of European students. Allezègre – on the 800th anniversary of the University of Paris – gave a mythical context to this apparatus by asserting that the university was a European creation. He endowed the flexible model that he invented with operational objectives, identified its enemies and defined its limits. The jumble of elements brought together there fits nicely Foucault’s canonical definition of the apparatus (dispositif): ‘[...]a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions’ (Foucault 1994, 299).

The apparatus directs actors’ thoughts and behaviours by a mechanism of constraint and learning, which shows itself as soon as the relation between heterogeneous elements produces an effect of normality joining words, bodies
and thoughts (Foucault 2004, 22). It sits alongside governmentality, understood as the conduct of conduct: it fixes what can and must be done at the moment, but does not define ‘how’, and does not indicate who has to do it. The 1998 Sorbonne meeting was prompted in the long term when the German and French governments began to worry about the decreasing attractiveness of their higher education systems and took steps to reverse this tendency. The departure of leading European scientists to American universities was deplored. More and more European students had been supported by an Erasmus exchange grant in order to carry out part of their study abroad. The concept of the knowledge society emerged. These scattered pieces were pulled together in the Sorbonne speech, and the subsequent political decisions gave them an unambiguous meaning and the unique opportunity to build an ‘EHEA’.

The catchword was clear; it was applied to the whole of Europe and those who resisted it were considered backward, incapable of understanding the course of history. Their resistance was, however, absorbed by the apparatus without stopping it; in fact they enriched it. Consolidated by all positive and negative demonstrations, the European higher education apparatus succeeded in making national systems converge on the same model, even if it was visibly chaotic. However, no element of the apparatus was imposed; each of them was the object of negotiations, exchanges, and debates, which explains the variations observed in the durations of the cycles or in the numbers of hours of credits.

The way that the Bologna Process has been exported to Africa corresponds in no way to the governmentality; none of the parameters of the LMD, such as presented to Africa, seem negotiable. Thus, it is not a question any more of the conduct, but of imposing norms to bring about what Foucault defined as sovereignty: the rule is justified because the sovereign expressed it and because its word cannot be disputed. The exportation of the Bologna Process tends to aggravate the defects. In Europe, it has contributed to the creation of a political education space governed by data used to measure performance, to compare and to control quality (Grek et al. 2011), when academic freedom and the classic forms of university democracy tend to withdraw (Schmidt and Langberg 2007). This evolution gives more and more power to the administrators and to the administration staff, who are the masters of the procedures. But even if it is narrowed, the frame still offers some flexibilities and it is doubtless thanks to that that it succeeds in becoming seen as an imperative. In the forms in which it is proposed to the African universities today, it offers no space for response, and could indeed establish a sinister ‘bubble of sovereignty’ (Butler 2004) in a political universe which, nevertheless, needs to arouse the inventiveness, the critical faculty, the collective mobilisations, in brief, all these signs of health, which forbid sovereignty.

Notes
1. Our translation of ‘Organisation licence master doctorat (LMD)’.
2. Our translation of ‘depuis 1998, avec le processus de Bologne, les pays européens décident de s’engager dans la réforme Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD)’.


References


