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Educating the next generation of Islamist Militants: The disputed equation

Marina Eleftheriadou

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Does (distorted) Islamic education empower Islamist networks and organizations in their recruitment efforts? The true dimensions and implications of this correlation have drawn a heated debate in the West, as well as in Muslim countries. Although there is no factual basis upon which to establish a "safe" estimation, it seems that given Islamic education does have the potential to produce militant tendencies. However, Islamic education per se cannot explain how those tendencies transform to affiliations and active participation. More importantly, education seems to play a pivotal role only in certain types of militancy.

The connection between education and Islamist militancy is barely a new research theme, although, much like everything related to Islamism, it currently attracts wider interest. During the past two decades, the emphasis was on the boom of educated, unemployed Middle Eastern youth who, frustrated by their social immobility, turned to violence. Nowadays, education is itself under scrutiny. Previously, this scrutiny manifested itself in the form of warnings, like those articulated by Samuel Huntington regarding the "civilizational threat" arising from the "availability of large numbers of often unemployed males between 15 and 30 [which] is a natural source of instability and violence". More recently, it has taken the form of questions, such as Rumsfeld's widely-quoted one (October 2003): "Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrasas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?", or alarming articles about schools in the US that are "inappropriately using taxpayer dollars to implement a religious [Islamist] curriculum... [that entail] possible violations of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause" (separation of the state from religion).

Although the issue of religious education has been examined in connection to places as distinct as Central and Southeast Asia, West Africa, the Middle East and North America, no other country has been under the spotlight as much as Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia. However, the low levels of consensus on the influence of madrasas in the much-studied Pakistani case reveals how complicated the interpretation of such phenomena can be. Madrasas are said to represent 1% to 33% (according to the "World Bank funded" Harvard report and an International Crisis Group estimation respectively) of educational institutions in a country with a literacy rate below 50%. At the same time, the Pakistani government adds several thousands to the official estimation of the number of madrasas

every few years (from 6,870 in 2001 to 10,430 in 2003 and 13,500 in 2007). However, this gradual inflation in government-provided figures is probably the result of international pressure to grasp and acknowledge the full size of the problem rather than a serious field research to record the madrasa sector. In any case, other estimates put the number to 45,000. Accordingly, the number of enrolled students ranges from 500,000 to 1.7 million.

There is no agreement on the social stratification of madrasa students either. Most of the studies (such as those conducted by the International Crisis Group) associate the phenomenon of the madrasa with poverty. According to this view, madrasas are popular among the poor because their dire economic situation makes the impoverished dysfunctional public education even less appealing. For decades, only 2% of the GDP has been allocated to education, which explains the existence of thousands of "ghost schools" (existing only in papers, e.g. in 1998 there were 4500 in the Punjab region alone) and the scores of absentee teachers who are still paid by the government. The lack of infrastructure is not in the least compensated by the quality and value of the education provided. For parents, investing in their children's education is not equivalent to securing a better future for them. As an NGO worker in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) said: *"Here, a person who has been through [public] schooling is actually at a disadvantage. He is competing for jobs against people who have developed technical skills from working all their lives"*. Then, the alternative to child labor and public schooling appears to be the madrasa. Madrasas provide free food and free accommodation and although the graduates' job opportunities are restricted to madrasas or mosques, employment prospects are better than those provided by public education. That is the reason why, the argument follows, three fourths of madrasa students come from the poor sections of society. However, this claim is refuted by other analysts who sustain that the connection between poverty and madrasas is not that clear-cut. On the contrary, a large share of students are said to come from the middle class; despite the fact that their families can afford private schools, they send their children to madrasas as an act of religiosity.

Even though there is no widely acceptable empirical test of the equation, there might be at least some indicators to confirm its plausibility. In order to discover those indicators, we should perhaps first look at the functions which education is perceived to perform within the framework of any given society. Schools are the primary mechanism of shaping and controlling youth, through which the national idea and identity is transmitted and internalized for the creation of the next generation of "good citizens". In this context, the teaching of religion is a part of a curriculum which is politicized to accommodate the national idea. This occurs in Muslim and non-Muslim states alike (the country that is most articulate in its concern about Pakistani madrasas, the US, is itself split over the issue of intelligent design versus Darwin's evolution theory), as well as in Islamic (e.g. Saudi Arabia) and secular (e.g. Turkey) countries. As Gregory Starrett pointed out *"just as wild plants have to undergo systematic genetic alterations to make them useful as cultivated foods, so 'Islam' has to be altered to make it useful as a political instrument"*. In some cases the state does that -successfully or not- from a position of power, while in other cases it has to compromise and bargain with the self-proclaimed defenders of Islam and Islamic education. In the former case, it manages to largely control mainstream education and, by implication, diffuse its perception of national idea and interest. In the latter, the national identity is overwhelmed by the religious one.

For example, the regime in Egypt, although faced with defiant Islamists and despite the alleged infiltration of the Muslim Brotherhood in the education system, exerts sufficient control on the religious curricula in public education and in madrasas (through the control of Al-Azhar that runs the religious schools) to fit the national image to its standards: for example, a distinction is drawn between Coptic Christians, that share with the Muslims *"the unity of the country and the common aims of its fate,"* and the imperialist Christians of the West. Saudi Arabia presents a slightly different case. Unlike Egypt, it is not a relatively secular state that tries to tame its Islamic identity. Its Islamic -Wahhabi- identity is an integral part of its national existence. However, this identity is not less instrumentalised than in the cases above. There is no doubt that the textbooks promote a Salafi-Wahhabi Islam, but only as long as the Saudi regime is legitimized within the confines of this Islam. A solid argument, found scattered in the textbooks, establishes the continuity -and analogy- from Prophet Mohammad to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and from him to the line of Saud kings who are there to "protect this tradition". Even when forced to face the issue of extremism, they did it through the prism of social stability.

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As the Saudi Education Minister said in a 2004 address marking the opening of the school year: *"The criminal and insane events (the series of bombing attacks in 2003) to which our country has been witness will not in any way shake our trust in Allah ... Saudi Arabia will not in any way be defeated by apostasy... and deviance from the righteous path that threaten the security and stability of society."*

Pakistan is no different in the way that religious education has been manipulated by leading elites. Pakistan was formed as a state to house the "Muslim Indian" identity and as the conflict with India intensified, the regime, in order to rally the population around the flag, had to consolidate the national myth by stressing what made it distinct: the Muslim clause. Ever since the first years of independence, the "Muslim identity" and religious education had to be periodically bolstered to mitigate the defeats suffered from India. Later on, during Pakistan's "golden age", Zia ul-Haq's rule, religious education bloomed while public education spiraled downwards. But at the time, the project of Islamisation was undertaken from a presumed position of power: through American funds and US-published books, *"students learnt basic math by counting dead Russians and Kalashnikov rifles."* Pakistan's government was creating strategic depth in Afghanistan and preparing fighters to continue the struggle in Kashmir. However, when Benazir Bhutto and her successor Nawaz Sharif decided to tighten the valves of new recruits, they realized that madrasas grew independent while public education, along with the economy, deteriorated rapidly after the US imposed sanctions due to Pakistan's nuclear program. To do the same, Musharaf had to co-opt the religious elite. But he had to do that from a position of weakness, since the coalition of Islamic parties (MMA) was at the same time a necessary coalition partner and a strong opposition force.

In other words, Pakistan, contrary to the other states mentioned above, had to accommodate a strong religious identity, while the state's relations with religious education centers spiraled out of control. Through the years, Islamabad developed on the one hand a non-existent official public education system via which it believed it would be able to disseminate state propaganda, which, given the years of conscious Islamization and the current political power of the self-proclaimed defenders of this tradition, it can't. On the other hand and for the same reasons, an independent network of religious schools, which enjoy relative teaching freedom despite numerous governmental efforts to tame them, attract resources and, perhaps more important, attempt to "explain" the events in Afghanistan and the world through their prism.

However, the crude product of these madrasas is functionally not different from the product of any educational system. By internalizing a system's values, the latter creates at best passive, though highly receptive individuals. These individuals know how to obey to rules and orders which claim their validity and legitimacy in those values. However, in order to develop an active approach to those values, they first have to go through other channels of socialization. This happens for the simple reason that such an active approach is "anti-social" in the sense that it contradicts the norms of behavior set by society, as well as the "normal life" that the young individual is expected to lead: create a family and integrate into the workforce. In this sense, the only potential that the net product of madrasas has is to man demonstrations against the US or Mohammed's cartoons. To move from this to anti-Shia sectarian violence, suicide bombings and participation in the Afghan insurgency (in the case of Pakistan), it would require further indoctrination and training. This liaison is usually provided by several militant organizations that look for recruits in madrasas and mosques and through

the vast amount of audio visual material available on the Internet or in urban markets. This way, the young individual interacts with people and ideas that "teach" him that he ought to take the defense of the idea (religion in this case) in his own hands and show him how. However, as many studies have pointed out, even this merely facilitates the "big step" that is usually undertaken under the influence of their close social circle. Marc Sageman, who in his book *Understanding Terror Networks* studies how individuals transform to "jihadi terrorists", suggested that three out of four "had pre-existing social bonds to members already involved in global jihad or had decided to join the jihad with a group of family members or friends".

Nevertheless, just like religious education functions within wider societal relations to create militancy, it cannot be detached from the general social context in which it appears either. Not only are Pakistani militants different from Egyptian or Saudi, but also the limited job opportunities madrasa graduates have reflect the limited "social mobility" they have inside the realms of Islamic militancy. The more sophisticated the militancy gets, the more unrelated to madrasas it seems. Madrasa graduates, even when employed in the "jihadi sector", are unskilled workers. They can be taught to pull the trigger -or the cordon that sets off the suicide belt- but they are the lowest and most expendable part of the jihadi division of labor. Wherever there is need for higher intellectual abilities required for the planning of attacks (more so for setting the general directions of the struggle) or technical skills for executing complex operations on heavily-guarded targets, the expertise the madrasas offer is simply inadequate. The profile of sometimes Western educated, alienated engineers responsible for the attacks in the West and the Middle East (e.g. Egypt) doesn't go well with hours of memorizing the Quran in a language they don't understand (that is the basic -primary- education that madrasas provide). ■

The Kurdish "non - education" in southeast Turkey

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Despite "overhauling" the Kurdish issue in the pursuit of European membership, AKP's policy seems to consolidate the already entrenched deprivation of cultural rights for citizens of Kurdish descent. Institutionalizing a distinctly Kurdish education is still in the margins of Erdogan's political agenda, since the Kurds are still viewed as a threat to Turkish national unity.

Turkey's predominantly Kurdish provinces in the Southeast still lag far behind the rest of the country in every socioeconomic index, largely as a result of the lack of education in the region. Poor education and high illiteracy rates are directly connected to language barriers for the inhabitants. Education in languages other than Turkish is forbidden by the Turkish Constitution (as formalised in 1982 and in several subsequent laws), rendering teaching the Kurdish language illegal.

In addition, broadcasts cannot have an educational content, they are banned from disseminating the Kurdish language or history, while they have to carry Turkish subtitles. Even with the enactment of the 2004 legislation, only three media outlets received authori-

sation and started broadcasting in Kurdish dialects, however with limited duration and with no educational scope. Apart from the Turkish national television, permission was granted to two local TV channels in Diyarbakir and to one radio station in Sanliurfa to broadcast in Kurdish for just 30 minutes per week. However, with the exception of films and music programs, time restrictions apply and all broadcasts, except for music shows, must be subtitled or translated into Turkish. In addition, the 2004 establishment of the first official private Kurdish language school, under EU pressure towards Turkey to recognise Kurdish cultural rights, was short-lived given that it was unaffordable for most Kurds to attend.

Nevertheless, despite long-standing official

attempts to suppress it, most Kurds have retained their native language, basically expressed through the dialects of Kermanji and Zaza. Yet, in south-eastern Turkey (mainly in the triangular region between Diyarbakir, Ezurum, and Sivas) children often begin school speaking only their native Kurdish language and thus having little chance of any remarkable school achievement.

Besides, many of them do not even complete the compulsory eight years of elementary education, mainly due to the lack of employment opportunities and poverty. The Mayor of Batman revealed recently that for six months of the year 50% of families migrate to the farms of western Turkey as seasonal agricultural workers. Those children who have started school rarely return to classes.

The lack of school buildings for primary education also contributes to the low rates of schooling. South-east Turkey counts 5594 primary schools, most of them deficient in basic educational material and equipment. At the same time, the shortage of educational personnel results in swelling classrooms for Kurdish students. According to Turkstat statistics, in 2007, there was one teacher for every 30.1 school students in the region, compared to 19.2 in the Aegean coasts.

The majority of Turkey's teachers consist of newly-qualified university graduates, who do not wish to teach in the region due to the threat of terrorism, security problems and limited social life, some of them resigning from the job. Their task is to promote through the book manuals the basic principles of Turkishness (Turkluk ilkeleri) as expressed in the Constitution of 1982. Any reference to the Kurdish culture or use of language is illegal.

Furthermore, the aim of secondary education is to infuse students with the maximum of Turkish common culture in at least 3 years of education. Southeast

Turkey covers 546 secondary schools (general and vocational) with a low numbers of student enrolment, especially amongst the Kurdish youth. The small share of Kurdish youth entering secondary educational level is, however, proportionate to the small number of graduates. Approximately 800,000 Kurdish students graduate from high school annually, but half of them are unable to make use of their skills and education due to high levels of unemployment in the region. Only in 2006, the most recent period for which official figures are available, the labour force participation rate in Southeast Turkey stood at just 34.3% compared to a still low 48.0 % in the country as a whole. What is more, the region has the highest fertility rates in Turkey, with young Kurds thus being affected the most by unemployment throughout the region.

As regards higher education, the central campus of Dicle University in Diyarbakir, counting 11 Faculties and 11 vocational schools, is the only existing institute of higher education, not allowing however any research into the Kurdish language, literature, or culture. At present, roughly 70% percent of the students studying at Dicle University come primarily from Diyarbakir and different cities and towns of the East and South East, while the rest correspond to Turkish students who have not been successful enough in nationwide general proficiency examinations (OSS). In fact, the figure for Kurdish youth entering university is 0.01%, compared to 3% for Turkish students. Kurdish graduates from Dicle University also represent the majority of the qualified labour-force in Diyarbakir and other southeast cities, trying to take advantage of the recent government subsidies for the development of the region.

Within the framework of the South East Anatolian Project (SEAP) (GAP in Turkish) and in addition to state funding for infrastructure and irrigation, R. T. Erdogan

recently pledged an additional \$850 million for education in the region, as well as the creation of four million new jobs. During one of his speeches in Diyarbakir, Erdogan also promised the restoration of boarding primary schools in Kurdish provinces, as well as the implementation of revised curricula for primary and vocational education.

This recent economic development initiative is seen as a "social restoration project", aiming to "restrict the terrorist organization's field for exploitation" by the end of 2012. Nevertheless, the prime minister dismissed calls for wider Kurdish-language education and open broadcasting, arguing that other minorities would demand similar rights.

At the same time a coalition of Kurdish grass-roots organizations supported by university students has

already begun a large campaign called "I want to be taught in my mother tongue," increasingly pressuring the Turkish government to institute Kurdish language education in public schools according to the EU Accession Partnership program, while the pro-Kurdish DTP party demands the same through a regional autonomous status for the Kurds.

The Ministry of Education, however, has already clarified its position with a 27-page indictment, accusing students of being part of a campaign that aims to carve a Kurdish homeland inside Turkey. Kemal Guruz, the head of Turkey's higher education body, ruled out any possibility of Kurdish being used in public education, characterising the Kurdish language as a creation of Kurdish activists ("PKK-inspired") with the backing of European countries trying to divide Turkey.

Kurdish educational rights are still significantly limited in Turkey. Even if the AKP honors its latest pledges, those will still be merely a substitute for a flourishing Kurdish education. The latter presumes the recognition of the Kurdish minority. In fact, it presumes that Turkey transforms from a state-nation to a modern civil society. ■



Education in Iran: *Towards a Second Islamization?*

Christina Prifti

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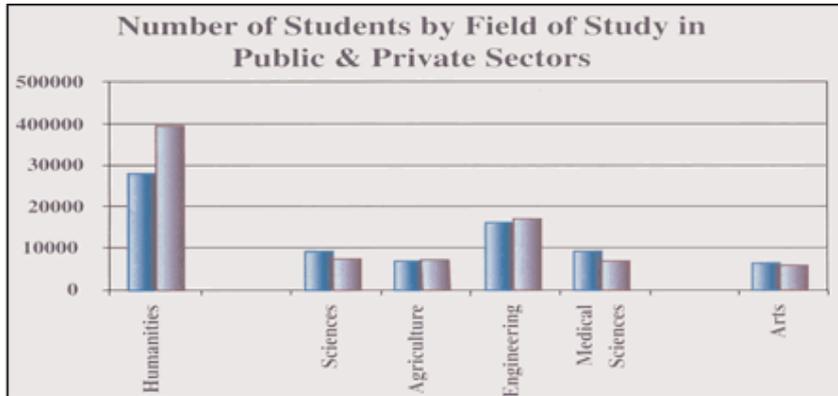
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Unlike other revolutionaries in this century who have aimed at creating societies based on various ideologies such as nationalism and socialism, the revolutionaries in Iran aimed to implement the Islamic values and ideals. Like all revolutionaries, for the Islamic Revolution in Iran the educational system considered one of the most important vehicles for reeducating the masses and disseminating the ideas of the revolution.

Following the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, Iran's educational system underwent a dramatic process of Islamization. Textbooks and curricula were revised to promote the Islamic teachings of the late Ayatollah Khomeini emphasizing his politico-religious doctrine which calls for the rule of the true imams. The universities in Iran became centers of conflict between students who supported a thorough islamization of administrations, faculties and curricula, and students who wanted to retain a secular system. As a result of the violent clashes at several universities in 1979-1980, the government closed all 200 institutes of higher learning in April 1980. Academics who did not embrace the revolution and pledge loyalty to the Shah were cleansed from educational institutions. Students not affiliated with the government were no longer allowed to form any organizations, post any writing or distribute literature. Some intellectual flexibility returned during the 1990s but due to financial problems the intellectual and institutional capacity was significantly restricted. The population explosion in the mid-90s, the fall of the agricultural production (in the 90s Iran was a major food importer) and the subsequent overurbanization, the economy's high dependence on oil-industry and the war with Iraq resulted in high levels of vulnerability in social structures such as the educational system.

The primary aim of Iranian education is to help create an 'Islamic person' through books and educational institutions. The processes of adab (purification-discipline), tarbiyyah (training, fostering, nourishing) talim (indirect learning through studying and getting exposed to mass media) and marafah (direct learning through communication with God) constitute the essence of Islamic Education. The role of textbooks, community and teachers is crucial not only in implementing the Islamic values but also in diminishing the role of groups and individuals who do not comply with the policies and programs of the government or the way these are implemented. In all Iranian texts, as well as in sciences, architecture and arts, "coloured" by the state, the two major themes are religion and government, which cannot be separated from each other. This Islamic concept of unity of church and state is not restricted to Iran, but it also forms the main component of the Islamic perception of the world, the Islamic Ummah.

Currently, Iran has 46 Universities (daneshgah), 60 post-secondary technical institutions, about 200 colleges/higher institutes/professional schools (madrasai-ali) and a number of teacher training colleges. In 2005-6 a total of 340.526 students were admitted to universities and higher education institutes. It is quite interesting that the ministry of Education employs the highest number of civil servants - 42% of the total - and receives 21% of the national budget. Before



1989, privately owned colleges were not allowed to operate. At present, there are approximately 40 private institutions in Iran, a private system of higher education that consists of theological colleges. For example, Azad University, a dynamic and fast growing institution founded in 1982 with 1.6 million students across Iran and with four active branches overseas (Tanzania, UK, Armenia and the UAE)-, most of the country's Universities are founded, financed and governed by the state.

Ahmadinejad is being criticized for following a hard-line policy, which aims to tight state control over universities. The fact that he appoints university chancellors himself, selecting a clergyman as chancellor of Tehran University, has caused the opposition of students who now see the once most politicized and high-status

University of Tehran plunge in political silence. Furthermore, there are about 150 "starred students", politically active students barred from continuing their studies as they are considered hazardous for security reasons. As a result, universities have been once again a major center of opposition against the state, a place where students struggle for more democracy and freedom. Nonetheless, the fact that women now comprise 60% of all university students indicates a relaxation of the situation in universities. The closing of the gender gap has been hailed as one of the Islamic Republic's important achievements. It is considered a social phenomenon, because of its social implications (women with high education have higher demands) and its impact on the family structure (the average marriage age has risen and the birthrate has fallen, families are smaller) and labor market (women have access to professions in both the public-private sector and the business world).

However, women participate in the workforce by only 10%. Even though they outnumber men in the entering classes of universities by two to one, when they graduate they are by onethird less likely to have equal job opportunities with men. This is partly explained by the fact that a large number of women are enrolled in humanities and social sciences programs, which have a low reward marker. In contrast, men prefer, for example, engineering (in 2006, 40% of engineering students were male, compared to 13% of females). Additionally, there is an effort from the conservative factions, who believe that education plays a liberating role for women, to limit the admission of women to certain courses or even to universities.



The Iranian Constitution recognizes only 4 religious minorities, the Zoroastrians, the Jews, the Christians and the Sunni Muslims, therefore excluding the largest religious minority in Iran, the Baha'is. Without any legal existence, the Baha'is have been officially barred from attending public and private institutions of higher education in Iran for over 2 decades and this is why in 1987 the Baha'i community established its own program, the "Baha'i Institute of Higher Education". The authorities have since attempted to intimidate those involved and suppress the program. What is more, according to a copy of a confidential 2006 letter (published by the International Federation for Human Rights) written by Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology which oversees all state-run universities, any student discovered to be a Baha'i had to be expelled. Iranian officials refused the authenticity of the letter, even though at least 128 of the 200 Baha'i university students enrolled in 2005 were expelled in the course of the 2006-2007 academic year.

At the same level even though Sunni Muslims account for as much as 20% of the Iranian population (Iranian Kurds, Baluchis and Turkmen are Sunni Muslims) and are accorded recognized and respected by the Constitution, Sunni groups are reported to be discriminated by the government. For example, Sunni teachings have been forbidden in schools in Sunni dominated areas. In addition, the millions of Azeris are forbidden from being educated their native language, as well as printing, publishing or airing in their language. Tehran has made Persian compulsory in schools and as a result 30% of Arabic speakers dropped out at primary level and 50% at secondary level, making illiteracy rates among Arabs at least four times higher than those of non-Arabs. Likewise, there are no major universities in Iran's Kurdish region. In addition, about 30% of the university positions have been reserved for family members of those who died in the Islamic Revolution, 1/3 of the remaining posts go to veterans and family members and the rest goes to those achieving the highest SAT-score (standardized test for admission to college). The acceptance rate for Kurds is extremely low, and because of their low level of education, it is extremely difficult to get a graduation degree.

Even though Iran is undoubtedly a Shia dominated society, one of the major problems the Iranian government has to deal with is nationalism, which is routed mainly in Azeri speakers in the North, Arabic speakers in the South as well as among some Iranians. The student movement is calling for a separation of the state from religion through a referendum, aspiring to put an end to the 29-year predominance of Islamic theocracy.

Through the educational system and the media, the Iranian government seeks to unify the concepts of religion and nationalism in one, creating in reality only one form of 'nationalism', Islam. For Muslims, Islam is an international religion which cannot be confined within specific territorial boundaries. Much like secularism, nationalism is a modern concept which does not relate to the Quranic tradition. As a result, nationalism of any kind is anathema to Islam, a concept fundamentally opposed to the Islamic Ummah. Nonetheless, in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society like Iran it is difficult for Islam to be maintained as the only bond among different communities. Therefore, it might take a second Islamization to establish the vest of the Islamic Revolution further and deeper. The restrictions imposed on the educational system may be the first step in this process. ■

Egypt: An educational takeover by political Islam?

Aggelos Stylianidis
Marina Tomara

Page 12 *In modern Egypt, the Islamization movement in education seems more powerful than ever; despite their continuous conflict with the regime, political Islamic organizations have managed to gain access to all educational levels demonstrating the insufficiency of the state's official educational establishment.*

During the past two decades, the Islamic world has witnessed a notable surge in Islamic activity which can be detected in the growing role of Islam in social life. An interesting phenomenon is the increasing participation of young people in Muslim movements with an activist agenda. Those movements not only offer independent social services, including for example the distribution of second hand-clothes in poor areas, but they also seek to empower the individuals. Through educational training and conversations, young people try to convey Muslim ideals to the poor. They focus on the importance of education, hard work and good morals. In his TV programme *Sunna'al Haya* (Life Makers), Amr Khald, an Egyptian accountant-turned preacher, called for young people to engage in their community: "Guys don't wait for something to happen, let's do it ourselves!". This call for social participation epitomizes Egypt's shifting reality, in which reli-

gion is a powerful and active component of social structures, rather than a mere sponsor of charities. The ongoing debate in Egypt is not meant to contest the value of Islam as a spiritual truth but to discuss the extent to which it should be permitted to encroach on the public domain.

Egypt offers a barometer for this process because of various features in modern Egyptian history, such as the expansion of secular education, the subservience of religious education to state control during Nasser's years. With the arrival of Anwar Sadat, the doors to the Muslim Brotherhood and to other offshoots of Islamic groups reopened. He initiated the great Islamic transformation of Egypt, making Sharia law a point of reference for the entire constitution. It is notable that in the early 20th century, Egypt had five religious schools with 3.000 students, compared to seven thousand with no less than 1.5 million students today. Even if we take into account

the population growth, this is still a significant proportional increase which has mostly taken place in the past few decades. What is more, there is a growing number of private schools functioning under the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) auspices, especially but not exclusively in the poor Western Delta region, which have an independent curriculum. The government occasionally imposes new management and teachers on these schools in order to strengthen its hold.

A reference to the state curriculum could be useful in order to understand the debate taking place concerning the efficiency of Islamic education. The Basic Education is separated consists in two parts, the primary and the preparatory stage (ages 6 to 14), which is compulsory and is determined by a system of committees at a state level. The structure of public education is separated in two branches: the state and the religious education, the latter sponsored by the Al-Azhar religious university. The curriculum of religious schools is monitored by the state. Private schools have greater freedom on tutoring issues. Running across the curricula of public basic education, one can point out that the building of national identity is based on Muslim identity. At the same time, there is an all-evident political direction in the state's effort to suppress extreme Islamic tendencies throughout the educational system. With regard to basic education, great emphasis is put on the rejection of extremist religious leaders acting outside the official religious establishment.

In this context, the Egyptian education is faced with a great crisis, as on the one hand there are those who pursue an expansion of religious education and on the other hand those who are in favour of Westernization and modernization. A protagonist in this

debate is the MB, especially after its outstanding results in the late 2005 parliamentary elections. Despite official government hostility, the organization has schools in every governorate in Egypt and has broadly managed to infiltrate the country's national education system. This is hardly surprising, given that prominent leaders of political Islam such as Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Hassan Ashnan, Muhammad Mahdi Akef and Mahmoud Sayyid Salim used to hold key educational and administrative positions.

Nonetheless, the presence of political Islam in state educational institutions poses a serious threat to the existing regime which has always feared its growing power. It is indicative of the Islamization process that most of the schools have replaced the daily salute to the flag with the Islamic proclamation "Allahu Akbar".

Political Islam's successful infiltration into the Egyptian educational system was both a direct and indirect process. In its direct forms, it has included violent political activity and propaganda, carefully planned and organized by political Islam organiza-



tions that wish to substitute the role of the state. Indirectly, which is the most difficult to handle, political Islam has gained the widespread support of the Islamic mass, regardless of whether it corresponds to active members of political Islamic organizations or not.

At the same time, the MB's influence also extends to the middle class. Due to the general deterioration of the educational system, many middle class families have turned to private education. Political Islamic organizations have shaped the culture of the middle class, whose sons will probably assume administrative positions in the future.

Egyptian analysts and state officials estimate that it is imperative to launch an intensive campaign in order to deal with the current situation. Recent events, such as the MB militias' protestation in Al-Azhar religious university, have caused cruel police intervention accompanied by media propaganda; authorities seem unwilling to accept autonomous political Islamic voices.

On the other side of the spectrum, several projects of modernization and decentralization of the education system are taking place, causing reactions from the opposition against increasing US and international intervention. For example, in April 2007, the government endorsed a five-year Ministry of Education (MOE) National Strategic Plan (MNSP) to adopt changes focused on decentralizing school-based reform and management.

The EQUIP2/Egypt Education Reform Program (ERP) is funded by the US Agency for International Development. The neoliberal trend appears at a time when there are no competing efforts across the

nation, addressing areas such as the environment and reduction of road accidents, cleanliness, attracting more investments or reducing unemployment.

After all, the Islamization of Egyptian education is a phenomenon that cannot be isolated from the wider economical and social crisis that the Muslim world is facing. What is more, it is a sign of the insufficiency of a regime which rules for more than 30 years based on a bureaucratic and authoritarian model that has failed to meet the country's educational needs. ■

The educational discourse in Sudan: The *effort* to establish an Islamic state

Ioannis V. Mantzikos

Sudanese education has been always a victim of political interference. Different regimes have used education and educational policies to advance their political agenda, with a new curriculum following every major political change. The efforts to unify the country through a national Arabic curriculum caused alienation and resentment in the non-Arab communities and the "education revolution" implemented by the current regime resulted in the degradation of university resources and degrees.

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In 1989, when the NIF (National Islamic Front) came to power in Sudan, it sought to establish an Islamic state founded on Sharia law. The issue of controlling knowledge has been a major concern for the current regime right from the start. Based on the official policies of the governing party, the NC (National Congress) set Islamic education above all other forms of knowledge.

In order to fully grasp the contested nature of Sudanese politics and education, the most important factor

is the racial identity issue in Sudan. While the majority of the population is Muslim, the distinction between persons of Arab and African origin is a much more complex issue. The current regime introduced an exclusive version of the Sudanese identity associated with Islam. For the Islamic movement's ideologue, Hassan Turabi, the Sudanese identity was practically identical to the North-Arab-Muslim identity, and the NIF regime based the education system and the curriculum on the so-called ideological state apparatus in order to impose a certain ideology in the classroom.

President Hassan al Bashir announced in 1990 that the national education system should be based on Islamic values at all levels. Then came Jaafar Nimeiri, who declared the nationwide application of the



Sharia in 1983 and the educational conferences of 1984 and 1987, whereby the use of Arabic and Islam took a prominent role in the national curriculum the new educational policy paralleled the reforms in the military forces and the civil sector. This policy had three key approaches in order to achieve its goals: the centralization of the educational planning by the Federal Ministry of Education, the introduction of an official Sudanese identity associated with Islam and the control of university institutions and student unions.

The official education system consists today of two years of pre-school education in the Islamic belief and practice (Khalwa schools). The Khalwa schools are run by Islamists at a local level and are financially supported by the state. The ideological rationale for these schools is the Islamist view of society as something stable, universal and protected by firm principles of law and morality. In principle, the Khalwa schools are compulsory in order to enroll in the primary school and pupils of different ages are accepted. The Islamic education extends to eight years of primary and three years of secondary schooling as well.

Furthermore, President Bashir attempted to reconfigure the entire structure of Sudan's higher education institutions. Given the fact that Sudanese universities had hosted revolutions and demonstrations that resulted in the downfall of two previous dictatorships (those of Nimeiri in 1985 and al Sadig in 1989), the NIF could not leave the academia untouched. NIF members were instantly appointed to the National Council for Education and Science Research which is responsible for overseeing the overall higher education policy. Bashir targeted mainly the governance of the University of Khartoum, where he voided an academic freedom act for faculty members and abolished the campus electoral system for university administrators. Finally, as part of the Islamization process, curricula and textbooks have been written in line with the ideology of the NC government. A recent academic analysis (Bakht el Rida University) of the Sudanese higher education textbooks shows that 96% of the characters whose religion can be identified are Muslims and 97% of religious references concern Islam.

Since 1991, several clashes between NIF- and non-NIF affiliated students for the control of the Khartoum University Student Union (KUSU) have occurred. In addition, the government forces actively assisted the NIF affiliated students by canceling elections and closing the university facilities. Similar events occurred also in other campuses, notably in the Ahlia College and the Gezira University, where hundreds of students have been arrested for election-related protests. However, a contending issue that causes resentment among Southern Sudanese communities and contributes to their social exclusion from the Sudanese society is the Christian education. To begin with, the first step the NIF took in 1991 with regard to education, is that it removed the National Committee for Refugee Education which was responsible for educational issues in Southern Sudan. In 1994 the Ministry of Education rejected a proposed syllabus for Christian education in public schools and only in 2002 a modified version was accepted. An additional problem is that Christian education is not offered as a regular subject in schools, meaning that Christian pupils need to prepare for their exams in Christian education privately. Apart from this, a more or less accurate picture of the educational landscape in Sudan was reflected in the

southern Sudanese students' letter to the Pope in 1993 where it mentioned: the syllabus in geography covers mainly north Sudan with economic and political maps; the mathematics books are pervasively Islamized; the south Sudanese society is neglected at all levels of education. The focus is on the history of modern (postcolonial Sudan) and the history of the Arab world.

Nevertheless, Sudan has been plagued by one of the longest civil wars in Africa which ended with the signing of the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) in 2005. This agreement paved the way for the creation of a Government of National Unity (GoNU) as well as an autonomous Government for Southern Sudan. Despite that, education continues to be a problematic issue. The first measure for the Southern leaders was to change the language and emphases of the curricula to English and to include references to traditional Southern culture rather than Islamic teachings. Furthermore, South Sudan's leading higher education institution, the University of Juba, was moved to Khartoum during the civil war. In 2007, the University of Juba moved two of its colleges to its old Juba campus, but the logistics and the cost of relocating the university to a campus half its required size have proved daunting. Without any essential assistance from the Government of Sudan and the teaching and research staff in place, the southern Sudanese will be delayed in their effort to create alternatives to the well-established Northern policies of assimilation.

On the other hand the situation in the university campuses has softened somewhat. Several distinguished professors returned to their old posts from abroad, and the government has encouraged several conferences on the role of universities and the access to knowledge. However, many analysts think that Sudan's policy of recognizing Christian education on the one hand and bulldozing Christian churches on the other is more contradictory than ever. They believe that NC's goal to homogenize a heterogeneous ethnic landscape will sooner or later return and that the recognition of Christian education is in fact a fake-recognition. ■

Iran: Facing the western fashion "siege"

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Political leadership and religion have been pivotal in determining the Iranian society's conception of right and wrong attire. Within the fabric of globalization, western dress and style standards have invaded Iran's fashion industry. To fight this sign of moral corruption, the Islamic state strives to stem this type of Western siege by imposing an Islamic dress code on young men and women alike.

The dress code in Iran is not merely a fashion statement. The attire of young people not only mirrors the changes the society has undergone in the past few decades, but it also represents the youth's attempts to achieve emancipation within a strict Islamic order. In 1979, Islamic dress became the kernel of Ayatollah Khomeini's cultural politics, a means of opposing Western influence on Iran's political and social life. The Iranian society's return to Islamic moral precepts was reflected in dress standards, that is, the prevalence of loose garments covering the whole body and not revealing its shape. While women walked with miniskirts or even wore bikinis at the beaches during the pro-Western Shah regime, the post-Islamic Revolution dress code called for women to wear the chador, the black head-to-toe cloak, and have their hair covered with headscarves. On the other hand, men's wear included white shirts and trousers, short hair and beards. Eye contact between men and women is to be avoided. This tight dress code and the set of rules regulating

social behavior was meant to prevent communication between the sexes and limit inappropriate relationships. Overall, the youth of the Islamic Revolution was educated to conform to Islamic principles.

In the early 1990's, a passage towards liberation of clothing gradually started to take place. Even in small numbers, young men at universities appeared in jeans, T-shirts and long hair but were still kept under the surveillance of disciplinary committees. The rise of Mohammad Khatami in power in 1997 eased the pressure of strict Iranian dress. During the period of his governance (until 2005), the "westernized" outfit became a common sight. Young people found their own way to express themselves through attire and state their individuality. Head-to-nail cloak gave its place to short and tight manteau, three quarter length pants, loose and colorful scarves, high heel shoes or open-toe sandals and even make-up. Respectively, young men showed their preference to sleeveless T-shirts with logos and prints, long hair or wild hairstyles, and in some cases shaved faces and

ties. The social tolerance and reforms introduced by Khatami were perceived by the right wing conservatives as slackness of discipline, provoking their accusations of moral corruption.

In the 2005 presidential election, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed the reigns of the Iranian government. The fixed notions about attire were once again altered. Two years later, his promises to refrain from enforcing a compulsory dress code fell flat. In April 2007, a harsh crackdown on un-Islamic dress was launched, evoking the young people's indignation. Police forces made patrols on the streets of Tehran and other major cities monitoring if clothes were compliant with Islamic laws. Thousands of young men and women were stopped for being inappropriately dressed or having unacceptable hair styles, while a couple of hundreds were detained. Those arrested were obliged to sign a statement of compliance with decent outfit; otherwise they would be referred to court. People reported incidents of violence as well. The measures were extended to hairdressers and barbers, shop owners, restaurants and even taxi drivers. They were deterred from offering

their services to what is known as "bad-hijabi" under the threat of having their license revoked. The police presence was conspicuous outside shopping centers, especially in the prosperous northern suburbs of Tehran. The upheaval didn't spread to the poor city quarters or the rural areas, where people tend to dress themselves in a more conservative manner.

Shiraz university authorities ordered an obligatory dress code for male students even within their dormitories. As a response, two thousand students at Shiraz University demonstrated against the harsh measures last March, demanding even the resignation of the chancellor. It is worth mentioning that in most Iranian universities, special security services are in charge of observing if students remain within the letter of Islamic law in terms of attire and social behavior.

In a statement, Revolutionary Guard's General Esmail Ahmadi-Moqqadam claimed that the campaign was part of an overall plan to safeguard social security and combat anti-social behavior. Hard-line pressure groups, such as Ansar-e Hizbullah, called for the cease of social immorality. Apart from law enforcement forces, the campaign was supported by state-run media and hard-line newspapers, which delivered several advertisements and warnings on immodest dress code. On the other hand, the reformists denounced the intensity of the crackdown. On his behalf, president Ahmadinejad tried to disaffect the government from the vigorous actions of the police forces. Since seventy per cent of the Iranian population is under the age thirty, such unpopular measures entail high political cost.

In an effort to redirect young females towards Islamic morality, the Iranian police forces organized in July 2007 an Islamic fashion show by the name "Reyhaneh", presenting more attractive Iranian Islamic



dresses. Still, the show had little appeal to the audience, as women on the streets have rather adopted western patterns. A second fashion show took place under the auspices of the Iranian Ministry of Interior Affairs, which was called "women of my country". Aiming at attracting more visitors and diluting the first failure, the organizers promised real models figuring on the catwalk instead of plastic mannequins. In January of the same year live models participated for the first time in a fashion show in the post-revolution era.

revolutionary Iran the chador does not have such ideological dimensions, as they have grown up under less strict values. Therefore, young people do not embrace Iran's Islamic dress code. Furthermore, the more the Islamic regime intensifies pressures on youth to comply with Islamic norms, the more the latter neglect the state. Apparel constitutes one dimension of a soft cultural revolution that takes place within the Iranian society, as a means of opposing to the repression of state regulations. The more revealing clothes attest an extrovert generation and its tendency to push the boundaries. By adopting stereotypes of western consumerist societies, young people, mainly in Tehran try to undermine the regime's power, which exerts its control on moral issues by means of legislation. ■



Photo : Satyar Emami

FARS NEWS AGENCY

Apart from reintroducing girls to the chador, the purpose of these fashion exhibitions was to prompt Iranian designers to draw according to Islamic behests, marring fashionable, practical clothes and Islamic modesty.

The notion of the Islamic dress constitutes one part of the borderline between the Islamic generation and the next generation. For older women the chador represents their commitment to the revolution. On the contrary, for young women born in post-

Unemployment and Education in the Middle East

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While it is commonplace to link the rising unemployment in the Middle East with the lack of education, the latter is a rather vague term. This theoretical suggestion seems narrow in scope in the case of the Middle East, since there is a number of other factors contributing to the phenomenon.

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Raging unemployment in the turbulent post-war Iraq was an expected side-effect, although estimations of an unemployment rate that ranges between 60% and 70% are rather shocking. However, the situation in war-ridden areas is indicative of a wider tendency which is prevalent across the region. According to the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the rate of unemployment in the Arab world increases by almost 3% per year. In more practical terms, 25 million young people (aged 15 to 24) are currently unemployed in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

A liberal-oriented analysis would attribute these figures to the stagnant economic and socio-political environment. To be precise, it would refer to the stagnant development of the Arab countries, meaning that while the GDP in the MENA region registered an annual increase of 5.5 percent in 1993-2003, productivity (referring to the efficient use of resources) increased only by about 0.1 percent annually during the same period (only sub-Saharan Africa had a worse record). In other words, the natural resources (mostly oil) allowed these countries to pursue "non-rationalist" goals.

This type of analysis would probably also put the blame on people themselves. It would point to the fact that young men and women across the region spend as little as 3% of their income on improving their skills, compared to 35% in Japan, 45% in Europe and 50% in the US. A liberal analyst would suggest that people should turn their interest to new technologies (computers, the Internet etc) and -of course- learn English.

As far as the role of the state is concerned, a liberal analysis would urge the authorities to strengthen the link between the private sector and the educational process. The ultimate goal would be to orient the entire educational system towards the market, to train students on how to be efficient and respond to the needs of the market. However, a recent study of the Egyptian case defies the validity of the above perspective as it shows that unemployment currently affects university graduates the most, due to the fact that it is the group most dependent on the -rather shrinking- public sector.

In any case, while a liberal would blame the situation to the incapacity of those involved, a materialist-oriented analysis would emphasize the unwillingness of those involved, namely those pursuing personal or group interests, to change the status quo. In states such as Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, ruling elites are comprised of a small group of

people who do not wish to share either power or benefits with the rest of the society. The last government reshuffle in Egypt was likened by Egyptian newspapers to the game of musical chairs... These ruling elites wish to control the population by keeping them at an income level barely enough for subsistence, enhancing the role of the state (as the population's patron) and entrenching their prerogatives.

This analysis would also point to the crucial role of education in this equation. Low quality education would be attributed to a coordinated attempt to undermine the prospects for the people's emancipation. The reluctance of the regime to invest in education is the reason why students in the MENA region have to endure untrained teachers, inadequate school buildings and poor textbooks. As a result, the countries in the MENA region rank low in comparison to other states when it comes to subjects such as mathematics and science. According to the -reckoned as independent- Mackenzie and Associates report, children in the Arab world failed to demonstrate that they had any competent skills in mathematics in the world benchmark eighth grade.

According to this line of thinking, education should be oriented toward the enlightenment of the student and not towards the rather volatile market needs. Therefore, although there is a convergence between the two approaches regarding the indispensability of education, there is a clear divergence regarding the content of that education.



At the moment, 10 million young people across the region are illiterate, with girls representing over two-thirds of that group, according to the Population Reference Bureau. Education, however, does not seem to help improve women's employment opportunities. In the rather extreme case of Saudi Arabia, although the percentage of Saudi female graduates in comparison to Saudi men is 58%, female participation in the labour market does not exceed 5%. There is a similar trend in Egypt where, according to the 2006 census, unemployment (currently 9.7 %, up from 8.9% in 1996) hits women more heavily: female unemployment is double the national average and three and a half times that of males. What is more, un-

employment rates among educated women increased significantly in the 1990s, at a time when they remained fairly stable for males. The World Bank estimations are more optimistic, highlighting the fact that female labour force participation in the MENA region rose from 22 % in 1960 to almost 25% in 1980, and to 32% in 2000, downplaying the fact that the MENA region continues to have the lowest rate of female labour force participation in the world.

The low participation of females in the workforce could be attributed to prevailing norms in Middle Eastern societies. After the Saudi Ministry of Labour compelled shop owners to employ women, businessmen decided to close their shops to escape employing women, despite the fact that such a move would attract more female consumers. Although the role of women is far better in other Middle Eastern states, these norms are very impervious to change through public deliberation, bearing in mind the control of Middle Eastern ruling elites on the public sphere.

Realist Western researchers blame the situation largely on demographics. Examining the issue in a quite cynical manner, they contend that mortality in the MENA region began to decline in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while

a decline in fertility did not occur until the mid-1960s and early to mid-1970s. Corroborating their argument, nowadays a typical Iraqi woman gives birth to an average of five children in her lifetime. Those analysts point out that population growth has outpaced economic growth. According to the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, during 1988-1998, the labour force in Egypt increased by an average of 523,000 workers per year while available job positions increased by 435,000, leaving a deficit of 88,000 workers annually to join the ranks of the unemployed. It is clear that the MENA region would have to produce growth rates much higher than its historical ones to have any chance of reducing unemployment. ■



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