THE CARNEGIE PAPERS

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PLURALISM IN EGYPT AND TUNISIA

Muhammad Faour

AUGUST 2012

CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER

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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Publications Department
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. +1 202-483-7600
Fax: +1 202-483-1840
www.CarnegieEndowment.org

Carnegie Middle East Center
Lazarieh Tower, 5th floor
Bldg. No. 2026 1210, Emir Bechir Street
P.O. Box 11-1061 Riad El Solh
Beirut
Lebanon
www.Carnegie-Mec.org

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Summary

Religion occupies a prominent position in the education systems of all Arab countries. With the rise of Islamists across the Arab world, especially in Egypt and Tunisia, there is a possibility that the new parties in power will update education curricula to reflect conservative Islamic beliefs.

Education is very important for any ideological party that assumes political power. And in the long run, the Islamists of Egypt and Tunisia will target education reform to ensure that more Islamic content is included in all students' schooling.

But in the short term, the emerging power of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia is unlikely to lead to a dramatic change in the curricula and culture of public schools or to the imposition of an Islamic code of conduct. Political and economic matters are more urgent than educational change during the current transitional period.

Islam is already incorporated into many aspects of Egyptian public education, from Arabic language courses to social studies, and some classes give more weight to conservative Islamic values to the detriment of pluralistic norms or other religious beliefs. The existing school climate is largely compatible with the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood, so it is doubtful that the FJP will risk a public outcry by pushing for official change now.

Meanwhile, though Islam is the only religion taught in Tunisian public schools, the country has a long history of secularization and the education system promotes universal values like freedom, tolerance, and social justice. Ennahda is unlikely to reverse this trend in the near term. Going forward, Egypt and Tunisia should maintain religious education as part of their curricula, but the focus must be on liberal Islamic content. Both countries should also make their systems more compatible with democratic values by promoting education for citizenship—the development of informed, responsible citizens who think freely and contribute to society. A step in the right direction is the new religious education initiative proposed by the Egyptian Family House and spearheaded by Al-Azhar that emphasizes diversity and basic freedoms.

Egypt and Tunisia should maintain religious education as part of their curricula, but the focus must be on liberal Islamic content.

As Egypt and Tunisia transition away from autocracy toward more democratic societies, they must make the most of this chance to apply the principles of pluralism to education as well.

Religion and Pluralism

Political parties across the Arab world are operating in a region where the majority religion, Islam, shapes the very fabric of economic, political, and cultural life. It is a central component of the legal system and is a key component of personal identity. Since all religions uphold absolute values and defend what in the eyes of their followers is "truth," fledgling democracies of the Arab world thus face the challenge of reconciling education curricula that are directed at promoting pluralism and tolerance of different ideas and opinions with the teaching of religion in public schools.

Arab countries are not alone in this struggle; it is a dilemma all democratic countries encounter. But in Tunisia and Egypt in particular, this challenge is compounded by the fact that a democratic process led to the rise of Islamist political parties that are now pushing for a more prominent role for religion in politics and society.

The end goal of education reform for countries like Tunisia and Egypt should be education for citizenship—the development of informed, responsible citizens who think freely and contribute to society. Key to this is the role religion plays in their schools and the analysis of the extent to which religion is taught in a manner that can advance civic and citizenship values. In addition, the most powerful Islamist parties may end up being in charge of the next round of education reforms, so their views on the matter are also important to understand. Their ascent to power raises many questions among Arab populations: Is education a priority for these parties, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia? Will the Islamists introduce sharia into the educational systems? Will they require non-Muslim students to follow the Islamic code of conduct? Will they prevent Christians from studying their religion? What is their view about the existing civic education programs and the role of Islam in civic and citizenship education? And how compatible is their perspective on religious and citizenship education with the notions of pluralism and democracy?

The end goal of education reform for countries like Tunisia and Egypt should be education for citizenship—the development of informed, responsible citizens who think freely and contribute to society.

Religion already plays a large part in existing curricula and the school climate of K-12 public schools in the Arab countries, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia.[1] However, the views of the two countries' Islamist parties—the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia—regarding religious and citizenship education are quite varied. The goal of the FJP is to develop the Egyptian education system as an Islamic model, while Ennahda

seems content to encourage diversity and a plurality of views. Based on extensive research, including the author's meetings with education experts from Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon, representing both Islamist and secular viewpoints, it is clear that in the short run at least, neither Egyptian nor Tunisian Islamists will attempt to make any drastic changes.

The Arab World's Traditional Approach to Religious Education

Religion and education in the Arab world are closely linked. Historically, education was undertaken in the places of worship and controlled by the clergy, who served as both teachers and administrators. In the traditional *kuttab* system, Muslim students learned the Quran and hadith (Prophet Muhammad's sayings) from religious scholars and received basic education in Arabic language and mathematics. The *kuttab* served a vital social function as the vehicle for formal public education for Muslim children and youth until the advent of Western models of instruction.

During the nineteenth century and under Ottoman rule, Christian missionaries from Europe and the United States established K-12 schools in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine. Subsequently, apprehensive of the proselytizing role of the Christian missionaries, Islamic associations, such as the Makassed Islamic Philanthropic Association in Lebanon and other Arab countries, established their own modern schools that taught Islam as well as basic subjects. They offered a more modern and higher-quality education to Muslims than did the *kuttab*.

Today, Islamic religious education, as part of school curricula in Arab countries, differs by type of school, how religion is taught and represented in textbooks, and the time allocated for teaching. In almost all Arab countries, Islamic religious education in the public school system is present as a separate course of study. In most countries, it is also integrated into the Arabic language and social studies curriculum in the form of themes, topics, and values. However, the exact way religion is taught in public education varies significantly from one Arab country to another. Although teaching religion might unavoidably be about teaching absolute truths and indisputable matters in the eyes of the believers, there is a considerable difference between Egypt and Tunisia with regard to content, learning objectives, and teaching methods.

In private Islamic schools in Arab states and in the public schools in several other countries, notably in the Gulf Cooperation Council, the entire school climate is characterized by Islamic norms and codes of behavior. Students and staff are required to observe all Islamic rituals, such as praying and fasting. Girls have to cover themselves and wear the hijab, and all student activities are aimed at promoting religious norms and values.

Egypt's Experience

According to the Egyptian textbooks, there is only one true religion—Islam, which God revealed to Adam and all the prophets including Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. One eighth-grade textbook quotes a chapter of the Quran, explaining, "And whoever desires other than Islam as religion—never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers."[2] Yet, 10 percent of Egypt's population is Christian, and that religion is given some space in public school curricula as well.

Christian students are taught about Christianity by teachers or priests of their own faith, while Muslims are taught about Islam by Muslim teachers or sheikhs. Courses include instruction in their respective religious dogmas, rites, and codes of behavior. Muslim students in public schools are taught about Christianity only through the perspective of the Quran and hadith while Christian students do not learn about Islam in the Christian religion course, as it postdates their religious texts.

The textbooks for the Islamic religious education subject use two contradictory approaches to Christians and Jews. One approach presents Christianity and Judaism as monotheistic religions that originated with Abraham, the "first Muslim," and whose messengers—Jesus and Moses—are described as Muslims. The other approach considers the Torah and the Gospels to be distorted versions of the true sacred books revealed to Moses and Jesus, and that only the Quran includes the correct content of these books.[3] Furthermore, the textbooks embrace the concept of jihad or *shahadah* against the enemy, which falls into two categories: infidels and enemies of the homeland.[4]

The textbooks for the Islamic religious education course in Egypt do not target the development of students' analytical thinking skills.

Several indicators also show that the textbooks for the Islamic religious education course in Egypt do not target the development of students' analytical thinking skills. This is evident in the method of presentation of material, assignments, and the type of exercises. After each lesson is presented, there is a summary of the main points, which helps the students recall what they will be later quizzed on, along with a number of exercises. The exercises tend to be of the type that requires memorizing and recalling facts. This approach to education emphasizes rote learning.[5]

Students in Egypt, both Muslim and Christian, are familiarized with many aspects of Islam when learning other subjects, notably Arabic language and social studies, which include history, geography, and civics. The study of Arabic has special significance for Muslims because it is the language of the Quran and the language used in prayers. Thus high competence in it is a requirement for advanced learning of Islam, and a basic competence is needed to practice Islam in a meaningful way. Arabic is also the official language in Egypt and all other member states of the Arab League, so all students must

learn it at school. This makes the integration of Islamic principles and values into teaching Arabic in public schools an effective way of introducing Islam to children from various religions.

According to studies that analyzed the content of Arabic language textbooks in Egypt, ample selections of religious texts and themes advocate piety and religious observance.[6] The Arabic texts assigned for language study at the primary level include selected verses from the Quran and quotations from the hadith relating to the Prophet Muhammad's life. Most of these texts are used to teach important universal social values like honesty, hospitality, charity, and kindness that do not contradict the beliefs and traditions of other religions. For example, in one sixth-grade Arabic lesson, the "road to strength and success," the main theme stems from two verses in the Quran that call for clinging to religion's directives because religion is the force that bonds the people together in affection and brotherhood. The title of one lesson for eighth graders on the importance of maintaining kinship ties is a direct phrase from the Quran, and the text presents maintaining kinship ties as part of the customs of Egyptian people, not just as an Islamic virtue.[7]

Yet there are also verses that challenge the beliefs of non-Muslims, such as those that preach God's absolute unity and that contradict the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity. And religious and Arabic language education sometimes targets values that are antithetical to those set forth in the civics component of the social studies curriculum and to broader norms. For example, gender equality is taught in social studies but inequality of genders is discussed in a lesson in Arabic language for eighth graders on "men's and women's allocations/shares." The title is a phrase from the Quran, and the text explains verses from the Quran that state that people are unequal, belonging to different statuses or classes, and that men and women should not receive equal shares of inheritance.[8] Some Muslim sects, notably Shia, as well as non-Muslims do not endorse this belief.

Religious and Arabic language education in Egypt sometimes targets values that are antithetical to those set forth in the civics component of the social studies curriculum and to broader norms.

History instruction tends to focus on ancient times and on the period since the advent of Islam. There is a detailed description of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and of the first Islamic state, which he founded in Medina. The period of the four "rightly guided caliphs" is also presented in detail. By contrast, instruction in Coptic history is very brief and largely limited to the economic and social dimensions of the Coptic community of today.[9] Perhaps more disturbing to Christian students is the textbook's negative presentation of "Romans" (*al-roum*, that is, Eastern Orthodox Christians) as people who "deviated" from the Christian principles that were advocated by Jesus. This reinforces many Muslims' belief that Christianity, as it has been preached and practiced by Christians since the advent of Islam, is a distorted version of authentic religion, which has been integrated into Islam.

Egyptian public schools do not offer a separate course on civic or citizenship education. Rather, the civic and citizenship concepts are integrated into the contents of social studies, Islamic or Christian education, and Arabic language instruction. The only exception is the national education course that is offered to twelfth graders, but that course does not cover major issues in civics or citizenship. Broadly speaking, Egyptian students are exposed to Islamic texts that imply that non-Muslims cannot hold senior administrative positions in the state, such as head of state or chief of the army.

Meanwhile, key civic concepts including freedom, social justice, and equality of citizens are found together with religious concepts in the same course. One example is the textbook for Islamic religious education for the fifth grade in public schools. In it, a poem titled "My Country" is included under the theme of citizenship education. The tone of the poem and at least two of its verses speak clearly of religious adherence to Islam instead of equal citizenship for all religions:

> I swear by the Lord of the faith [Islam], you [my country] will not be vanquished. I swear by the Lord who perfected the religion for the Muslim.
>
> We will protect your soil and the roads, and hail victory to the believers [Muslims].[10]

Students in public schools in Egypt thus receive inconsistent messages regarding what it means to be a contributing member of Egyptian society. Large sections of social studies textbooks subscribe to the principles of pluralism, national unity, acceptance of other beliefs and cultures, and equality of Muslims and non-Muslims. But religious education in the same schools, whether Islamic or Christian, develops beliefs in religious distinction and inequality.

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Further complicating matters is the role of the teacher in imparting religious values and behavior, which is often overlooked despite its critical significance both in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Some scholars in Egypt use the term "hidden curriculum" to describe the impact of many Islamist teachers on students, either positively or negatively. These teachers impose their own thoughts and attitudes on their pupils in a process that is affected by the prevailing culture within schools and made easier through the dominant teacher-directed methods of lecturing and rote learning as well as the lack of open discourse and critical reasoning.[11]

The picture is somewhat different in private schools. In secular and international schools in Egypt, there may be either no religious education or a

social studies course that includes general information about various religions and the role of religion in society. A number of private schools in Egypt resort to a variety of extracurricular activities and community service internships to enrich their programs in religious education.

The private school ethos or culture is marked by the norms and values of its administrator. Thus in an Islamic school, Islamic culture and Islamic norms pervade the instructors' interactions with the students and their families. Such schools encourage and applaud what they consider students' praiseworthy "Islamic" behavior, such as performing religious rituals and honoring one's parents. They also criticize what they consider to be behavior that violates sharia, like consuming alcoholic beverages or a girl's failure to wear a headscarf or obey her legal guardians. In contrast, a Christian school requests that students attend Sunday Mass and exhibit other exemplary Christian behavior.

Religious Education in Tunisia

Tunisia presents a different approach to religious education. The values and learning objectives of Tunisian religious and civic studies are more compatible than in Egypt, and the school curriculum for various subjects aims, much more explicitly than in Egypt, at the development of the universal values of responsible freedom, cooperation, equality, social justice, and respect for the other. Tolerance is a recurrent theme in Tunisian school books.

The Tunisian school curriculum for various subjects aims, much more explicitly than in Egypt, at the development of the universal values of responsible freedom, cooperation, equality, social justice, and respect for the other.

Interestingly, that tolerance has roots in reforms implemented during the authoritarian presidency of Zine el-Abidine Bel Ali. In 1989, Ben Ali appointed Mohamed Charfi—a lawyer, longtime human rights activist, and critic of the president—as his minister of education, perhaps as a way to keep an eye on him or to purge the education system of anti-Western content. Charfi implemented important reforms that included the scrutiny of all school textbooks. The purpose was to delete all statements that promoted intolerance of different religions and groups and to keep the liberal aspects of Muslim thought in religious education. The science curriculum, for instance, was revised to incorporate Darwinian evolution and the big bang theory. These reforms were rejected by the Ennahda party, which accused Ben Ali of "de-Islamizing" the country.[12] Charfi's reforms may have contributed to the democratic and pluralistic worldview of the young generation of Tunisians who rebelled against the regime in December 2010.

Today, as 98 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, with Jews and Christians making up less than 2 percent of the population, the only religion taught in public schools is Islam. Yet as part of social studies in public secondary schools, the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all taught.

In public primary schools, the Tunisian textbooks for the Islamic education course emphasize the ethical and moral aspects of Islam and its main pillars alongside training in the performance of religious rituals, notably praying and fasting. Religious tolerance toward Christians and Jews is also highlighted as an Islamic value. Unlike other Arab countries, the Tunisian books go further to warn against the exclusion of nonbelievers and enmity toward them, stressing pan-human solidarity. One telling example used in one Islamic education textbook is a story about the Prophet Muhammad showing respect for a Jew's funeral that passed him in Medina. When asked why he stood up to show reverence, he said: "Is it not a soul? Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up."[13]

According to one text, tolerance defined in terms of respect for other religions and freedom of faith is found in 36 chapters (*sura*) and 125 verses of the Quran and represents the "basic idea in the Quran."[14] Dialogue with and acceptance of the other is promoted, and the other is believed to have rights and duties equal to those of Muslims, irrespective of color, religion, or education.[15] The emphasis is on unity of mankind, peaceful coexistence between different races and religions, and equality of all nations. The Islamic education course promotes peace, accepting war only in the case of aggression or oppression,[16] and jihad is defined as a spiritual struggle against the moral deficiencies of the self. The concept of jihad or shahadah against the enemy is not endorsed. Democratic values, meanwhile, are adopted as a historical product of a universal culture.[17]

The Islamic education course for primary and middle schools in Tunisia presents Islamic rituals as a personal affair and a religious duty that carries an individual responsibility to God. There is no implied enforcement by society or the state.[18] At the secondary level, the Islamic education course in public schools is called "Islamic thinking," a reflection of the objective of the curriculum to foster analytical thinking that does not contradict the main pillars of Islam.

A Comparative Look at Religion in Education

Some general conclusions can be drawn about Islamic education in public secondary schools in Egypt and Tunisia based on a review of curriculum documents. As far as details are concerned, the Tunisian curriculum follows international practices in presenting a reference framework, objectives, learning outcomes, and methods of learning and assessment, while the Egyptian curriculum document is a brief syllabus sheet displaying the contents of the course. More broadly speaking, the selected topics in the Tunisian curriculum—such as man and monotheism and man and society—are more amenable to deeper

The selected topics in the Tunisian curriculum are more amenable to deeper analysis and philosophical thinking than the topics in the Egyptian curriculum.

analysis and philosophical thinking than the topics in the Egyptian curriculum, such as the lessons learned from the Prophet's battles, smoking, drinking, deviance, and selected Islamic values. There is also more coverage in the Tunisian curriculum of a host of issues that relate to civilization, modernity, reform, and knowledge, and the approach to religion at this school level brings together the existential meaning in religions with the realities of modern civilization. While the objectives in the Tunisian curriculum explicitly endorse dialogue, flexibility, moderation, tolerance, and openness to global approaches and universal values, the Egyptian curriculum document does not mention course objectives at all.[19]

Under the now-deposed regimes that ruled both Tunisia and Egypt in particular, students in both countries also experienced a huge gap between what they learned at school and what they saw being practiced in real life. Young students were aware of abuses of political power, corruption, and the violation of basic human rights of citizens. As a result, a report that assessed the extent of integration of human rights principles in the curricula of secondary schools in the Arab world described these students as having a state of "schizophrenia in their academic formation" partly due to the contradiction between idealistic values learned and life experience.[20]

In terms of time allocation, Egyptian students in public schools dedicate three out of thirty hours per week to religious study at the primary level and two hours at the higher levels. Tunisian students study Islam for two hours a week in lower primary grades and one and a half hours at all higher grades. Broadening the scope to the rest of the Arab world, the number of study hours dedicated to religion in primary schools ranges from one or two in countries like Morocco to three in Jordan and up to six in Oman. In Saudi schools, the time allocated to Islamic studies at any school level is the highest among Arab countries—at the primary level, it is nine hours per week.[21]

Similar to the case of Egypt, the public schools in Jordan and the Palestinian Authority expose students, both Muslims and Christians, to Islamic beliefs and concepts through Arabic language and history. The Arabic language curriculum in those countries is rich in Islamic topics and values, many of which are shared by Christianity and other faiths, such as honesty, justice, and helping the needy. History textbooks emphasize Islamic and Arab history, and as in the Egyptian history curriculum, the period of the Prophet Muhammad's rule over Medina is discussed at length, highlighting various aspects of his organization of the first Islamic state. Special attention is given to the city of Jerusalem because of its close connection to the conflict between Israel and both Jordan and the Palestinians.

The civic and national education curriculum in Jordan presents the issues of freedom, human rights, and rule of law, supported by examples and

explanations that are predominantly Islamic, with little reference to the universality of these rights. Rights of women and children are also discussed with the emphasis on the religious dimension. The unit on citizenship in the civic education course includes components that are not found in similar courses in democratic societies, namely the idea of faith in God, sacred books, and messengers. This approach might send a message that people who do not belong to the three major religions have no sense of belonging to their nations.[22]

Educating students about the various sects that exist among Muslims is not part of public school curricula in Arab countries. Most of these countries either offer a general course in Islamic principles and morals or restrict their content to the beliefs and rituals of the dominant faith of their society. Other religions and beliefs are only viewed from an Islamic perspective. Research into sources that present different points of view on this matter is not encouraged and neither is engagement in open discussions within the classroom.[23]

The Views of the Islamists

For most Islamists, education is a key component of creating a properly pious and good society. Although the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia encourage reliance on modern methods of instruction in scientific subjects, such as critical thinking, dialogue, research, and open debate,[24] their approach to teaching religion is different.

The Muslim Brothers advocate a specific form of dialogue enjoined by various Quranic verses, calling for gentle persuasion and civil debate. But this form of dialogue does not permit any open contravention of the Islamic creed in the form of atheism or agnosticism, for instance. Muslim Brotherhood parties contend that Islam places a high value on education, ranking the learned people above the ignorant, and that religious education is an essential subject at schools. Meanwhile, Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, speaks of the totality of Islam and its guidance for all aspects of life, personal and public.[25] He argues that people need religion and its spiritual and moral guidance and that it is certainly a core part of education.

Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood

Egyptian Islamists regard religion as the most important component of their national character. Public education should thus incorporate Islam—the religion of the majority of people—to enhance the Islamic character of students. The Muslim Brotherhood's goal, as stated by one of its education experts, is not to create a new curriculum in Islamic religious education. Rather, it is to change the school ethos and student behavior into a true Islamic model.[26]

The Muslim Brotherhood's goal is to change the school ethos and student behavior into a true Islamic model.

The published platform of the FJP declares the party's commitment to "deepen the Arab and Islamic identity" of Egyptians.[27] What the Brothers advocate is far more than teaching some chapters from the Quran and selected statements from the hadith. They would like to introduce a comprehensive education reform that creates an integrated curriculum across all subjects with explicit Islamic themes. The FJP aims to provide "a holistic education in all levels in a way that deepens religious values in the students."[28] Although the FJP does not elaborate on how it intends to achieve that goal, one of its education experts highlighted the party's experience in running some private schools in which a school climate had been created to represent a true Islamic community.[29]

An Islamic school climate is one in which the character of school life and interpersonal relationships (among students and staff, and between students and teachers) reflects Islamic values, and teaching and learning practices follow Islamic principles.[30] Furthermore, an Islamic school climate is characterized by an Islamic code of conduct that includes dress, social behavior, and the practice of Islamic rituals. Accordingly, girls cover their bodies and wear the hijab, and all members of the school community observe Islamic rituals, notably daily prayers and fasting in the month of Ramadan.

To create an Islamic climate, as the experience of private schools run by Islamists demonstrates, the school should have either a mosque or a dedicated space for prayer. Food served on school premises should contain no pork, and beverages, no alcohol. Students are required to recite and memorize chapters of the Quran and the hadith. Interaction between males and females, where coeducation exists, is carefully monitored by the school staff and those who violate the boundaries are swiftly punished, but in most Islamic schools, there is gender segregation. Books and magazines that are accessible to students are censored to ensure that anti-Islamic materials are discarded or anti-Islamic content from available learning resources is deleted or erased. Teachers and administrators frequently refer to Islamic principles and practices to educate students about life and social behavior. A variety of channels to communicate the school's Islamic ethos is used such as school magazines, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and meetings with parents. Extracurricular activities include trips to religious sites, visits to religious scholars, and the celebration of religious events and holidays.

School magazines depict several aspects of the school climate. One telling example is *Ethraa* (Enrichment), the school magazine at the well-known Manarat Al Farouk Islamic School in Cairo. Each issue includes sections aimed at indoctrinating the students in Sunni Islam. In one of its issues, "Shias and their beliefs" are presented in a negative way, with the emphasis on their deviation from Orthodox Islam.[31] In another issue, Islamic fundamentalism is praised because one needs to build the present and the future on the past.[32] Most topics, even those that have no direct link to religion, include references to Islam. The school curriculum is also explained from an "Islamic

perspective," underscoring its distinction from the Western curriculum primarily by targeting students' spiritual and moral development in addition to the academic and physical aspects of growth. The ultimate goal of Islamic education, according to *Ethraa*, is to promote social relations among members of the society and between members of the society and God.

The objectives of the current religious education program in Egyptian public schools are, to a large extent, compatible with the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Ministry of Education pays a good deal of attention to religious instruction: "Religious and moral values should be deeply ingrained among our children."[33] The ultimate goal of the state under former president Mubarak may have been to combat Islamic extremism, but the state did allow more Islamic content into the curriculum in an attempt to offset the Islamists' criticism that it intended to destroy culture and Islam through secularization. For example, Hussein Kamel Bahaedddin, minister of education in the 1990s, acted decisively against "terrorism" in education, yet he had to declare that the state's education policy enhanced religious values and that the religious education curriculum was approved by Al-Azhar, the respected Islamic center of learning.[34] This education policy, which was adopted by secular ministers of education, appeased the public sentiment because the majority of Egyptians are religious Muslims. And ironically, it also concurs with the FJP's current policy.

The objectives of the current religious education program in Egyptian public schools are, to a large extent, compatible with the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The FJP could also use the numerous Muslim Brotherhood teachers in public schools as an effective force to impart the Brotherhood's Islamic vision, values, and code of behavior. The party could restructure teacher pre-service and in-service training programs to include more Islamic orientation and to recruit Islamist trainers for teachers. It might also try to add new co-curricular and extracurricular activities modeled after the Muslim Brotherhood's private schools. These changes could be introduced gradually and discreetly without much resistance from secular politicians or education officers at the Ministry of Education.

Nevertheless, the FJP does not intend to stop Christian students from studying their own religion in Egyptian public schools or to enforce the Islamic dress code on Christian students, notably the hijab for girls.[35] Muslim girls are also unlikely to be forced to wear the hijab. But should the FJP succeed in creating an Islamic climate at a school, most students would feel intimidated into compliance—a situation that exists today in Islamic schools in Egypt and other Arab countries. Furthermore, the Islamic climate and culture in a school demands that non-Muslim members of the school community respect Islamic rituals and symbols and the Islamic code of conduct. In the month of Ramadan, for example, non-Muslim students are expected not to eat or drink in public while on campus, and non-Muslims are not allowed to criticize Islamic scholars, principles, or practices.

Tunisia and Ennahda

In Tunisia, impacting the education system is more challenging for Ennahda than it is for the Muslim Brothers in Egypt for several reasons. First, the country has had a long history of secularization, and the liberal interpretation of Islam has pervaded the school curriculum, particularly Islamic education, for many years. Second, civil society is strong and mainly secular; many associations are led by secular women, human rights groups, and youth. And third, the Ministry of Education, with Ennahda's approval, is in the hands of a secular party.

All the public statements and speeches of Ennahda leaders have so far indicated their patience in introducing change to various aspects of life including education, taking into account the likely repercussions among substantial, more secularly oriented segments of the population. Ennahda's position on implementing sharia is also more liberal than that of the FJP in Egypt. The writings and speeches of Rached Ghannouchi clearly convey a tolerant position toward different viewpoints and endorse pluralistic values.[36] Thus, Ennahda is unlikely to apply the Islamic code of behavior in public schools even to Muslim students, resorting instead to educating them about their religious duties and the benefits of abiding by sharia.

More importantly, as in Egypt, if Ennahda eventually succeeds in establishing an Islamic climate and culture in public schools, this would make members of the school community feel uncomfortable if they do not comply with the prevailing Islamic norms and practices. Even without coercion, most would be expected to comply. In such a situation, Christians' and Jews' noncompliance would be tolerated, but they would certainly feel out of place.

Longer-Term Objectives

During the present transitional phase, neither the FJP nor Ennahda sees the urgency of reforming education in general and religious education in particular. Neither party is likely to introduce sharia to the educational system or impose an Islamic code of conduct on students, Muslims and Christians alike. Christians in Egypt will be allowed to continue studying their religion at public schools. Civics and social studies curricula will not be substantially revised to include dramatically more Islamic content. And Islam will continue to be offered as a separate course in both Tunisia and Egypt with limited revision, if any.

Niether the FJP nor Ennahda is likely to introduce sharia to the educational system or impose an Islamic code of conduct on students, Muslims and Christians alike.

This is in part because the current state of education in Egypt does not pose any real threat to the FJP's ideology or political strategy. And Ennahda cannot afford the breakup of its partnership with secular parties. By keeping sharia out of the constitution, it has decided to avoid a rapid process of Islamizing society, including

the education system. Clearly, at the moment both the FJP and Ennahda have more urgent political and economic affairs to attend to.

Education is a very important target for any ideological party that assumes political power, and the Islamists of Egypt and Tunisia are no exception. They will eventually target the education system with the objective of imparting more Islamic content and orientation. When they do so, they are expected to take a number of approaches, incuding the administrative route, which requires the amendment of policies and regulations at the ministerial level in order to revise school curricula and make them more Islamized in the case of Egypt and simply less secular in the case of Tunisia. But that process will be long and challenging because of the nature of the bureaucratic procedures and the expected resistance from the liberal Muslim and non-Muslim politicians as well as the active political parties and nongovernmental organizations.

Religion and Citizenship Education

In democratic, pluralistic societies, education for citizenship encompasses three main concepts: knowledge of civic concepts, systems, and processes of civic life; skills of civic participation, problem solving, and negotiation; and a citizens' general disposition, including a sense of belonging to the state and shared values and ethics. The purpose of education for citizenship is to develop well-rounded, responsible citizens who know their legal rights and duties, and apply this knowledge to evaluate or justify government policies and practices. Thus, teachers of any subject and supervisors of any activity at school educate their students for citizenship when they impart values such as responsibility, cooperation, and respect for diversity.

This definition of citizenship education is not adopted or applied fully in either Egypt or Tunisia. But the Islamists in those two countries are likely to endorse it on the condition that it is subjected to the barometer of sharia and placed within the context of an Islamic school culture. Put differently, the mission of a school from an Islamic perspective is to raise a devout Muslim who is also a responsible citizen of his or her country and who possesses the professional and social skills required to succeed in the twenty-first century. The dilemma, however, is that a strict application of sharia is not compatible with all the articles in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights or with pluralism as practiced in established democracies.

Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia consider a course on civics or citizenship to be far less important than a course on Islam, as religion has priority over nationalism and citizenship. They will not accept, and neither will the general public, the marginalization or dilution of Islamic education programs. Any new initiative in education reform that emphasizes education for citizenship would have to maintain religious education as part of the educational

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The Muslim Brothers hold that religious identity is both more profound and more comprehensive than national or citizenship identity. For them, religious identity derives from a wider conceptualization of life, the world, and divinity, at the heart of which is man. Rached Ghannouchi of Ennahda argues that the goal of sharia is the realization of the supreme interests of humanity, the most important of which is safeguarding religion.[37] Being more important than citizenship in any country, religion thus supersedes it in any context including education. According to Ghannouchi, nationalism is a "component of Islamic universalism."[38]

In Egypt, the Ministry of Education under Mubarak adopted the same view as Ghannouchi, perhaps not deliberately, when citizenship education was made part of religious education and social studies at the primary and middle school levels. Recently, however, the post-Mubarak Ministry of Education decided to add a course on citizenship and human rights to the eleventh- and twelfth-grade curriculum as one out of six new courses. Although the contents and delivery methods of the new course on citizenship are not yet published, the fact that it will be a pass/fail course and taught only in the two highest grades makes it much less important than the course on religious education, which is taught in all grades.

Furthermore, despite their public endorsement of democracy and pluralism, neither the FJP nor Ennahda accepts full equality for all Muslims and non-Muslims. Ghannouchi justifies this position by dividing citizenship into two categories: unqualified (*muwatana 'amma*) for Muslims and qualified (*muwatana khassa*) for non-Muslims. In a democratic state where Muslims constitute a majority, he approves of prohibiting non-Muslims from occupying senior government positions.[39]

Gender equity looms high in citizenship education and in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and in all UN decisions and programs on women and empowerment. Yet the FJP and Ennahda concur with the mainstream Sunni Islamic position that deviates from the international consensus. Their position endorses equal rights for women and men in earnings, acquisitions, fair treatment, and religious obligations but not in inheritance, where Islamic injunctions allocate to females half the shares of their male siblings. The Muslim Brotherhood does not support the appointment of women to the highest political, religious, or judiciary offices namely that of president, mufti, or supreme judge. Furthermore, Islamists are more likely to support the current policy in most Arab states that denies women the right to pass citizenship to their children.

Given these deviations of Islamists' positions from democratic values and pluralism, how can a new initiative in education reform reconcile education for democratic citizenship with teaching Islam in Egypt and Tunisia?

The Way Forward

The Tunisian experience in reforming school education, particularly the Islamic education curriculum, offers important lessons for the rest of the Arab world. Islamic education in Tunisian public schools aims to nurture tolerance and respect for other religions and Islamic sects, to promote the acceptance of Western democratic values as universal values that transcend national and regional boundaries, and to develop students' interest in analytical thinking on issues related to the meaning of religion and its role in life. These objectives are compatible with a modern, democratic conception of education for citizenship and are far more advanced in promoting democratic values and pluralism than those in Egypt. For that reason, one international study that analyzed the contents of school textbooks for several Arab countries praised the Tunisian education system as the model for all Arab states.[40]

A new initiative in education reform in Tunisia could keep the present Islamic education curriculum and build on it with a more liberal Islamic orientation. The fundamentalist Salafists in Tunisia will certainly attempt to replace it with a more traditional, fundamentalist curriculum modeled after Saudi Arabia, but their success is doubtful under the present balance of domestic political power. To encourage broad-based citizenship education, the new initiative should also target the curricula of other subjects and other components of the education system.

There are also lessons to be learned from Egypt. There was an attempt during Mubarak's rule to design a course that incorporated the common values and morals of Islam and Christianity; however, its syllabus, published as a textbook for the elementary level, was not implemented. A new initiative was proposed by the Egyptian Family House, a national group comprised of Al-Azhar, churches from different Christian denominations, and a number of academics. The initiative calls for preparing a new religious education program by focusing on values that are common to Muslims and Christians, and a special committee was formed to design the program, planning to receive government approval and implementation in schools in the fall of 2012.[41] If this initiative passes, it will be a fundamental step in the right direction toward democracy and pluralism in Egypt that can serve as a model for other Arab countries. All new education reform efforts should incorporate this approach as an integral part of their plans.

The Egyptian Family House initiative is based on Al-Azhar's recent document of "basic freedoms." The document is an effective, proactive measure by moderate political forces led by Ahmad Al-Tayyib, the grand imam of Al-Azhar,

to prevent newly elected conservative members of parliament from rewriting the constitution to fit their restrictive interpretation of Islam. Supported by the Coptic Church and most political parties in Egypt, Al-Azhar's "bill of rights" has four main chapters: freedom of belief, freedom of scientific research, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of literary and artistic creativity. Freedom of belief is a right for all citizens and is based on explicitly stated verses in the Quran. Not only does this bill of rights endorse freedom of religion, but it also prohibits any attempts to exclude others or label them as infidel, rejecting the orientations that "denounce the beliefs of others."[42]

Al-Azhar's document incriminates any manifestation of "compulsion in religion, persecution, or religious discrimination" and strongly endorses plurality, diversity, and equality of citizens. Furthermore, Islam has a clear position regarding dialogue with nonbelievers: "Argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious." More importantly, neither party to the dialogue is deemed to be right beforehand; either of them, including the Muslim party, may prove to be wrong: "Certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or in manifest error."[43]

Freedom of opinion is described in Al-Azhar's declaration as the "mother of all freedoms," which is expressed in various forms: writing, speech, art production, and digital communication. It encompasses individuals and groups, such as parties and civil society organizations, the freedom of the press and other mass media, and the freedom of access to information needed to form an opinion. Related to freedom of opinion, as another document by Al-Azhar asserts,[44] is the citizen's right to criticize a political or religious leader's wrong act or that of a government policy or action on issues of public concern. This is part of accountability and transparency, which are characteristics of good governance and true democratic states.

Religious education in Egypt today neither contributes to acceptance, respect, and mutual understanding between faiths nor helps students develop a more profound understanding of their own faith or themselves.

Al-Azhar's document on basic freedoms promotes the development of independent and critical thinking—salient skills for democratic citizens. This follows a long line of similar endeavors dating back to the nineteenth century when Muhammad Abdou, then the head of Al-Azhar, argued that Islam encourages individual critical thinking and reasoning.[45] The Quranic verses abound with phrases and statements that urge people to reason and think and not imitate blindly the behavior and beliefs of their parents and elders.

Religious education in Egypt today neither contributes to acceptance, respect, and mutual understanding between faiths nor helps students develop a more profound understanding of their own faith or themselves. The new proposed course by the Egyptian Family House signals a promising change toward pluralism. Offering a new course on the commonalities between Islam and Christianity that promotes diversity and respect for

differences would open up the students' minds. It would encourage them to view their religion and themselves from a new perspective and to start questioning and investigating the issues they study. This is part and parcel of education for citizenship, which may in turn also encourage future attempts at liberalizing the current religious offerings in both Islam and Christianity.

But much more than this new initiative is needed in Egypt. An overhaul of the entire education system with all its components is imperative. All elements of the school climate should be reformed—infrastructure, safety, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and relations with the external environment—with emphasis on new approaches to regular professional development for teachers. The goal of education reform should be to develop well-rounded citizens who possess twenty-first century skills such as effective communication, civic competence, analytical thinking, problem solving, and creativity.

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Conclusion

The rise to power of Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia is unlikely to lead directly to a dramatic change in the curricula and culture of public schools or the imposition of an Islamic code of conduct in the short term. For the FJP and Ennahda, educational change in the current transitional period is not a priority over more urgent political and economic matters. In the long run, however, they are likely to try to impact the entire education system, with the goal of reducing the secular content in Tunisia and increasing education's Islamic orientation in Egypt to establish a truly Islamic climate in schools.

Undoubtedly, religion occupies a prominent position in the education systems of Arab countries. Any serious plan to reform education in Egypt or Tunisia would probably maintain that position. But the present Islamic education program in Egypt needs to be revised if it is to be more compatible with democratic and pluralistic values.

A step in the right direction is the new education initiative proposed by the Egyptian Family House, which is spearheaded by Al-Azhar, to design a new course in religion. This course focuses on the values shared by Islam and Christianity and emphasizes diversity and basic freedoms based on Al-Azhar's "bill of rights."

Tunisia, meanwhile, would do well to keep its current Islamic education program. It was reformed under Ben Ali to promote tolerance, equality, and freedom despite the divergence between these values and the authoritarian nature of the deposed regime. A new education reform initiative that emphasizes education for citizenship should retain this program but build on it to increase its liberal Islamic content with emphasis on pluralistic and democratic values.

Generally speaking, religious education can play a significant role in promoting students' citizenship through developing their skills in communication, open discussion, dialogue, and attitudes and values relating to equality of nations and races, freedom, social justice, diversity, and tolerance.[46] However, if religious education is to promote citizenship education, its content, structure, methods of delivery of the teaching material and related activities, qualifications of teachers, and a supportive school climate must all be involved and potentially reformed. More importantly, it should be part of a comprehensive approach to education reform that emphasizes education for citizenship.

The challenges are numerous, notably the lack of political will of decisionmakers and the difficulty of selecting and preparing qualified teachers. Needed are not only teachers who know their subject matter but also those who possess knowledge of and skills in modern learning methods. Education reformers and other stakeholders would need to network together in order to push the agenda of reform forward.

Through aggressive advocacy, serious research, and persistence in pursuing socio-cultural change, a new initiative in citizenship education that includes a religious component is a realistic goal in Tunisia and Egypt. As these countries undergo political and social transformation, education for responsible citizenship offers a promising opportunity for their children and youth to develop into responsible citizens equipped with the requisite civic and religious knowledge, skills and competencies to prosper in a free, pluralistic, and peaceful society. An essential component of this approach should be a revised religious education program that fosters understanding and respect among different faiths and the endorsement of human rights, notably equality and freedom.

Notes

1 The Azharite religious schools in Egypt, which are supervised by Al-Azhar, are excluded from this analysis because they represent a particular case for Egypt that has no analog in Tunisia or other Arab countries.

2 Al-Imran *sura*, verse 85. This verse and others are explained in the eighth grade textbook, part 1 (2010–2011) 22, and in a commentary in Grade 11 textbook (2002), 167–68; the same meaning appears in Islamic Religion Education textbooks for Grade 7, part 1 (2002) 22–25, and for Grade 11 (2002) 30.

3 For detailed statements from religion and social studies textbooks on these approaches, see Arnon Groiss, editor, compiler and translator, "Jews, Christians, War, and Peace in Egyptian School Textbooks," report prepared by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, New York, 2004, 20–27; www.impact-se.org/research/reports.html.

4 Groiss, "Jews, Christians, War, and Peace," 9.

5 This observation applies to all grades including the secondary grades. See, for example, the textbooks for primary grades: http://manahg.moe.gov.eg/Prim_Book.aspx; textbooks for higher grades are also available on the ministry of education's website. See also Charlotte Neill, "Islam in Egyptian Education: Grades K-12," *Religious Education*, vol. 101, no. 4 (fall 2006): 491; Elham Abdulhameed, "Egyptian Education and its Relationship to the Culture of Citizenship in Egypt: Current Status and Prospects" (Arabic), paper prepared for Carnegie Middle East Center, May 2012, 15–16.

6 See for example, Ahmad Youssof Saad, "The Concept and Issues of Citizenship in Educational Texts: Between the Approaches of Empowerment and Content of Mobilization," no date (unpublished manuscript); Neill, "Islam in Egyptian Education"; Pakinaz Baraka, "Citizenship Education in Egyptian Public Schools, What Values to Teach and in Which Administrative and Political Contexts," *Journal of Education for International Development*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2007; Groiss, "Jews, Christians, War, and Peace."

7 Saad, "The Concept and Issues of Citizenship in Educational Texts," 33–34.

8 See Neill, "Islam in Egyptian Education," 496; and http://manahg.moe.gov.eg/Prep_Book.aspx.

9 In the history textbook for tenth grade, there is a short section on the "Coptic era of Egyptian history."

10 Verses translated from Arabic by author. See Egypt, Ministry of Education, *Islamic Religious Education textbook* (Arabic), Fifth Elementary Grade, 51.

11 Bradley James Cook, "Egypt's National Education Debate," *Comparative Education*, vol. 36, no. 4 (November 2000): 484.

12 Mohamed Bechri, "Islamism without Sharia: The Tunisian Example," May 21, 2012, 1, http://fikraforum.org/?p=2260.

13 *Islamic Education*, Grade 9 (2007), 32.

14 (Literary) Texts, Grade 9 (2007), 159.

15 (Literary) Texts, Grade 13-Sciences, as cited in Arnon Groiss, "The Attitude to the 'Other' and to Peace in Tunisian School Textbooks: A Preliminary Report," report

prepared by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (formerly CMIP), New York, October 2008, 10; www.impact-se.org/research/reports.html.

16 *Islamic Education*, Grade 9 (2007), 34.

17 As cited in Groiss, "Jews, Christians, War, and Peace," 11–12.

18 Naila Al-Silini and Ahmed Al-Hadhiri, "Citizenship Education in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria" (Arabic), paper prepared for Carnegie Middle East Center, June 2012, 16.

19 For the Egyptian curriculum documents, see http://manahg.moe.gov.eg/Sec_Dis.aspx; For the Tunisian curriculum document, see http://sakhana.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=270:2010-10-19-15-39-46&catid=78:2010-10-19-14-57-25&Itemid=197.

20 This is a general observation in all Arab countries, which was highlighted in the General Report about the seminar organized by the Arab Institute on Human Rights on "The Status of Human Rights in the Curricula and School Textbooks in Secondary Education" (in Arabic), Beirut, February 27–March 1, 2003, 4, item 1–5; see also Al-Silini and Al-Hadhiri, "Citizenship Education in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria," 18.

21 UNESCO, World Data on Education, August 2011, www.ibe.unesco.org/en/services/online-materials/world-data-on-education/seventh-edition-2010-11.html; Cook, "Egypt's National Education Debate," 481.

22 Muhyieddeen Touq, "Citizenship Education in Jordan and Palestine" (Arabic), paper prepared for Carnegie Middle East Center, March 2012, 31–35, 56.

23 See also Neill, "Islam in Egyptian Education," 491; Abdulhameed, "Egyptian Education and its Relationship to the Culture of Citizenship in Egypt," 15–16.

24 *The Program of the Freedom and Justice Party* (Cairo: Dar Al-Tawzi Wannashr, 2011) (Arabic), 31–52.

25 As cited in John Esposito and John Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

26 Ahmad Al-Halawany, expert meeting, Carnegie Middle East Center, March 8, 2012.

27 *The Program of the Freedom and Justice Party*, 49–50.

28 Ibid., 53.

29 Ahmad Al-Halawany, expert meeting, Carnegie Middle East Center.

30 For a more comprehensive definition of school climate, see Jonathan Cohen, Terry Pickeral and Molly McCloskey, "The Challenge of Assessing School Climate," *Educational Leadership*, vol. 66, no. 4, December 2008/January 2009, www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec08/vol66/num04/The-Challenge-of-Assessing-School-Climate.aspx.

31 http://alfaroukschools.com/data/downloads/magazine/ethraa24.pdf, 7.

32 http://alfaroukschools.com/data/downloads/magazine/ethraa21.pdf, 11.

33 As cited from a Ministry of Education document titled Implementing Egypt's Educational Reform Strategy (1996) in Cook, "Egypt's National Education Debate," 482.

34 See Ibid., 483.

35 Ibid.

36 Rached Ghannouchi, *Democracy and Human Rights in Islam* (Beirut: Addar-al-Arabiya lil Ulum, forthcoming), as cited in *Al-Hayat*, February 16, 2012, 9.

37 Ibid.

38 As cited by Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, 105.

39 Ibid., 115.

40 Groiss, "Jews, Christians, War, and Peace in Egyptian School Textbooks," 14.

41 As announced by Mahmoud Azab, Adviser to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, at the UNESCO meeting on inter-faith dialogue, Beirut, March 2012.

42 Al-Azhar Ashareef, "Bayan Al-Azhar wal-Muthaqafeen 'an Mandhumat Alhurriyat al-Asasiyah" (The declaration of Al-Azhar and the intellectuals about the system of basic freedoms), mimeograph (2011) 2–3; Muhammad Faour, "Education Is Key to Avoiding Religious Tension in Egypt," *National*, January 17, 2012.

43 Saba' *sura*, verse 24.
44 Al-Azhar Ashareef, "Bayan Al-Azhar wal-Muthaqafeen lida'm Iradat Ashu'ub Al-'Arabiya" (The declaration of Al-Azhar and the intellectuals to support the will of the Arab peoples), mimeograph, October 30, 2011, 2.
45 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 130–47.
46 Hackney SACRE, *Religious Education: The Hackney Agreed Syllabus* (SACRE, 2006), 8.

About the Author

MUHAMMAD FAOUR is a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center, where his research focuses on education reform in Arab countries, with an emphasis on citizenship education. Prior to joining Carnegie, Faour was a research fellow at the Center for International and Security Studies at York University in Canada and from 2007 to 2010, he was president of Dhofar University in Salalah, Oman. Faour is the author of several books and monographs, including *The Silent Revolution in Lebanon: Changing Values of the Youth*, and *The Arab World After Desert Storm*, and the co-author of *University Students in Lebanon: Background and Attitudes* (with Adnan El-Amine).

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