Nationalism and Homogeneity in Contemporary Curricula

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Introduction

In July 2013, a few weeks after the fall of President Mohamed Morsi, newly appointed Minister of Education, Mahmoud Abou Al Nasr stated that he would look into reports he had received concerning the so-called 'Brotherhoodization' of the curriculum. A committee would be set up, he explained, presided over by him personally in order to look into such accusations.[1] In parallel, he declared that changes to the history curriculum were going to be made to account for the political changes that took place with the ouster of Morsi.[2]

The new Minister's decision came as no surprise given that Egyptian media had been propagating an alarmist discourse around the so-called "Islamization and/or 'Brotherhoodization' of the state and its institutions following the ascension of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi to the Presidency and the appointment of Brotherhood members and supporters to Ministerial positions. This discourse was particularly apparent in the case of education and specifically around the issue of curriculum reform.

It is within this context that an initial scan of various allegedly "Islamized" curricula was conducted by EIPR, the results of which clearly showed that the "threat" to school curricula was not as serious as media reports suggested. The instances were not only few but they were also insignificant.

A closer look at the process through which curricula are currently developed and revised suggests that there is little room to radically shift their ideological orientation. This is true both in terms of the procedural and organizational aspects of curricula development. More important-

1- Allam, Sara and Mostafa Fahmy. "Wazir Al Ta'lim al Jadid Lil Yawm Al-Sabi': Wada'na Ma'ayiir Litaqyiim Kafa't Qiyadat al Ikhwan" Al Yawm al Sabi'. 19 July 2013. http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1167821#.U57DjuARjao

2- Gamal, Ahmed. "Hukm Morsi kharij manahij al Tarikh" Bawabat Akhbaralyom. 8 September 2013 http://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/207105/1/التعليم-حكم-مرسي-خارج-مناهج-التاريخ-في-العام-الجديد.html#.U57BOuARjao

ly, it is true in terms of the fundamental underlying ideological orientation of current curricula and educational discourse.

While the media and official state discourse have propagated a binary between the nationalist/secular on the one hand, and the islamist on the other, this binary does not seem to be quite accurate. The nationalist discourse comprises elements of identitarian Islamic discourse, which serves, informs and reinforces it. Furthermore, the so-called Islamist discourse still operates within a nationalist-hat is, homogenizing—project/ discourse. It is precisely this nationalist discourse that we perceive to be more alarming and worth addressing in this study especially now that the "threat of Islamization" seems to have subsided given the recent political changes in Egypt.

This paper is part of a larger project aimed at understanding the ways in which the nationalist discourse has developed from the 1950s onwards particularly in subjects such as history and national instruction. Such subjects provide an insight into the seriousness of Egypt's adherence to its international obligations vis-a-vis the right to education. In the following, an analysis of the contemporary history and national instruction curriculum will be conducted in an attempt lay down concrete recommendations about how they should be changed to match international educational standards which propose a balance between the promotion of a nationalist identity on the one hand, and the promotion of tolerance, diversity and openness, on the other.

Textbooks, Human Rights and Education

The quality and content of textbooks is tightly linked to the right to education which is guaranteed within international legal frameworks.

Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states:

"(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

Similarly, Article 13(1) of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* stipulates:
"1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

By focusing on the necessity for education to promote understanding, respect and tolerance between different national, racial and religious groups these articles indirectly also make a case for the necessity of curricula to reflect such principles. Since curricula and textbooks represent one medium for the transmission of values to students, they too must be made compatible with them.

More details can also be found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states:
Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child›s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child›s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

Here we note that this agreement overcomes the boundaries of religion, nation and culture built across many parts of the world. At first sight, some of the diverse values expressed in article 29 (1) might be thought to be in conflict with one another in certain situations. Thus, efforts to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all peoples, to which paragraph (1) (d) refers, might not always be automatically compatible with policies designed, in accordance with paragraph (1) (c), to develop respect for the child's own cultural identity language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

But in fact, part of the importance of this provision lies precisely in its recognition of the need for a balanced approach to education and one which succeeds in reconciling diverse values through dialogue and respect for difference. Moreover, children are capable of playing a unique role in bridging many of the differences that have historically separated groups of people from one another.

Ultimately, the international legal framework on the right to education lays down the foundational values of the education system which include a level of openness to cultural, religious, ethnic and national differences as well as respect and tolerance for others and for principles of human rights.[1] It is within this framework that this study seeks to assess the performance of Egyptian curricula, particularly history and national instruction curricula to understand whether such values are transmitted within the nationalist discourse traditionally associated with these subjects.

The Current Process of Writing Curricula

The process by which curricula are currently developed and revised suggests that there is little room to radically shift their ideological orientation because the procedural and organizational aspects of curricula development have become more or less fixed and are highly centralized.

According to Mohammed Ragab, during his tenure as director of the National Center for Curricula Development (NCCD)[3], existing curricula are revised roughly every four years, although there is no official or set schedule. Curricula may be revised if developments occur that require changes.

Ministry of Education officials we spoke to on one of our visits to the Education Museum/Archive explained that the contemporary period (Mubarak onwards) has witnessed the most frequent changes to curricula.[4] The history curriculum for example was changed five times from 1986 to 2007 compared to its counterpart produced in the 1960s which withstood no to little changes for a period of over 20 years.

There are four main documents that guide the writing and the revising of curricula:

1) "The Curriculum Document" (Wathiqat Al Manhaj)

2) "General Guidelines for each Subject" (Etaar 'Aam)

3) "Guidelines for Publishers" (Daleel Al Tagh'leef)

4) Guidelines for Selection (Daleel al Tahkim)

Textbooks contain the content and there is an accompanying workbook with exercises.

There are also «Al Kutub Al Musa›adah» (The Study Aid Books), «Al Kitab al Idaafi» (The Accompanying Textbooks) such as the calligraphy workbook, for example. These account for about 10% of the overall grades in certain subjects. They have a different revision cycle than regular subject textbooks. Generally speaking, curricula are developed based on this simple three step process:

a) The Ministry of Education issues a call for applications by private publishers to produce the book.

b) Accepted applicants are then given "Kurasat Al Shuroot" (Guidelines and Conditions) and a "Dalil al Tahkim" (Guidelines for Selection) and meet with representatives of the Curriculum Development Centre to discuss questions related to the competition.

c) The curriculum Development Centre then selects the final (winning) submission.

3- Interview conducted by EIPR staff at the Ministry of Education February 13, 2013

4- Information obtained during one of three visits to the Ministry of Education on 30 July 2013 from the employees working at the Ministry's Education Museum/Archive. Purpose of the visit was to look at some of the older textbooks (history and national instruction).

In early June 2013, the Ministry of Education organized a press conference to disclose additional details of the curriculum writing process for the academic year 2013/2014. The conference revealed that the process had followed these steps:

a) In the first phase, the Ministry of Education, and specifically the Curriculum Development Centre, collaborated with university teachers, research centres, field practitioners, consultants and teachers to produce Guidelines for curricular content. These amounted to 24 different documents which were released in December 2012.

b) In a second phase, throughout December 2012, the Ministry revised the then current texts to select those which could continue to be in use throughout the next academic year. Amendments, comments and suggestions were compiled in a report.

c) In a third phase, and specifically on 16 December 2012, a competition for the writing and submission of the new curricula for the academic year 2013/2014 was announced in collaboration with 'The Textbook Department' at the Ministry of Education. The door for submissions was open until 30 April 2012.

d) Fourth, the content of the new curricula was selected, edited, designed and produced. This took place within the framework of a competition which was open to a 28 publishing houses and six independent authors who worked for four months. Additionally, the content of the philosophy, national instruction, Islamic Religion and Christian Religion curricula and the content of the continuing curricula was amended accordingly.

e) In the fifth phase review committees were set up to go over the new textbooks.

f) Sixth, the review committee with its jury members was sent on a retreat to issue a final verdict regarding the new books. This took place between 15-24 May 2013.

Continuing textbooks began to be reprinted as of 15 April 2013

g) Seventh, the Arabic Reading textbook was amended so that it would now include more than one reading/text for any given topic.

h) Eighth, as of February 2012, the National educational activities" document was designed to enhance activities in the school.

i) Ninth, the teaching guidelines were developed for teachers

j) Finally, the textbooks were printed.

Noticeable here is the absence of references to Egypt's international obligations vis-a-vis the right to education and the failure to safeguard the values enshrined in international law within the planning and development process of textbooks.

Islamist Pictures-Nationalist Discourse?

When Brotherhood-affiliated Ibrahim Ghoneim was appointed as Minister of Education in August 2012, several Brotherhood figures were placed in key positions in the central administration of the Ministry of Education and to the education directorates at the governorate levels, particularly in Alexandria and Dumyat. Ayman El Bialy, Secretary of the Independent Teachers' Union claimed-at the time- that the next phase would witness the "Brotherhoodization" of curricula, aimed at instilling in students a sense of affinity with the Muslim Brotherhood[5]

At the time, El Bialy stated that there was an intention to "Brotherhoodize" curricula, specifically decreasing the space given to the Nasser era and increasing coverage of the history of the Brotherhood itself within the history curriculum.

El Bialy's opinions were shared by many others.

In an interview by EIPR researchers with El Bialy after the removal of President Morsi in October 2013, he suggested that several school text books for the academic year 2013/2014 had been altered and were on their way to being printed and distributed had it not been for the 30 June events.

Upon closer examination, the threat of Islamization seems to have been milder than anticipated, especially in the 2012/2013 curricula:

In September 2012 Nahdet Masr publishers produced a second year preparatory Arabic language textbook with a cover illustration comprising a bearded older man with a young boy and girl. A media frenzy ensued with claims of "Islamization of education". The book was not government-issued and, in response to the me-

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5 - Interview with Ayman al Bialy by the Editor of Akhbar al Ta'lim. 27 January 2013 http://www.akhbaraltaalim.com/index.php/news/one-news/1806) Al Bialy, Ayman. "Al Tathir la Ya'ni al Akhwana Ya Wazir al Ta'lim". Al Hewar Al Mutamadin. 1 June 2013 http://www.m.ahewar.org/s.a s p?aid=339818&r=0&cid=0&u=&i=0&q=)

dia furore, the publishing house's director explained that the man's beard in the illustration was meant only to evoke the teacher's seniority and was not intended as a religious symbol intended, as critics were claiming, to win the favour of the new Islamist regime. The textbook was also said to contain what was described as a gratuitous reference to the topic of Islam and political thought.

In January 2013 media outlets circulated reports of the removal of the picture of Egyptian feminist Dorriyya Shafiq from the National Instruction curriculum for preparatory school . The alleged removal was on account of her being pictured without the hijab and also included recommendations for removing pictures of unveiled female students also in the text. It was revealed that no such changes had actually taken place but, rather, that changes had been referred to in a statement by Mohammed El Sherif, Philosophy and National Education advisor at the MoE. The statement was made following an alleged report submitted by a committee at the Ministry of Religious Endowments who had been given the textbook specifically to review Qur'anic verses and Prophetic Hadith included therein. Ministry officials stated that the El Sherif did not have the authority to push for or to announce amendments to the curriculum [M5].

In February 2012, a widely circulated YouTube video titled "Citizen reveals Brotherhoodization of primary school curricula" shows a man claiming to be a teacher indicating the recurrence of the word "jamaa'a, group. He claimed that this was evidence of the Brotherhood's subtle introduction of their discourse into school curricula. The video received over 450,000 hits and was included in numerous mainstream media reports [M6].

In March 2012 there emerged on social networking sites again a set of pictures from kindergarten Arabic language textbooks where the examples used to teach letters laam and Haa were liHya (beard) and Hijab (veil), respectively. It is not yet clear who the publisher of these books is, nor which school the textbooks were being used in. Nevertheless, they added to the list of evidence now being used in claims around the Islamization and 'Brotherhoodization' of education [M7].

Finally, and more recently, in September 2013, after the fall of the Brotherhood regime, Ministry of Education officials announced that there were "significant violations" in the National Instruction curriculum for the third year of tertiary school (high-school).[6][1] These included the addition of the 'Rabaa' sign in the curriculum. An adviser to the Minister of Education explained that the images were added in the layout and design phase of publications by the layout and designed team, which, according to our source, comprises several Islamist sympathizers.[7]

6- Sara Gamil and Asmaa Muhammad Al-Sayyid"Ihalat Wadi'I Kitab al Tarbiyya al-Wataniyya lil Tahqiq li Wad'ihim suwaran li isharat Rab'a wa-al Ikhwan" Al-Masry al Youm, 16 September 2013 Accessed 25 September 2013 http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2122421

7- Telephone conversation with Mostafa Magdy advisor to the Minister of Education September 2013

Most of the above-mentioned incidents are related to pictures and images, which were either added or removed from the curriculum. It appears that the design and layout phase of curriculum crafting is the one easiest to alter and change especially that it seems to take place at a much later stage closer to the beginning of the school year. The Rab'a sign incident represents the perfect example. Other example indicate a similar pattern bearing in mind that the curricula from the school year 2012/2013 were mostly crafted before the tenure of the Brotherhood affiliated Minister Ibrahim Ghoneim.

Finally, it is important to note that the majority of alarmist reports on the Islamization of curricula concern 'external textbooks', i.e. produced by non-government, private sector publishers. Examples of Islamization listed above suggest that the threat of Islamization was not as widespread as media reports made it out to be, at least not in the first year under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is especially the case as the content of school curricula remained more or less the same. However, this does not take into account the allegations concerning the Brotherhoodization of the 2013/2014 curricula, which never saw light due to the June 2013 political events. It is within this context and due to such a realization that a further analysis was conducted on the nationalist content of curricula.

Problems with Nationalist Discourses

During the past year, contemporary Egyptian media has witnessed a an increasing reliance on nationalist discourses in the face of what is perceived to be a threatening Islamist discourse. Various analysts and policy makers have paraded national and privately owned media channels to talk about the "Egyptian identity". Educational experts have warned that special emphasis needs to be put on the content of school curricula so as to make sure that the texts do not encourage an identity "different" from the "Egyptian" one, echoing the Minister Abul Al Nasr's concerns regarding "Brotherhoodization".

What seems to be missing from this discussion is a critical engagement with the Egyptian nationalist discourse from the start.

Indeed, it is not so much the "type" of nationalist discourse, which is most problematic, rather, it is its persistence in today's curricula which is of most concern. Whether Egypt's Islamic identity or its Arab identity is brought to the forefront is essentially the same. Both elements have (at a certain point in time) been used functionally and strategically to inform, strengthen, and support an inherent nationalist discourse which excludes diversity, respect for others and tolerance.

Nationalist discourses are a central component of the modern nation state. There must always exist a more or less coherent and distinct narrative or set of defining elements by which a peoples, a nation identifies itself. Nationalist discourses can be problematic for a number of reasons.

1) The first and perhaps the most important problem with nationalist discourse is that it is-in many ways-a construct. In Benedict Anderson's famous Imagined Communities a definition of the nation is presented:

"it is an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"[8]

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8 Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities. (London: Verso, 1991), 6

2) Nationalist discourse is homogenizing. It is based on the idea that an entire people are 'one'. Differences between ethnic groups, and minorities are completely overshadowed by the 'true' national character often leading to the marginalization of minorities and other groups. As a result, tolerance and acceptance of difference is challenged and creativity and diversity are not welcomed. This stands in stark contrast to Egypt's legal obligation under international conventions referred to above.

3) The homogenizing effect of nationalist discourse is not just a question of content, but it is also a question of form. Though the elements of a given nationalist discourse may differ from one era to the next, any nationalist discourse establishes the idea that there is such a thing as "The Nation". It establishes a form of how things operate. Things operate within the parameters of a form called "the nation" and this "nation" is homogenous. Thus it does not really matter whether Egypt is Islamic, Egyptian, Pharaonic or Arab, what matters for the nationalist discourse is that there is such a thing as "Egypt" and that it is "one". The results of such thinking are dangerous because they create contending forms of nationalisms and visions for Egypt that do not conceive of the idea of diversity.

4) Nationalist narratives also establish a particular power relationship between state and citizen. In most nationalist discourses there is a very clear attempt to create obedient citizens who adhere to existing power structures and who do not question authority. Authority and power are positioned in such a way that one cannot criticize them.

All that having been said, we note that a state has the right to promote its national identity according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, however, there is a need for curricula to strike a balance between the promotion of nationalism on the one hand and the promotion of tolerance, acceptance and diversity, on the other. The danger lies in omitting narratives, excluding groups and over-emphasizing ultra-nationalism.

Analysis of Contemporary Curriculum:
Is there a balanced nationalist discourse?

The History curriculum

In the following, Social Studies (History) and National Instruction curricula for third preparatory (I'dadiyya) and third year of tertiary school (Thanawiyya/ High school) for the academic year 2012/2013 and 2013/2014[3] is examined to trace and analyze the nationalist discourse propagated in its content. Both subjects are among the most ideologically charged making them all the more valuable for our research.

It would have been equally fitting to examine Arabic language textbooks as well as Religious Instruction texts as they have traditionally contained equally ideologically charged content. However, given time and space limitations, these two subjects were excluded from the analysis. As such more work needs to be done in this regard.

Furthermore, the focus on these particular school years seemed most appropriate given that these are the two years in which the history curriculum focuses on Egypt's modern history.

History books are particularly important because they denote the overall narrative to inform students about their past and their identities. While public figures including Minister Abul al Nasr have signalled the rise in what they deem to be "Islamic" content in curricula, no concrete changes have taken place, according to our observation, to the dominant nationalist narrative which prevailed in textbooks prior to the January 25 Revolution. In fact, many of the elements characteristic of this narrative have remained. These include a certain notion of historical determinism (inevitability), a simplistic approach to the development of time, a binary approach, the existence of an unchanging "Egyptian" identity that transcends time and space, and, the employment of modern language and the silencing/exclusion of diversity.[9] With the help of such elements the nation-

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9- A very similar analysis was conducted by one of the authors of this paper in 2008 as part of an undergraduate project. At the time, the 2007/2008 curriculum was analyzed resulting in many of the same conclusions about the nature of the nationalist discourse. It is also worth mentioning, that the curriculum has not significantly changed since then.

alist narrative is both formed and reinforced thus serving a twofold goal: the creation and the legitimization of the modern Nation. Similarly, no concrete changes have been identified in the national instruction curriculum, with the exception of a few minor changes discussed below.

Historical Determinism

In his article, "Embodiment of the Revolutionary Spirit: The Mustafa Kamil Mausoleum in Cairo", Yoav Di-Capua suggests that the post '52 narrative is constructed in a way which is meant to demonstrate that all events prior to the revolution took place in a "teleological fashion that inevitably led to only one possible concluding event (the July Revolution) the implication was that the future of the revolution (…) was guaranteed to be successful. In this way, history stopped functioning as a tool for providing insight into the past and became a mechanism for predicting the future"[10] The element of historical determinism is present in both the preparatory school curriculum as well as the high school curriculum. Essentially, the method employed to do so, is the depiction of all events taking place prior to the revolution as having failed or being incomplete.

The notion of determinism exists in the Social Studies Curriculum for third preparatory (I'dadiyya) for the academic year 2012/2013. Chapter 4 of the History section which discusses the main events of the interwar period suggest that a clash took place between police forces on the one hand and the British occupation forces on the other on January 25 1952 leading to various casualties.[11] Then, according to the narrative, events unfold and the great fire of Cairo breaks out on the next day and this marks the end of the monarchic system and the beginning of the 23 of July Revolution 1952.[12] The 6 months between January and July are omitted in the narrative suggesting that the January events were a prelude to the July coup. The narrative fails to portray the political turmoil accurately and makes it sound as though the instigators of the fire knew that the monarchy would collapse six months later.

'Determinism' is also found in the high school curriculum. Before discussing what has been deemed the "liberal age", the narrative dedicates a section to the Urabi Revolt of 1881. Within this section, a paragraph is presented

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10- Di –Capua, Yoav. "Embodiment of the Revolutionary Spirit: The Mustafa Kamil Mausoleum in Cairo". History & Memory, 13, no. 1(2001,) p. 94 http://lib.aucegypt.edu

11- Mohamed Sabry, et al. Al Dirasat Al Ijtima'iyya Lil Saf al Thalith al I'dadi Jughraphiyya Al-'Alam wa Tarikh Misr ul-Hadith, (Cairo: Wizarat Al Tarbiyya wal-Ta'lim, 2012), 132

12= Ibid

with the title: "Al-Durus Al-Mustafada min Fashal Al-Thawra Al-Urabiyya"[13] (The Lessons Learned from the Failures of the Urabi Revolution). In it, the following points are enumerated:

1) The unity of the nation is the most important factor for victory

2) it is important to prepare a military which is capable of defending the nation

3) determining the goal and working towards it is vital for success

4) it is necessary to get rid of all traitors

5) Trusting world powers is not wise because they are always after their own self-interest.[14]

If anything, these "lessons" provide a lens through which the liberal era could be assessed by students. Essentially, they suggest that the liberal era did not make use of these lessons seeing that the nation was divided between the different political parties, that Egypt was collaborating with Britain and other world powers, that the government was not working towards the desired goals and finally that the military was kept weak and under-trained.[15] Thus, these lessons indirectly imply the failure of the Liberal age. History does not provide insight into the past but is a mechanism for predicting the future.

Accounts of the January 25 Revolution are placed within this grand narrative and downplay the many contradictions to the regime in the post 52 era. Interestingly, both the Mubarak era and the January 25th revolution are omitted in the history curriculum for high school in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. This is a departure from previous curricula such as the 2008 history curriculum for example which not only mentioned Mubarak but also placed him within the trajectory of the July Revolution: Yu'tabar 'Asr Al-Ra'is Mubarak Imtidad Tabi 'i li Thawrat 1952"[16] (The Mubarak era is considered a natural extension of the 1952 revolution). It is not clear why between 2008 and today, the entire Mubarak era and its aftermath have been removed from the high school curriculum.

As for the preparatory school curriculum, it depicts the 25th of January events not as a rejection of the post 1952 regime, but rather as a criticism to specific elements that surfaced in the last 10 years of Mubarak's rule. The chapter on the January 25 Revolution almost seems to be out of place because after being fed a rosy image of Egypt's last 50 years, the chapter has to justify a revolution. It asserts: "The January 25th Revolution

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13- Al-Qawsi, Abdullah Ahamd Hamid. AlWisam Fil Tarikh Lil Thanawiyya Al-Amma.(Cairo: Dar Al-Gharib Lil Tiba'a Wa Al Nashr, 2013), 190

14- Ibid.

15- Al-Qawsi 2013, p. 281

16- Al-Qawsi, Abdullah Ahamd Hamid. AlWisam Fil Tarikh Lil Thanawiyya Al-Amma.(Cairo: Dar Al-Gharib Lil Tiba'a Wa Al Nashr, 2008),306

was not born in this age, but there were many other opposition movements that paved the way for it."[17] It also maintains that "the events of the revolution demonstrate that the Egyptian army is a power which supports its people and is not a tool for the repression of protesters"[18]. Such justifications prove that the curriculum continues to legitimize the post 52 regime. Any deviation to this narrative is either omitted or downplayed such as maintaining that the only problems to the post 52 regime were those incurred in the last 10 years of Mubarak.

Simplification

Simplification in this context refers to a concept introduced by Di-Capua which suggests that in the Egyptian narrative, the notions of time change completely as the normal day to day successions of time lose their relevance. "The past is now perceived as a succession of turning points that cuts historical time into new periods. This manipulative process aims at creating a new dimension of time that accentuates only the narrative evolving around the historical "turning points."[19] The result of such a construction is that the events "between the key turning points" lose their meaning and become irrelevant to the nationalist discourse.[20] In essence, such a construction enables the narrative to down play certain important events. More importantly, it creates a storyline that is simple to understand as it consists of minimal "turning points" and is based on simple principles of "cause and effect". Consequently, the narrative becomes ready for "mass consumption"[21] due to its simplicity, which, in turn, helps its solidification.

Elements of simplification are found in both the high school and preparatory school curricula.
When discussing the "liberal age" for example, these sections consist of subheadings with the 'key turning points in history'. These turning points include the 1919 Revolution, the 1922 Agreement, the 1923 Constitution, the 1930 Constitution, the 1936 Agreement, the 1948 Arab Israeli War and finally the Cairo Fire of 1952. The more "sophisticated" high school curriculum adds a number of details to this skeleton; however, the main ideas remain the same. Thus, a period of thirty years is reduced to a few key turning points. It is important to add that these turning points with the exception of 1919 are portrayed as failures and are therefore "reminders" of the inefficiency of the liberal system and the monarchy as a whole.

17- Al Imtihan fi Al Dirarsat Al Ijtimaiyya Lil Saf al Thalith Al I'dadi. (Cairo: Al Dawliyya, 2013), 201

18- Al Imtihan 2013, 205

19- Di-Capua 2006, 95

20- Ibid.

21- Ibid.

Binary Approach

By binary approach we are referring to the existence of a dichotomy between the liberal era and the current age within the nationalistic narrative in that the liberal era is perceived as old, bad, and ineffective while post- 1952 revolutionary Egypt acquires positives qualities such as young, good and effective. [22] Interestingly, the January 25 Revolution does not seem to disturb this dichotomy. As mentioned earlier, the 2011 events are seen as a re-action to the last 10 years of Mubarak only. Egypt's military regime established in 1952 remains unquestioned.

This dichotomy is highlighted in Egyptian history books in both school levels. In the preparatory school curriculum, the chapter on the 1952 Revolution starts with an assessment of the conditions of Egypt prior to the revolution. These conditions include (as enumerated in the chapter):

1) The continuation of the British occupation and the British interference in Egypt's internal affairs

2) The corruption of the monarchic system and the corruption of King Faruq and his entourage

3) The lack of democracy and the manipulation of the constitution

4) Declining economic conditions

5) Declining social conditions and the spread of corruption and bribery

6) The defeat of the Egyptian army in the 1948 War due to the corrupted weapons

7) The deterioration of the army and its neglect.[23]

Similarly, the high school curriculum starts with a comparable paragraph but with additional details for each point.[24] Both sections indicate that pre-revolutionary Egypt according to the narrative is corrupt, inefficient and simply put-bad. In contrast, the revolution embodies the opposite. The fabrication of a dichotomy not only legitimates the revolution but it also creates an other embodied in the pre-revolutionary era.

The Primordial Nation and its People

The nationalist discourse as presented in Egyptian school books encompasses a national character which is independent of space and time and which is unconnected to the political systems governing Egypt. This assumption is based on the belief "that a primordial nation existed on that land, that regardless of who ruled, or

22- This concept is briefly alluded to by Di-Capua.

23- Al Imtihan 2013, 152-153

24- Al-Qawsi 2008, 279-280

who colonized the area, something intrinsically unique about these people and this land could be identified."[25] The national character is depicted in both curricula. In the preparatory school narrative, the actions taken by the different governments or leaders during the Liberal Age are generally attributed to "the people".

For example, the preparatory history curriculum concludes the paragraph on the 1936 Treaty by stating: "The 1936 Treaty represents one of the many phases in Egyptian people's struggle for independence"[26] Similarly, the curriculum asserts that the "January 25th Revolution demonstrates the determination of the Egyptian people, their will and power to continue their struggle to obtain their rights"[27].

As for the high school curriculum it describes the existence of a "national soul" which the British occupation tried to destroy but failed to accomplish.[28] As a result, one can identify elements of continuity in the sense that the nationalist paradigm portrays a fictional continuous national identity/character which transcends policies, governments and colonial powers. This national character produces a linear understanding of history in the minds of students and thus legitimizes post-revolutionary Egypt as a natural extension of the revolution.

Modern Language

One of the interesting elements which shape the nationalist discourse is the employment of modern language. Betty Anderson explains that: "States around the world used the vocabulary of modernity to describe their nation."[29] The use of modern language has given the subsequent regimes legitimacy and power. The preparatory school refers to the British invasion as a time when the Egyptian people continued to struggle for independence and a constitutional government.[30]

If the liberal age is portrayed as a failure to secure such important ideals, post-revolutionary Egypt is depicted as a nation where such ideals have been accomplished and safeguarded. For example, the high school curriculum indicates that the revolution was instrumental in achieving social justice by giving women the right to vote,

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25- Anderson, S. Betty. "Writing the Nation: Textbooks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan". Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, XX1 no. 1,2 (2001) , p. 5 http://lib.aucegypt.edu

26- Sabry, Al Dirasat, 2013 132.

27- Al Imtihan 2013, 205

28- Al-Qawsi 2013, 194-196

29- Anderson 2001, 6

30- Sabry, Al Dirasat, 2013, 120

making public education a free enterprise, limiting working hours and including workers in decision making processes.[31]

Thus, the language of modernity becomes instrumental in serving the post revolutionary narrative by providing it with ideological legitimacy.

Silencing/Exclusion of diversity

One of the most pronounced features of the nationalist discourse observed in the history curriculum in both school years is its almost insistence on excluding "the other". The histories of minority groups whether they be ethnic, religious or national are non-existent. The participation of groups including women, workers and others is silenced except when their actions appear within the framework of the 'collective'.

Furthermore, contemporary history textbooks focus solely on Egyptian history especially in the modern period and exclude regional and international histories creating the illusion of an exceptionalist Egypt detached from international developments. The exclusion of the 'other' from the history curriculum is worrying insofar as it represents a failure to promote tolerance and respect for minorities and other cultures which is part and parcel of Egypt's international obligations with regards to the right to education.

31- Al-Qawsi 2013, 286-287

National Instruction Curricula and Human Rights Curriculum

Before turning to the content of national instruction curricula it is necessary to mention that this particular subject matter does not count towards the final grade at any point. As such, it is merely a pass or fail subject that students are expected to complete in order to fulfil their degree requirements. Moreover, schools often neglect the subject and fail to allocate teaching hours to instruct this subject leading students to cram the content last minute before their end of the year examination.

Based on an analysis of the national instruction curriculum for both the second and third years of high school for the academic year 2012/2013 and 2013/2014, some important observations have been made:

As a whole, both curricula do not display any signs of drastic change. In fact, both have kept the overall government-style framework of conveying information. This means that paragraphs are short and often in bullet format, that the opinions expressed in the texts are mostly the authors' and that almost no primary sources have been used. Additionally, a few inaccuracies have been detected.

Furthermore, both curricula try as much as possible to prove that the 'modern' concepts discussed in the texts including "democracy, women's rights and human rights" have their origins in Islam. Thus, while primary sources are missing from the texts, they seem to be abundant when it comes to proving that modern concepts actually originate in Islam.

Inaccuracies have been detected on several occasions within the textbooks of this particular subject matter:

For example, the curriculum for the third year of high school defines the word Secularism by claiming: "Secularism is the separation of politics and religion and it also means the separation of religion and all forms of human activity (…) a state is not liberal unless it is secular, and it is not secular unless it is liberal."[32]

32- Walid Taher Mohamed et al. Al Tarbiyya al Wataniyya lil Saf al Thalith al Thanawi (Cairo: Wizarat Al Tarbiyya wal Ta'lim Qism al Kitab, 2012), 10

Such claims are not only inaccurate, but they also merely represent the author's own understanding of the term. The text fails to provide for alternative definitions and does not leave room for a student to cultivate their own opinion on the matter.

As mentioned earlier, the curriculum is constructed much like the history curriculum in paragraph format, each paragraph highlighting an idea. Often, these paragraphs are numbered so as to make it easier for the student to remember the content. Consequently, many of the complex philosophical concepts introduced in the text are dealt with hastily and without much depth. Examples include the origins of democracy, human rights, segments from history and political philosophy.

In addition to this general framework, the curricula seem adamant on proving that many of the concepts covered in the texts actually originate in the Abrahamic religions, especially Islam. For example, the civic education curriculum for second year high school students tackles the issue of women's rights by first introducing the concept of equality between both sexes in Christianity and then by enumerating the many ways in which Islam provides for women's rights.[33]

The same pattern can be found with the concepts of democracy and human rights.

All in all, the national instruction curriculum does not display any significant changes up until now. It has also retained the style, format and content found prior to 2011.

Finally, it is important to note that there is an additional textbook titled 'Citizenship and Human Rights' for the second year of high school. The 2012/2013 edition of this book was briefly analyzed for the purpose of this study.

Generally speaking, this book is considered a step forward as far as the subject matter is concerned. Not only does this textbook present students with a fair understanding of the concept of citizenship, it also tackles some of the problems facing civil society organizations in Egypt, women's rights and political awareness/participation. One critique of this textbook is that it narrowly focuses on these three subjects without speaking more general about the other fundamental human rights. Furthermore, there seems to be little reference to Egypt's obligations under international human rights law. Nevertheless, this textbook is considered a step forward and an equivalent should be introduced on all levels.

33- Walid Taher Mohamed et al. Al Tarbiyya al Wataniyya lil Saf al Thani Al Thanawi (Cairo: Wizarat al Tarbiyya wal Ta'lim Qism al Kitab, 2012), 50.

Plans

For purposes of this study, an analysis of the curriculum plans issued for the academic year 2012/2013 has been undertaken in order to verify differences between "planned" and "practice"-if any. The Ministry of Education's history curriculum plan for the academic year 2012/2013 both for preparatory school and high school also embody the very same narrative found in the curricula themselves albeit with a "modern", slightly progressive twist. There are in many ways vast contradictions between the plan and its implementation in curricula.

The Ministry of Education claims that the history curriculum is not politicized. According to Ministry officials we listened and spoke to throughout 2012/2013, the curriculum focuses on events rather than personalities.[34] The rationale behind such statements is to suggest that the focus on events prevents the politicization of the curriculum. This however, is not true. First, the curriculum selects distinct personalities to represent the grand nationalist narrative. These include: Ahmed Urabi, Mustapha Kamel, Muhammad Farid, Saad Zaghloul, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Anwar Sadat and finally Mubarak. All of these are used to emphasize the constructed nationalist narrative while other personalities are left out including Mohamed Naguib, for example. Just as events have been simplified and reduced so as to create a "dimension of time that accentuates only the narrative evolving around the historical 'turning points' ", so too have the personalities been reduced to a handful to emphasize the same historical turning points.

Even the Ministry of Education plans (analysis below) maintain that one of the most important goals of the history curriculum for high school is to identify: "the events and historic personalities that have contributed to the founding of modern Egypt".[35]

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the Ministry fails to realize that maintaining the simplified nationalist narrative is in and of itself a form of politicization. The grand narrative largely analyzed earlier, (see section

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34- This announcement was made during the Ministry of Education conference alluded to earlier in May 2013.

35- Wizarat Al-Tarbiyya wa Al-Ta'lim. Wathiqat Manhaj Al-Tarikh Lil Marhala al Thanawiyya 2012/2013, 16

on content) is constructed to legitimize the post 1952 regime and failure to deconstruct this narrative in a meaningful way demonstrates the continuation of curriculum politicization.

No better document exists to demonstrate this than the Ministry of Education's educational plan for the History curriculum for the academic year 2011/2012 titled "Wathiqat Manhaj al Tarikh Lil Marhala al Thanawiyya", which highlights the philosophy behind the new history curriculum given recent changes which have occurred locally as well as global trends in education.

In a section titled: The Foundations for the High School History Curriculum, the plan asserts: "the curricula should abide by the cornerstones of the Egyptian personality".[36] What this means is that the plan buys into the nationalist discourse alluded to earlier, which constructs an Egyptian personality which somehow transcends time and space and is present all throughout history. This Egyptian soul/personality/figure is a vital component of the nationalist discourse.

Another section titled "General Goals of the History Curriculum" suggests that one of the primary goals of the history curriculum is for students to be able to discern the general principles of Egyptian thinking[37] . This is yet another indication that the curriculum continues to construct a nationalist narrative to legitimize post 52 Egypt.

Similar patterns can be found in the education plans for preparatory school. Al Itar al 'Am Lil Marhala Al-I'dadiyya which clearly indicate that the goals of the curriculum are taken from the "values of Egyptian society."[38] It also suggests that the goals of education include "the enhancement of national consciousness and the principles of unity of the Islamic and Arab worlds".[39]

While the construction of curricula without the slightest form of politicization is nearly impossible, there are various ways in which curricula can at least attempt to create a balanced view by relying primarily on an array of primary sources rather than secondary ones. The Ministry of Education's plan for the history curriculum for high school suggests that the curricula will focus on primary sources. [40] Yet, the official curriculum does not present the student with sufficient primary sources nor does the curriculum dedicate a section on how primary sources are to be used for purposes of analysis.

36- Wathiqat Manhaji al Tarikh, 2012, 5

37- Wathiqat Manhaji al Tarikh, 2012, 10

38- Wizarat Al Tarbiyya wa al-Ta'lim. Al Itar Al 'Am Lil Marhala al-I'dadiyya. 2012/2013, 5

39- Ibid.

40- Wathiqat Manhaj al Tarikh, 18

Similarly, the Ministry's plan for the preparatory school as a whole asserts that one of the foundations of preparatory school is to present the student with a selection of sources in light of their cultural background yet the history curriculum analyzed in this study did not include a single primary source.[41]

The plans also demonstrate a very clear intention to install certain principles/attitudes values and ideas into students' minds. For example, the plan for the history curriculum for high school very clearly asserts that students should learn to "support" the establishment of a common Arab market and should develop feelings of sympathy towards the January 25th martyrs and victims.[42]

The plan for preparatory school education suggests that the goal of the education system is for students to become attached to religious teachings and moral values.[43]

While the general Plan for Pre-University education for the academic year 2011/2012 suggests that one of the primary goals of the education curriculum is for students to understand and appreciate the Egyptian culture, the religion and the Arab/Islamic world, there is little about tolerance vis-à-vis the other and the appreciation of diversity.

All of these examples demonstrate that while education plans after January 2011 seem to have incorporated the language of progressive education by inserting concepts such as "critical thinking", " new technologies", "creativity" and "learner's Centred Pedagogy", they have retained the overall framework of nationalist education. This is seen both in the content of the plans, i.e. the reliance of nationalist discourse, as well as in the methods (absence of clear mechanism to implement progressive ideas). More importantly, we find that the necessary balance between nationalist discourse on the one hand, and the promotion of tolerance, respect and cultural understanding on the other, is not the primary goal as outlined in the plans.

Need for Reform

Official statements by Minister Mahmoud Abu Al Nasr regarding the need to reform the history curriculum such as those expressed at the beginning of his term in August 2013 are definitely a positive step towards quality history curricula.

However, no such reform will be meaningful unless the issues raised above are accurately and seriously addressed.

41- Al Itar Al-A'm, 2012, 9

42- Wathiqat al Manahij, 2012, 19

43- Al Itar Al-A'm, 2012, 20

Specifically, we recommend that reforms take into consideration the fact that history and national instruction curricula are always politicized and that they carry with them an overarching nationalist discourse which is both problematic and alarming especially in light of the absence of the promotion of tolerance, acceptance and diversity.

In terms of concrete steps for reform, there is a pressing need to review the textbooks analyzed in this study in a manner which more clearly shows a commitment to Egypt's international obligations with regards to the right to education.

Specifically, we recommend that the following be taken into consideration:

1) Deconstruction of the nationalist narrative:

It is of utmost importance that more efforts are exerted to deconstruct the Egyptian nationalist rhetoric by balancing this discourse out with content that reflects Egypt's rich cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious make-up. It is necessary for students to understand nationalism as a political, economic and social movement and be able to trace its development over time. This would require a critical engagement with the history of nationalism and its European origins. It would also necessitate a critical engagement with the idea that some historical occurrences were inevitable and that there is such a thing as "the Egyptian people".

It is important to note, that even though the Egyptian curriculum from the 1950s and 1940s was in many ways a 'nationalist' curriculum, it did dedicate entire sections to the history of nationalist movements. Thus, the current Ministry of Education need not look far for inspiration: The 1955 History Curriculum titled: "Al Tarikh Al –Hadith wa-l Mu'athir" (Modern and Contemporary History) by Muhammad Qasim and Ahmad Nagib Hashim for example dedicated various chapters to the history of nationalist movements in Italy, Germany and France. While the assumption that the merger of these areas into "nations" was an inevitable occurrence is evident, the fact that the history of the nationalist movement was brought up in the first place, begins to open up channels of discussion about nationalism. Unfortunately, these channels of discussion seem to have disappeared with time.

2) Introduction of Primary Sources:

It is not sufficient for Ministry Plans to state that primary sources will be used when this is not implemented in reality. The introduction of primary sources entails not just a reform of the curriculum but also a change in teaching methods. Primary sources are useful insofar as they require a certain level

of critical engagement and the ability to analyze them within their historical context. An analysis of primary sources means the ability to be critical of the text and the ability to contrast it with other texts from the time period. Thus, a significant portion of history classes would need to be altered to accommodate the introduction of such new skills to the curriculum.

Again, the Ministry does not need to look far for inspiration. The 1954/55 History curriculum which encompasses a fabulous introduction by Taha Hussein and is titled: "Fusul Mukhtara Min Kutub al Tarikh Min Awasit al Qarn al Sabi' Ila al 'Asr al-Hadith" (Selected Chapters from History Books from the 7th century to the Present Time) is just that: a collection of primary sources. It includes texts by Rifaa' al Tahtawi, Ibn Khuldun, Muhammad Farid to name but a few. It is time for the Ministry of Education to pay more attention to the books it produced a little over 50 years ago.

3) Diversity:

One of the fundamental problems with the nationalist discourse since the early twentieth century is its attempt to homogenize society and create a construct revolving around "oneness". One of the ways to counter this trend is through the introduction of various histories. This could include the history of minorities and ethnic groups etc. By introducing the history of other groups in society, we create a diverse curriculum that takes into account the fact that Egyptian society is diverse. By doing so, the Ministry of Education would be fulfilling its international obligation under Article 26 of the International Declaration on Human Rights, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among others. Perhaps inspiration for this sort of curriculum could be found in the 1960s. While Nasser's curricula are considered some of the most dogmatic and nationalistic, they nevertheless highly emphasized the histories of other Arab peoples. The 1962 history curriculum titled" Tarikh al 'Arab al Hadith wal Mu'athir", which became the standard history book up until 1991 as it covered in detail (chapter by chapter) the history of the Yemeni people, the Algerian people, the Lebanese etc etc. The aim at the time, may have been to further indoctrinate the student population, but there is no reason why one should not draw some lessons for our contemporary curriculum.

4) Erase Simplification:

Simplification is one of the biggest threats to the entire education system. As indicated above, complex historical developments are often lumped under one title and numbered in list format. This is not just the case in preparatory school but it is also endemic to high school level curricula. Simplification is

an effective way to eradicate critical thinking and prepare students for the practice of rote memorization.[44]When contemporary curricula are compared to those from the 1940s and 50s, the first thing one notices is the density and complexity of earlier books compared to contemporary ones. A quick reading through history books from the early twentieth century is enough to convince any reader that the books were intended for mature young adults. In contrast, contemporary books are simplified to such a degree that they seem at first glance to be ridiculous if not childish.

5) Revise Inaccuracies

Given the fact that many of the curricula used for this study have been found to encompass several historical and factual inaccuracies, it becomes necessary for the Ministry of seriously look into the mistakes and contradictions.

6) Focus on Institutions rather than Ideology

The National Instruction curriculum is also in need of dire transformation in a way that provides the student information about his society, national institutions and legal framework (governance, constitution, ministries, etc.). However, there is no need for this curriculum to be heavily ideologically charged. Here we invoke once again an example from the past: The 1934 National Instruction curriculum provides information to students for the third year of high school about the state and society they live in. The book is broken down into sections covering topics such as Local Administration, Constitution, Parliamentary System etc. While the tone is overtly nationalistic, it is nevertheless a contrast to the text analyzed for the purposes of this study.

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44 The authors of this paper are not necessarily against the practice of rote memorization since it has proven to have significant pedagogical value. We are merely pointing out the fact the system only endorses ONE kind of learning over others.

Conclusion

This study has tried to present an analysis of the contemporary history and national instruction curricula in an attempt to verify the extent to which these abide by international standards related to the right to education. Generally speaking, the right to education as highlighted in the International Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and finally the Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly entails the promotion of tolerance, co-existence and openness not only to local minorities but all nations. While these international mechanisms clearly highlight a state's right to promote its own national identity and allegiance to the nation, they nonetheless propose a balance between such a promotion and the values mentioned above.

This is particularly why our attention specifically targeted the Egyptian nationalist discourse in order to assess to what extent it abides by the principles highlighted in international mechanisms.

Throughout this study, we have shown that the current nationalist discourse is alarming for a number of reasons, the most important of which is its insistence on omitting alternative histories, its suppression of diversity and its failure to promote tolerance and co-existence.

It is therefore time for these curricula to be radically changed in a way that more clearly shows Egypt's commitment to international agreements. In doing so, we re-iterate that such changes are simple, since the Ministry of Education needs only to look within its archives and reprint some of the old textbooks previously used. Finally, it is crucial that the Ministry develops a sincere commitment for overarching and general educational reform as the reliance on curricular changes alone, would yield almost no palpable educational results if conducted within our current educational environment.