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WESTERNIZATION AS CULTURAL TRAUMA: EGYPTIAN RADICAL  
ISLAMIST DISCOURSE ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** In this article, the relation between the Westernization experience and the radical Islamists reaction in Egypt is examined. It is argued that it is necessary to focus on the historical imagination of Westernization to understand the Egyptian reaction as manifested in Islamist religious educational discourse. The historical imagination appears to be based on a traumatic experience which was triggered by a traumatic event, namely British colonialism. The religious educational discourse in Egypt, an opportune case to observe radical Islamist response to the trauma experience, is found to be a mediating structure between the historical experience and the Islamist reaction. The study indicates that emic categories and societal emotions play a significant role in this mediation.

**Keywords:** Cultural Trauma, Radical Islamism, Religious Education, Westernization, Colonialism, Egypt

## Introduction

The rise of radical Islamist education in various parts of the Islamic world is often presented as simply a reaction to the impact and experience of Westernization by a wide range of researchers including proponents of political Islam.<sup>1</sup> It is not uncommon to observe that those who advocate for Islamist education repeatedly refer to the ill effects of Westernization in their discourse.<sup>2</sup> Seyyed Husain Nasr, for example, argues that the Western sciences are a “cancer.”<sup>3</sup> The view that there is a straightforward and causal link between the experiences of Westernization and the religious reaction is frequently borrowed by other scholars studying the phenomenon. Since the nature of the interaction between Westernization and Islamist reaction, and the mediating structures, agencies, and discourses are thought to be evident, they rarely receive the critical scrutiny they deserve. This article, therefore, aims to problematize the linkage between Westernization and political Islam’s challenge through education by pointing to the various ways in which mediating structures, agencies, and discourses have been influential in constituting the Islamist “reaction.” We specifically examine a range of radical Islamist *emic* categories that play a crucial role in this mediation through the constitutive role they play in shaping the practice, discourse, and agency of radical Islamists in general. Our goal is to demonstrate that the linkage between Westernization and Islamist reaction is not straightforward, and therefore, cannot be taken for granted.

In the imagination of Egyptian radical Islamists, the experience of Westernization is associated with the event of British colonialism and the subsequent developments. Islamist reaction to Westernization, however, does not solely target colonialism but also the post-colonial state. Nikki Keddie, for example, argues that the “Islamist reaction in the Middle East” was directed more against post-colonial states than colonial states since the former’s actions were “perceived as tyrannical and anti-Islamic.”<sup>4</sup> According to Keddie, the reason behind this is the fact that “[p]ost-colonial states often interfere with all aspects of life more than did colonizers, who were wary about interfering with personal and family arrangements.”<sup>5</sup> It is true that various contemporary Islamist movements present alternative institutions, policies, and social order to current post-colonial states and regimes.<sup>6</sup> This, however, does not result in a singular discursive attack of the radical Islamists on the post-colonial state. On the contrary, the post-colonial state is seen as a pawn and manifestation of (neo)colonial domination. Although we agree with Keddie that radical Islamist reaction poses a significant challenge to the post-colonial state, we argue that the scope of radical Islamist imagination and discourse transcends the confines of post-colonial state and encompasses colonialism and the experience of Westernization.

## Cultural Trauma

In this article, we conceptualize the historical experience of Westernization in Egypt as a “cultural trauma.” We borrow the concept of “cultural trauma” from Jeffrey Alexander who develops this notion through a discussion of the Holocaust. Alexander defines cultural trauma as an empirical and scientific concept that suggests “new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions.”<sup>7</sup> He argues that “[c]ultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, Alexander considers these remarks on group consciousness and memories conducive to the emergence of particular modes of collectivity, belonging, and political action either at present or in the future.

Trauma is created in the imagination through the mediating role of traumatization.<sup>9</sup> This is the cultural construction of trauma, what Alexander refers to as the “trauma process.”<sup>10</sup> Although we situate our framework within Alexander’s general approach to cultural trauma, we nevertheless revise it slightly for a discussion of our case study. While Alexander’s approach is based on the dual structure of a traumatizing event and the subsequent imagination, we introduce a tripartite framework based on event, the process of experience, and historical imagination. In our case, we take colonization as the event and the Westernization process of Egypt from the nineteenth century onwards as a traumatic experience in the minds of the radical Islamists. As similar to the trauma of the Holocaust, as discussed by Alexander, the traumatic experience of Westernization is perceived by the radicals “as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go.”<sup>11</sup> Construction of this traumatic experience in the historical imagination of contemporary radical Islamists in Egypt shapes their collective memories, group consciousness, identity, and political action (see Figure 1).

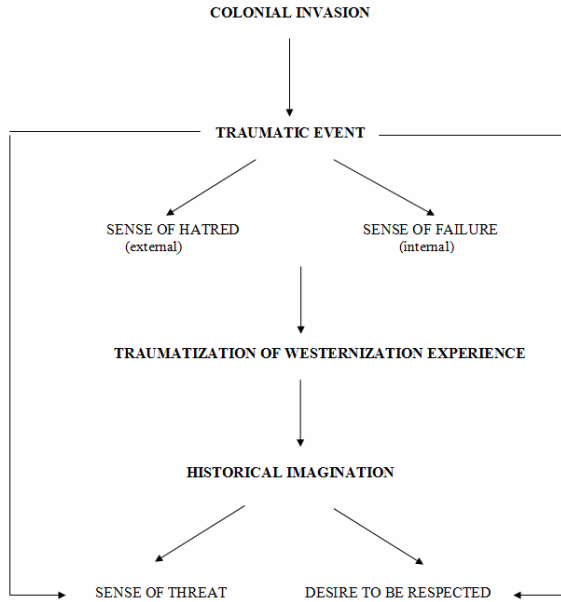


Figure 1. The Trauma Process

The Muhammad Ali period, which predates British Colonialism, is considered by Egyptians to be the beginning of westernizing reforms in Egypt. Radical Islamists, therefore, perceive Muhammad Ali period to be a part of the traumatizing experience of Westernization. Interestingly, in the Egyptian case, the traumatic experience happens to predate the actual traumatizing event, i.e. British colonization. The ambiguous status of the pre-event experience and the ambivalence of Islamist radicals in Egypt deserve a thorough research and problematization on their own and are beyond the scope of this study.<sup>12</sup> We argue that the radical Islamists were particularly traumatized by the post-1882 Westernization experience. We are specifically interested in examining the ways in which radical Islamists selectively remember, present, and represent this traumatic experience. We follow Alexander's constructivist position that highlights the crucial role of a traumatizing event that creates a fragmented imagination.<sup>13</sup> Similar to the case of the Holocaust, we focus on a particular event which was perceived as being horrendous and traumatizing, i.e. British colonialism. We take the act of colonization as the source of cultural trauma and the trigger of the trauma process.<sup>14</sup> Colonization traumatized Egypt's Westernization experience by explicitly or implicitly constituting a fragmented historical imagination of the Westernization process of Egypt in the minds of radical Islamists.

In our analysis, we problematize the linkage between the traumatic experience of Westernization and the notion of radical Islamist education through a study of fragmented historical imaginations resulting from the trauma process. We examine radical Islamist discourse on Islamist

education because this discourse is one of the crucial mediating agencies between historical imagination and the radical Islamist reaction. Firstly, as Alexander argues, historical imagination seizes on traumatic experience and constructs it by producing particular symbolic representations of the past, present and future.<sup>15</sup> Hence, as Alexander argues, “[i]t is only through the imaginative process of representation that actors have the sense of [traumatic] experience.”<sup>16</sup> At this point, we turn to Risser who argues that symbolic representations which refer to a particular history and ideology come to sight as images on discourse.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Alexander considers symbolic representations as claims on discourse about “a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution,”<sup>18</sup> or as responses to trauma, which are efforts to alter the circumstances that caused trauma.<sup>19</sup>

Along similar lines, Geertz views symbolic forms as a means through which human beings explain social phenomena and whereby making the world comprehensible, explainable and even endurable in their own eyes. He argues:

„As religion on one side anchors the power of our symbolic resources for formulating analytical ideas in an authoritative conception of the overall shape of reality, so on another side it anchors the power of our, also symbolic, resources for expressing emotions –moods, sentiments, passions, affections, feelings–... religious symbols provide a cosmic guarantee not only for their ability to comprehend the world, but also, comprehending it, to give a precision to their feeling, a definition to their emotions which enables them, morosely or joyfully, grimly or cavalierly, to endure it”.<sup>20</sup>

It is within this general framework that we pursue a discourse analysis which is based on the interpretation of certain religious symbolic representations. This, in turn, helps us to understand the mediation between the construction of traumatic Westernization experience in the historical imagination and the radical Islamists’ claims and responses to this cultural trauma in their discourse on Islamist education.

## Moods and Motives

In this article, we identify four emic categories which we highlight as significant topoi of mediation between historical imagination and religious educational practices. We relate these emic categories to the traumatic Westernization experience and colonization in Egypt, and thereby, seek to outline the historical imagination of radical Islamists. Overall, we argue that there is a dialectic formation between the historical

imagination of the Westernization experience and radical Islamist discourse which end up mutually reproducing and reinforcing each other.

The four emic categories we present in this article were identified to be dominant ones within the religious educational discourse of radical Islamists who were interviewed during a three-month field research between April and July 2005 in Cairo, Egypt. These categories are Western cultural invasion (*al ghazo al thakafy al gharby*), moral decadence (*al en hetat al akhlaqy*), ignorance of divine guidance (*jahiliyya*) and cultural schizophrenia (*al shezofrenia al thaqafeya*). While examining these emic categories, we pose the following question: which meanings, motives, and moods exist behind the formation and articulation of these emic categories? We specifically prefer to focus on the triad of meanings, motives, and moods since the cultural construction of radical Islamists' trauma process extends from a traumatizing event that has had a disturbing effect on this triad.

In order to study the triad of meanings, motives, and moods, we employ an eclectic perspective that is inspired by Alexander and Geertz. On the one hand, Geertz highlights the link between religious practices and moods and motives by arguing that anthropological study of religion has two dimensions: "an analysis of the system of meanings embodied in the symbols" and "the relating of these systems to socio-structural and psychological processes."<sup>21</sup> Defining the psychological situation as a disposition, Geertz argues that two different sorts of dispositions are induced by religious activities: "motives" and "moods."<sup>22</sup> According to him, moods constitute emotional sources "which are made meaningful with references to the conditions from which moods spring."<sup>23</sup> A motivation, for Geertz, is "an inclination to perform certain sorts of acts... [and] made meaningful with references to the end."<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Alexander argues that traumatizing event shatters "an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being," which undermines the human beings' needs such as "security, order, love, and connection."<sup>25</sup> From a psychoanalytical perspective, therefore, traumatizing event causes traumatic emotions that are embedded in everyday life and unconsciously generate certain fragmented historical imagination of traumatic experience in trauma process.<sup>26</sup>

The Egyptian traumatic process, we argue, has generated four types of emotions, namely, (1) *sense of failure*, (2) *sense of hatred*, (3) *sense of being threatened*, and (4) *a desire to be respected and to have self-determination*. It is true that these four types of emotions do not exhaust the range of emotions that radical Islamists feel. It is also true that the emotions that radical Islamists experience are not solely negative ones towards the West.<sup>27</sup> One can often come across the ambivalence that radical Islamists feel vis-à-vis the West.<sup>28</sup> For example, it is not uncommon for an Islamist to feel admiration and hatred towards the West.<sup>29</sup> The reason why we choose to focus on the abovementioned four emotions is that they are the

key ones consciously or unconsciously expressed in the Islamist discourse through which radical Islamists make sense, constitute, and represent the relation between the experience of Westernization and the Islamist reaction. To highlight the prevalence of these emotions, we present a chronological account of recent Egyptian history to show the various times and ways in which these emotions appeared and reappeared in conjunction with various political developments. This, in turn, will demonstrate how the Westernization experience of Egypt has been traumatized through these emotions in the historical imagination of radical Islamists.

The French invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 set in motion the colonial history of Egypt. French presence in Egypt (1798-1801) aimed to protect French trade interests and undermine British access to India. Although French control of Egypt was short-lived, it left significant marks on the political and cultural structure of Egypt. Muhammad Ali, who had been sent by the Ottoman Empire to reorder Egypt after the French invasion, declared himself as the viceroy of Egypt in 1805. Then, with the assistance of French specialists, he launched large-scale modernization projects to keep up with major European countries in the fields of military, state administration, law, and education.<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Ali period is important for two reasons: firstly, Muhammad Ali started to rule Egypt as a semi-independent country with its newly emerging modern educational, military and economic institutions. Therefore, it is possible to see the first manifestations of Egyptian nationalism during this period. Secondly, in this period, European ideas, notions, and institutions permeated the Egyptian society on a grand scale. This Westernization process engendered certain dualities in the Egyptian social structure. These dualities coming out in the field of education brought about ruptures (e.g. traditional/modern, religious/secular, Islamic/Western) both for individuals and the society at large. When the British occupied Egypt in 1882, these cleavages were already entrenched to a great extent in the Egyptian society.

These cleavages were further deepened by the British who sought to reorganize all spheres of life, including cultural and educational, to transform power relations in the country in accordance with colonialist interests. This transformation has been perceived by various Egyptian groups to be damaging to the society at large. This is the context within which a variety of anti-colonialist ideas and movements appeared.

One can find a telling account of this process in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* in which the author presents a vivid description of the political atmosphere of the early twentieth century in Egypt.<sup>31</sup> The atmosphere of political enthusiasm and the ensuing mass movements for the independence of Egypt encouraged Egyptians to seek an active role in the future of their country, a future in which there was no space for the British. Although the dominant ideas of the period were all advocating the

overthrow of the *alien* British rule, their intellectual sources, perspectives, and solutions exhibited a great range from the Islamist to the secularist, or even communist ones.<sup>32</sup> While the *Salafīyya* movement, secular nationalism led by Mustafa Kamil and Sa'd Zaghlul, and the Muslim Brotherhood organization exhibited a variety of positions, they all seemed to revolve around a pronounced "hatred" of the British.

Besides this sense of hatred, the colonial invasion created a sense of failure articulated in the radical Islamist discourse in Egypt, which is defined in two different ways: a state of defeat by an external alien power, and a state of ignorance of divine guidance (*jahiliyya*), i.e. an internal failure of the Egyptian society to uphold an Islamic way of life. The second failure is usually considered to be both the reason and the result of the first failure. We think that the first Islamists (led by Muhammad 'Abduh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Rashīd Rīda), who articulated the ideas of renaissance and reform in Islam at the turn of the twentieth century, were motivated by this sense of failure. In their opinion, Egypt was defeated by alien Western powers because its social institutions, including the educational structure, failed due to the lack of a sound and progressive Islamic belief and identity that can stand up to the West.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the aim of the first Islamists was to start an Islamic renaissance (*nahda*), and launch reforms in the Islamic way of life.

The presence and dominance of an alien power that subordinated both Egyptian elites and masses traumatized the consciousness of Egyptians as a whole. At the first stage of cultural trauma, the traumatic event triggered a sense of hatred and sense of failure, which started to shape the formation of the Egyptian radical Islamist mood and emotions beginning with the historical act of invasion. At the second stage of cultural trauma, the perception of enduring effects of invasion, even after the end of British rule, created a sense of being threatened, and a subsequent desire to have true self-determination and respect.

Egyptian radical Islamists perceive the Westernization process as the continuation of the historical act of colonial invasion. Gauhar argues that "[t]he colonial era was brought to an end but the colonial elite which imperial powers had created to succeed them in office continued to serve the interests of foreign domination."<sup>34</sup> During his rule (1956-1970), Gamal Abdul Nasser overthrew the monarchy which had been complicit under British colonial rule, drove out the last British troops from Egypt, launched modernization and developmental (land and industrial) reforms on the one hand. On the other hand, he accused the Muslim Brotherhood of attempting to assassinate him, and oppressed the organization, executed or arrested its leaders and members.<sup>35</sup> These acts of Nasser are eventually taken by the radical Islamists as the hallmarks of an anti-Islamic secularization and Westernization process. In this historical imagination, the Nasser period is represented not as an era of national independence and non-alignment, but as the continuation of anti-Islamic,



colonial, and alien hegemony. After Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat and Husnu Mubarak are considered to be the pawns of colonial Western powers. Sadat's open-door policies (*Infitah*) (1970-1981), peace process with Israel at Camp David in 1978-1979, and Mubarak's economic liberalization policies (1981- ) are claimed to have allied Egypt with the West, and turned the country into a servant of neo-colonial Western hegemony. Overall, this fragmented historical imagination of radical Islamists is a reflection of the traumatic experience of Westernization in Egypt. According to this traumatic experience, the colonial conditions still continue to exist in the post-colonial era in Egypt.<sup>36</sup>

We think that Egyptian radical Islamists depict the continuation of colonialism as a never-ending threat. We deal with this perceived constant threat in terms of the sense of being threatened in connection with the Westernization experience of Egypt. Radical Islamist discourse on education highlights education and culture as the backbone of the Egyptian Muslim society, and asserts them as one of the primary targets of the never-ending "colonial" threat. Suleiman Abd Rabou Muhammad, for example, argues that although the Egyptian public schools incorporate religious education, they are "non-productive, and... can not constitute a strong defensive line that would protect children from deviation and non-Islamic behaviors."<sup>37</sup> This inevitably leads to, what is depicted in the radical Islamist discourse, an Egyptian society that is ignorant, religiously deviant, morally decadent, and in lack of a coherent identity. This is the context in which the idea that the Egyptian society should be more Islamic becomes a strong and popular public discourse. Most of our interviewees claim that the Egyptian educational system should be more Islamic.<sup>38</sup> It is not uncommon for people to advocate Islamization of national education as well as scientific education at universities.

The Islamist rhetoric concerning education in general mainly stems from a search for authenticity in the field of education to create a genuine and ideal Islamic society. When Mehmet Ozan Aşık was conducting the field research, he attended a political science class at the AUC (The American University in Cairo). In the class, one of the students was presenting a Master's thesis proposal, and it was about how to build an international relations perspective based on the Qur'an. This proposal is actually a reflection of the hot debate in Egypt on the viability of Islamic sciences such as Islamic international relations, Islamic medicine and Islamic sociology. It is in fact an effort to build an authentic and single Muslim perspective and basis for modern sciences. The student ended her words by explaining that the *tawhid* notion is located at the heart of the Islamic paradigm. As for the issue of international relations, the goal is to build a single unified Muslim nation; *ummah* –one nation, one religion, and one culture. While leaving no room for the simultaneous existence of Western/secular and Islamic educational institutions and notions, this traumatic perception offers an all-encompassing, *sui generis*, self-

referential and authentic educational system (Islamic *tarbiyah*) as claimed to have existed in the pre-colonial Muslim world.

Islamist search for authenticity in the educational system might be criticized in terms of its irrationality, inapplicability, and its intolerant, and anti-pluralist nature. However, we think that this sort of Islamist proposals about religious education in Egypt exhibits a collective mood in the common sense of the Egyptian Muslims, especially Islamist ones: a desire for self-respect and self-determination in the face of Western societies. In the radical Islamists' traumatic experience, British colonialism is condemned for creating the abovementioned rupture (which, in fact, can be traced back to Napoleon) in the cultural and educational structure of society. This rupture is held responsible for breaking the integrity of the *ummah*, and the dominance of Muslim identity and culture. Then, as a perpetual result of colonialist past of Egypt, westernization is accused of leaving no solid, native and Islamic ground on which Egyptian Muslim society could rely on in order to interact with Western societies in a respectful way which would be free from the damage given by colonialism. It is this parallelism between the loss of independence and self-determination of country and the disintegration of Islamic belief and culture, which generates the desire of self-respect and self-determination in the traumatic experience of radical Islamists. Islamic *tarbiyah*, however, is claimed to reestablish the integrity of *ummah* and Islamic character of the educational system, and make Muslims the real owners of the society, dominant over the cultural and educational society of Egypt.

We argue that; a) all these Islamist educational efforts and discourses in the Islamist public atmosphere and movement in Egypt, b) the fragmented historical imagination of Westernization among the radical Islamists of Egypt, have a substantial emotional basis at the societal level. These four emotions, we argue, play a crucial role in shaping the development of radical Islamist reaction in Egypt. These emotions were triggered by a traumatic event and they still maintain their psychoanalytical effects over radical Islamist collective mood and motives. These emotions are embedded in the following four emic categories which mediate between historical imagination of Westernization, and religious educational discourses and practices of radical Islamists in Egypt.

### Emic Categories

The four emic categories that we suggest in this work are (1) western cultural invasion; (2) moral decadence; (3) ignorance of divine guidance; and (4) cultural schizophrenia. These categories, as a whole, derive from the Egyptian traumatic process which has generated the abovementioned four types of emotions. The emic categories we employ are entrenched in the general radical Islamist discourse and frequently articulated by radical Islamists in magazines, books, schools, universities, public debates, and

other public arenas of Egyptian life. Radical Islamists make sense, constitute, and represent the relation between the experience of Westernization and the Islamist reaction through these categories.

Analyzing the linkages between Westernization and Islamist reaction requires examining the four emic categories operational within the radical Islamist discursive field. To investigate these categories, we employed two research techniques. Firstly, we analyzed the ideas and conceptualizations of prominent Islamist intelligentsia by referring to the written materials in which these radical Islamist ideas and conceptualizations were articulated. Secondly, a three-month field research was carried out by M. Ozan Aşık in Cairo between April and June 2005. Twenty semi-structured in-depth-interviews were carried out with university students, educational experts, teachers, and parents. Based on the analysis of these interviews, we ascertained four emic categories that were employed by radical Islamists in their attempts to articulate issues of religion, education, and Westernization. We argue that the four emic categories we suggest are the most important ones in mediating the relation between Egypt's Westernization experience and the radical Islamist educational discourse in Egypt.

### Western Cultural Invasion (al ghazo al thaqaify al gharby)

Since the time of Muhammad Ali, Westernization movements led by Egyptian ruling elites have rested on the following perception: Egyptians have lagged behind the Western civilization, which is the most advanced one, and Egyptians need to catch up by following the same modernization path. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Egypt, ruling elites found themselves in a battle to institutionalize Western way of social organization and life in their country. However, these reform movements gave rise to heated debates, triggering the question about the extent to which the reform movements aimed at ameliorating the political, economic, and technological problems of the Egyptian society were, at the same time, a blunt imitation of the Western civilization to the detriment of Muslim way of life.

Contemporary radical Islamist discourse perceives Westernization process as an invasion of the Muslim world, i.e. an attack to the integrity of *ummah*, because it brought about the domination of Western culture which is seen as inimical to Islam by the radicals.<sup>39</sup> One of our interviewees, a pioneer Islamist and a professor at Cairo University commented that the Egyptian educational system “has been invaded by Western thought, values, and methodologies.” During our conversation, she was eager to emphasize her strong reaction to Western culture, its educational concepts, and methods. She said that:

„We want an educational system which is peculiar to Islam, but the current Egyptian educational

system is under the influence of anti-Islamic and Western methods and ideas. We should do away with this Western educational system and establish a Muslim paradigm to create a genuine educational system which is convenient to Islamic principles.”

One of the prominent Islamist intellectuals, Abdel-Haleem Mahmud, similarly asks the following question: “Does the West (Europe and America) want to keep exporting these sins to the Muslim world, especially to Egypt, which is considered as its heart.”<sup>40</sup> In his book, *Methodology of Education Adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood*, he lists several different forms of cultural and intellectual invasion. In his view, while the borrowing of the Western ideologies, morals, and values leads to the distortion of Muslim identity, the adoption of Western educational programs distorts the personality, thought, and identity of Muslim children in a Muslim country like Egypt.<sup>41</sup>

The Egyptian case is in line with the religious educational discourse of radical Islamists around the world. In this discourse, the cultural invasion of the Muslim society is portrayed as the attack of *sick* thoughts and values of the West which has led to the contamination of the Muslim identity and culture. For example, Seyyed Husain Nasr, an Iranian Muslim scholar who is mentioned in religious educational discourses of Egyptian Islamists, portrays Western invasion through the analogy of a sickness. He argues that the “modern science is a *cancer* [emphasis added] which is today steadily eating away the marrow of the Islamic faith.”<sup>42</sup>

The portrayal of the Western education as a disease or sin rests on a highlighting of materialism, hedonism, secularism, and utilitarianism, which are considered to be the main characteristics of Western culture invading the Islamic societies. This, in turn, leads to various strategies, on the part of Egyptian Islamists, to resist the perceived Western threat. For instance, the abovementioned interviewee refused to use the term “secular” during the interview since she perceived it to be “an anti-Islamic concept”. Instead, she preferred to use the term “civil education” to refer to secular modern education because she argued that the term secular “originates from anti-Islamic thought” while the term civil does not have “anti-Islamic connotations”. Similarly Abdel-Haleem Mahmud refrains from using the term secular in his works. These intellectuals have developed a strategy of resisting Western cultural invasion by keeping certain terms that they find contaminating out of their Islamist discourse.

### Moral Decadence (al en hetat al akhlaqy)

The issue of morality has a very central role within the radical Islamist discourse in Egypt since it is seen as the backbone of the Muslim society. All other institutions of the society such as family, education, law, economy, and politics are believed to be intrinsically connected to the

issue of morality. Furthermore, it is argued that these institutions can not function properly if they are not based on a strong Islamic morality. During interviews with radical Islamists, the conversation frequently came to the issue of morality. Deviation from the true Islamic path, which was seen as the major reason for all of Egypt's problems, was mostly defined in terms of moral decadence.

Radical Islamists argue that Western cultural invasion has weakened the Islamic moral character of the Egyptian society, and has subsequently caused moral decadence among Muslim people. Mahmud, for example, argues that Westernization keeps Muslims away from Islamic morals and manners.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Western educational system is blamed as one of the major reasons for moral decadence. Osman Bakar,<sup>44</sup> a prominent Islamist scholar, highlights the conflicting relation between Western education and Islamic morality in the following way:

“[M]odern science and technology [coming from the West] become an obsession as the sole indicator of human progress and development; and this obsession brings about the decline of moral and spiritual values. Consequently, science and technology are misused, and pave the way for the economic exploitation by the rich against the poor, destruction of the environment, false ideologies such as atheism and materialism, and the like. That's why the intervention of spirituality and ethics are urgently needed.”<sup>45</sup>

Bakar's conceptualization seems to be adopted by the radical Islamists in Egypt. For them, the major problem is that Egyptian people do not know how to deal with Western culture, science, and technology because of their lack of Islamic morality. Religious education, therefore, is highly valued as a remedy to the moral decadence accompanying Westernization, and it is expected to provide a profound Islamic moral socialization for students, and Islamic atmosphere and character for the educational system. Islamists advocate teaching moral values in religion classes where students can infer moral lessons from Qur'anic verses and *sunnah*.

A professor in Al-Azhar University,<sup>46</sup> for example, proposed a remedy for moral decadence in the following way:

“The Egyptian society is undergoing a moral decadence. Now, the educational system in Al-Azhar is not very good. However, if students would take good and sufficient Islamic education beside scientific courses in Al-Azhar University, they would not cheat people in hospitals, in constructing

buildings, and the like; because, they would know Islam very well, and would have fear of God.”

Beyond the training of the *ulama* and *alims* of Islam, the major benefit of Al-Azhar schools is claimed to disseminate Islamic culture, morality and virtues in all fields of social life, and to strengthen the moral character of society. The highly significant mission of Al-Azhar schools is claimed to train Muslim engineers, Muslim doctors, Muslim managers, Muslim mothers and fathers, Muslim neighbors and Muslim friends. In this way, young people would learn how to deal with the invasion of Western thoughts and methods, and would not lose their way in moral decadence. Therefore, Islamic morality is considered to be the sole guidance that must be taught to young people in order to maintain the well-being of the society.

### **Ignorance of Divine (jahiliyya)**

This emic category has its origin in Sayyid Qutb's writings. Sayyid Qutb, one of the most important figures of the Muslim Brotherhood in the formation of its ideology, asserted that Muslims were not living in an Islamic society. He “charged that the Egyptian society was living in a *jahiliyya*, or a state of ignorance similar to that which predated the coming of Islam.”<sup>47</sup> This strategy of criticizing Egypt through the concept of *jahiliyya* was not only limited to Sayyid Qutb but as Esposito argues “the classical historical designation of pre-Islamic Arabia as a society of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) was appropriated” by others “to condemn modern [Muslim] societies as un-Islamic or anti-Islamic.”<sup>48</sup> In the contemporary radical Islamist discourse, for example, *jahiliyya* is not perceived simply as a pre-Islamic condition, but also a modern one.

Within the context of rising Islamism in Egypt, most of our interviewees and informants claimed that the society and individuals are not fully Islamic. They used *jahiliyya* as a key concept in expressing their ideas about Islam and religious education. It appears paradoxical at first that at a time when growing numbers of Egyptian Muslims have an eagerness to Islamize the Egyptian society, they are also complaining about *jahiliyya* in Egypt. The peculiar reasoning behind this paradox can be revealed if one pays attention to the fact that the contemporary concept of *jahiliyya* is not defined as the ignorance of Islamic belief but rather as the ignorance of proper Islamic knowledge and the way of practicing it. Therefore, radical Islamist debates on education and science, in which ways of providing an ideal Islamic education (*tarbiyah*<sup>49</sup>) for Muslim children of Egypt are discussed, turns out to be at the core of radical Islamist discourses in general.

The specific nature of *jahiliyya* in radical Islamist discourse in Egypt was also apparent in the interview with an Islamist professor in Cairo University. She complained that Egyptian students –she meant Muslim

students– neither know Islam nor history or philosophy of Islam. According to her, Egyptians, i.e. Muslims, do not know how to apply Islamic precepts and ideas in their daily lives according to the requirements and circumstances of the contemporary age. They, she argues, just worship and carry the Qur'an, but are ignorant of the kinds of knowledge it includes.

Within the radical Islamist discourse, the main obstacle to inculcating Islamic *tarbiyah* is the dominance of Western educational and scientific notions. Western domination which is one of the outcomes of Western cultural invasion is believed to be a disease undermining the Islamic character of Egypt. Sayyid Qutb condemns the West for privileging the human mind and scientific inquiry over divine truths and believes that the Egyptian internalization of Western attitudes and approaches is one of the reasons for the *jahiliyya* in Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

### Cultural Schizophrenia (al shezofrenia al thaqafeya)

The spread of the “disease” of Western cultural invasion is perceived by radical Islamists as an attack on the cultural and religious unity of the Muslim world. The term, cultural schizophrenia, which one comes across mainly in the discourse and works of Islamist intellectuals, is one way of calling Western encroachment a disease, or more specifically, a psychiatric disorder. Cultural schizophrenia draws attention to the breakdown of the character and identity of Muslims. This disintegration is believed to be triggered by the radical divergence between the Western culture associated with secularism and materialism, and the Islamic values associated with spirituality and morality. The ensuing dichotomy is blamed for harming the integrity of Muslim character, making Muslim individuals confused and disoriented. This, in turn, leaves Muslims open to further threats from the West.

Islamist perspective on education views education as a process of acquiring two different kinds of knowledge: intellectual knowledge and spiritual knowledge. The Islamic *tarbiyah* strives to produce a complete person with rational, spiritual, and social capacities. Westernization process, however, with its secular, materialist, and individualistic emphasis, is claimed in radical Islamist discourse to threaten the *tawhid* notion, the all-encompassing and unified character of Islamic education.<sup>51</sup> S. Ali claims that the “reliance on foreign models of education, which deny Islam as a dominating educational philosophy” creates a dualism in the educational system, and eventually causes a state of cultural schizophrenia in the Muslim societies.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Saqib argues the following in the First World Conference on Muslim Education held at Mecca in 1977:

“[T]here exists at present a regrettable dichotomy in education in the Muslim world; one system namely, religious education being completely divorced from the secular sciences, and secular education being completely divorced from religion, although such compartmentalisation was contrary to the true Islamic concept of education and made it impossible for the products of either system to represent Islam as a comprehensive and integrated vision of life.”<sup>53</sup>

This dualism which is also present in the Egyptian educational system is considered to be the main reason for the polarized culture of and the state of cultural schizophrenia in the country. The existing dualism is argued to cause cultural confusion and identity crisis among Egyptians, especially among youngsters. A political science student at the AUC stated the following during an interview:

“[W]ith globalization, we are witnessing the invasion of American culture. Young Egyptians desire, and internalize it on the one hand; but on the other hand, they try to sustain their traditional Islamic identity, so we come to face the various confusions and conflicts in our culture.”

Hence, one part of Egyptian culture urges young Egyptians to focus on Islamic knowledge and traditional identity, and the other part provides them with a new identity emphasizing information technologies, twenty first century's science and new global ideas. Having a strong Islamist stance and a Western life-style at the same time, many Egyptian university students interviewed during the field research admit to having identity problems. These difficulties are further complicated for students who study at foreign schools in Egypt where the divide between secular education and religious teachings is more visible. A political science student at the AUC, for example, blamed the US involvement in Egypt's political and cultural affairs for damaging the nation's Islamic character during an interview in which he expressed his views in a radical manner. He touched upon the identity void experienced by the students of foreign schools, saying that

“The American schools in Cairo have a subtle political aim: to leave all Egyptians without a coherent identity. The graduates of these schools feel neither completely American nor Egyptian. But, Islam and Arabic are the backbone of our culture, and we are devoid of learning them in private foreign schools.”



Overall, radical Islamists believe that the society's identity crisis and cultural confusion (as exemplified in the case of cultural schizophrenia) are the key problems of Egypt, and they draw a direct correlation between the insufficient emphasis on religious education and the painful and lingering question of identity for Egyptians. They argue that the Egyptian Muslim society can establish a healthy relation with other civilizations, especially with the Western civilization, only after establishing the integrity of the Muslim character through Islamic *tarbiyah*.

These four emic categories that we have identified in Islamist educational discourses are significant topoi of mediation between Islamist historical imagination and religious educational practices in Egypt. We argue that the aforementioned triad of meaning, motives, and moods, which is the main locus of the cultural construction of radical Islamists' trauma process, was effective in the formation and articulation of these emic categories. The emic categories, in turn, play a crucial role in interlinking perceptions, experiences, discourses, and practices of Islamists in Egypt.

## Conclusion

As Hudgson argues, "Islamic piety reflected a strong historical consciousness."<sup>54</sup> The historical consciousness of Egyptian radical Islamists also appears to be very strong as the abovementioned moods and motives and the ensuing emic categories demonstrate the extent to which radical Islamists were affected by a traumatic anti-Western attitude. The historical imagination at the root of the radical Islamist discourse on religious education depicts Westernization as a sickness, contamination, or disaster. This imagination, we argue, stems from a trauma process in which the West is portrayed as a single, hegemonic, and harmful cultural totality which has nothing positive to offer to Muslims. In the radical Islamist discourse in Egypt, the West is an "other" against which the idea of Islamic *tarbiyah* is developed. This other is perceived as a profound threat to the integrity of Egyptian Muslim society, identity, and cultural continuity.

Speaking of the relation between historical imagination of the Westernization experience and radical Islamist discourse, we think that there is a dialectic formation between the two. They mutually reproduce and reinforce each other. We are aware, however, that the radical Islamist practice, that is the materialized reaction to the perceived trauma of Westernization experience, is often not fully in line with radical Islamist discourses. This contradiction, for example, could be studied by focusing on religious education discourses and practices of radical Islamists particularly at private Islamic schools in Egypt. Although these schools are intended to produce and disseminate particular Islamic life practices, the outcome does not seem to be as consistent and uncontroversial as it is

presented by radical Islamist discourses.<sup>55</sup> The resulting contradictions could further illustrate the complicated ways in which historical experience, moods, and motives, emic categories, discourses, and practices interact. We argue that the framework offered here could be fruitfully applied in studying the different kinds of discord between discourses and practices of radical Islamists. It is only through such a focus on the discord between discourse and practice that one can begin to have a fuller understanding of the dialectic nature of the connection between Westernization experience and the radical Islamist reaction.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Ismail Al-Faruqi, "Islamizing the Social Sciences", in *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective*, eds. Ismail R. Al-Faruqi and Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 11-16.

<sup>3</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (London: Zen Books, 1991), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, "The New Religious Politics: Where, When, and Why Do "Fundamentalisms" Appear?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40/4 (1998): 723.

<sup>5</sup> Keddie, 723.

<sup>6</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "Beyond Democratization: Political Change in the Arab World," *P.S.: Political Science and Politics*, 27/3 (1994): 508.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2003), 86.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, 86.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, 87-88.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander, 94.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander, 94.

<sup>12</sup> The pre-colonization experience of Westernization bears interesting resemblances to the pre-Holocaust events of the rise of Nazism which is often imagined to be part of the overall trauma.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander, 93.

<sup>14</sup> Along the same lines, Muhammad al-Ghazzaly argues that "Egyptians must face the wounding implications of the Western colonization at the deepest cultural levels... [He says that] Colonization started with the military invasion of our land, full of hatred for our religion, our language, and our civilization and all its material and moral potentials." Muhammad al-Ghazzaly quoted in Raymond William Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 40.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, 93-94.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander, 93.

<sup>17</sup> James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 133.

<sup>18</sup> Risser, 94.

<sup>19</sup> Risser, 88.

<sup>20</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 104.

<sup>21</sup> Geertz, 125.

<sup>22</sup> Geertz, 96.

<sup>23</sup> Geertz, 97.

<sup>24</sup> Geertz, 96-97.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander, 87.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, 88-93.

- <sup>27</sup> Karen Armstrong argues that “at the beginning of the 20th century, nearly every single Muslim intellectual was in love with the west, admired its modern society, and campaigned for democracy and constitutional government in their own countries” and asks why the West has “lost this goodwill.” Karen Armstrong, “The Curse of the Infidel”, *The Guardian*, (June 20, 2002), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2002/jun/27/guardianweekly.guardianweekly1>
- <sup>28</sup> We would like to thank Elisabeth Özdalga for directing our attention to the non-negative emotions and ambivalence of radical Islamists towards the West.
- <sup>29</sup> Along the same lines, Zachary Shore points to “the deep ambivalence that many European Muslims feel toward Europe and the United States.” Zachary Shore, *Breeding Bin Ladens: America, Islam, and the Future of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p.x.
- <sup>30</sup> P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak* (USA: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 49-56.
- <sup>31</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street* (Everyman's Library, 2001).
- <sup>32</sup> Vatikiotis, 214-215.
- <sup>33</sup> Geneive Abdo, *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Syed Altaf Gauhar, “Education and the Mass Media”, in *Education and Society in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Wasiullah Khan (Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 77.
- <sup>35</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, “Muslim Religious Extremism in Egypt: A Historiographical Critique of Narratives”, in *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century*, eds. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer and Y. Hakan Erdem (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 278-279, 282.
- <sup>36</sup> The traumatic experience of Westernization and colonialism in Egypt is not solely connected to developments within Egypt. Other developments such as the Palestine conflict and the Gulf Wars deepen the trauma. It is, therefore, crucial to keep in mind that global politics has a continuous impact on the “Egyptian” trauma process which is discussed mainly at the cultural realm in this work. We would like to thank Elisabeth Özdalga for pointing us to the non-Egyptian component of the Egyptian trauma process.
- <sup>37</sup> Suleiman Abd Rabou Muhammad quoted in Bradley James Cook, “Egypt's National Education Debate”, *Comparative Education* 36, 4 (2000): 487.
- <sup>38</sup> Mehmet Ozan Aşık, *Religious Education in Egypt: A Sociological Analysis of Contesting Religious Educational Institutions, Policies and Discourses* (VDM Verlag, 2008), Chapter IV.
- <sup>39</sup> Baker, 40.
- <sup>40</sup> Ali Abdel-Haleem Mahmud, *Methodology of Education Adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood* (Cairo: Islamic Inc. Publishing & Distribution, 1998), 61.
- <sup>41</sup> Mahmud, 56.
- <sup>42</sup> Hoodbhoy, 69.
- <sup>43</sup> Mahmud, 60-61.
- <sup>44</sup> Osman Bakar is professor at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University, Malaysia, and previously served as Malaysia Chair of Southeast Asian Islam at the Prince Alwaleed Bin-Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.
- <sup>45</sup> Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Text Society, 1999), 229-236.
- <sup>46</sup> Al-Azhar has the widest educational institutional network in Egypt, a network ranging from kindergarten to higher educational institutions. It is currently the central institution of traditional Islamic learning in Egypt. Although Al-Azhar schools follow the official curriculum in Egypt, their students are also required to master Islamic knowledge. For a discussion of Al-Azhar schools, see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 99-104; Rivka Yadlin, “Inter-Faith Strife: The Al-Azhar Discourse on Israel”, *Israel Affairs* 12, 1 (2006): 55; Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work:*

*Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1998), 90-91; Malike Zeghal, "Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of Al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 376.

<sup>47</sup> Denis J. Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in the Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 43.

<sup>48</sup> John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 128.

<sup>49</sup> Ali Abdel-Haleem Mahmud claims that one of the most important objectives of Islamic *tarbiyah* is to prepare individuals to live in harmony in the ideal Muslim society according to Islamic precepts. Islamic *tarbiyah* is expected to terminate the state of *jahiliyya* by providing Muslim students with an education "that covers all aspects of life; spiritual, mental and physical" (Mahmud, 11). For the Muslim Brotherhood, there are ten basic pillars of the Islamic *tarbiyah*: 1) Understanding, 2) Sincerity, 3) Worship, 4) Jihad, 5) Sacrifice, 6) Obedience, 7) Perseverance, 8) Integrity, 9) Brotherhood, and 10) Trust (Mahmud, 103).

<sup>50</sup> Shahrough Akhavi, "Sayyid Qutb: The Poverty of Philosophy and the Vindication of Islamic Tradition", in *Cultural Transition in the Middle East*, ed. Şerif Mardin (Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 1994), 136, 141-144.

<sup>51</sup> M. N. Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism, and the Philosophy of Future* (London; New York: Mansell Publishing, 1985); Ismail Al-Faruqi, "Islamizing the Social Sciences", in *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective*, eds. Ismail R. Al-Faruqi and Abdullah Omar Nasseef (Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981).

<sup>52</sup> Syed Ismail Ali quoted in Bradley James Cook, "Islamic Versus Western Conceptions of Education: Reflections on Egypt," *International Review of Education* 45, 3-4 (1999): 486.

<sup>53</sup> Ghulam Nabi Saqib, "Modernization of Muslim Society and Education: Need for A Practical Approach", in *Education and Society in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Wasiullah Khan (Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 53.

<sup>54</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1974), 362.

<sup>55</sup> See Aşık, Chapter IV; Linda Herrera, *The Sanctity of the School: New Islamic Education and Modern Egypt* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2000).