



ENC ANALYSIS

The role of Education in women's radicalization process

April 2019

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“Les Coptes, constitutifs de l'identité égyptienne”, in *Atlas de l'Égypte contemporaine*, Cedej (Le Caire) – Editions du CNRS (Paris), (in press).

The role of Education in women's radicalization process

Introduction

Since 2001, discussions and debates over jihadism,¹ political Islam, extremist Islamism, etc. are increasingly gaining importance around the world. Before September 11 2001, Al Qaida, the Base, a then tenebrous terrorist organization, was only known by security and counterterrorism experts. A decade later, in June 2014, the grand public was exposed to the mediatic launch of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS,² through the creation of the caliphate that was therefore claiming religious, political and military authority over all Muslims, worldwide. What has made ISIS so attractive to jihadists is that it had achieved a territorialisation of their network and had succeeded in crystallizing its ideology under the form of a State. Although women are not allowed to take part in the armed battle, they are nonetheless essential for the viability of the Islamic State³ and are encouraged to perform the hijra⁴ to ISIS controlled territories. They are not only expected to be a moral support for their husband or used for reproduction needs, but also to perform some day-to-day duties and assume responsibilities for the well-being of the State such as ensuring the enforcement of sharia. The Al-Khansaa brigade was created in order to make sure women living under the rule of ISIS were acting in accordance to the imposed rules.⁵

But how did we get there? This essay will not try to present the situation from a geopolitical nor geostrategic point of view. Furthermore, many studies have already been made on the socio-economic profile of radicalized women, their geographical origin and their role inside the Islamic State.⁶ Instead, it will more precisely try to analyze the role of education through the Arab World. It will contextualize the process of radicalization into the framework of education which increasingly touches more women. The role of education in the deradicalization, or counter-radicalization process, is indeed extremely important. But we must go back to one of the roots of the question, which is: how education and religious discourse can induce to radicalization?

¹ See definitions below

² Also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL.

³ A. Perešin, A. Cervone, The Western Muhajirat of ISIS, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 38 (2015), 495–509, 499.

⁴ Historically, the term hijra refers to the episode when Muhammad and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina. In a contemporary context, it rather refers to the duty of every true Muslim, man or woman, to migrate from non-Islamic lands where they cannot correctly perform their duties, to what are considered to be the true lands of Islam.

⁵ C. Winter, Women of the Islamic State a Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade, Quilliam, February 2015, <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>

⁶ Among others: Women and violent radicalization, Quebec Conseil du statut de la femme - Centre de prévention de la radicalisation menant à la violence (CPRMV), 2016, https://www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/radicalisation_recherche_anglais.pdf; Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalised, and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation, European Parliament Think Tank, December 21st 2017; A. Osborne, Engendering Extremism: Gender Equality and Radicalisation in the WANA Region, WANA (West Asia and North Africa) Institute, December 19th 2017, http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publication_WomenAndPCVE_English.pdf

Under no circumstances, should this study be seen as an analysis of Al-Azhar's official or implicit position, whether in terms of theology and religious doctrine or politics. And even less, of course, should it be seen as an outline of any criticism. This analysis focuses only on certain undeniable anomalies, which are not without dangers that can be found in textbooks that have been, and still are, widely distributed. As shown below, this worrying situation has also, and firstly, alerted several leading Arab intellectuals and politicians (such as Egyptian President El Sissi or some renowned Muslim thinkers and/or islamologists) who have not hesitated to denounce this state of affairs and more generally the insidious impregnation of Arab Muslim societies by radical Islamist thinking. While some, and not the least, go as far as asking the millennial institution of Al-Azhar for nothing less than a revolutionary work to modify religious discourse,⁷ others, even more virulent, have been denouncing a sclerotic institution guilty of passivity or sometimes even objective complicity with the Islamists. It seems important to us to take stock of this situation and to report it as well as the reality of the very lively debates it generates within the concerned societies. While bearing in mind that although a conservative institution, Al-Azhar may not be as monolithic as it might seem and that many contradictory forces are opposing each other.

1. Historical background

The mid-20th century period of decolonization, has generally been followed by a modernization of the educational system around the world, and in Arab countries.⁸ Basically, this implied the creation of governmental schools, and sometimes, religious schools which were replacing the traditional kuttabs where formerly, kids had to learn by heart the Quran and the Sunnah and were taught some basic traditional knowledge.

This modernization did not only bring some modern curricula to kids. Eventually, together with the Wahhabization⁹ of Arab societies since the 1970's, and the spread and financing of Islamist¹⁰ and Salafist¹¹ ideas and ideals, especially in the extremely sensitive field of

⁷ See, for example, President El-Sissi's speech at Al-Azhar in January 2015.

⁸ List of Arab countries by population, Wikipedia,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Arab_countries_by_population

⁹ Wahhabization of society or of minds refer to Wahhabism, a religious movement founded by Mohamed Ibn Abdelwaheb in the 18th century and derived from hanbalism. Hanbalism, the most rigorous of the four madhhabs (schools of religious thought) of Sunni Islam was born by reaction to mu'tazilites. Wahhabism advocates "a return to practices in the Muslim community of the Prophet Muhammad and his first successors or caliphs." E. Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, Basic Books, New York, 2011, p. 54-55

¹⁰ Although it is up to debate, the *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* indicates that the term Islamism "has come into increasing use in recent years to denote the views of those Muslims who claim that Islam, or more specifically, the Islamic shari'ah, provides guidance for all areas of human life, individual and social, and who therefore call for an "Islamic State" or an "Islamic Order." W. E. Shepard, F. Burgat (rev. by J. Piscatori), A. Salvatore, "Islamism", in J. L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, it is defined as: "Term used to describe an Islamic political or social activist. Coined in preference to the more common term "Islamic fundamentalist." Islamists (al-Islamiyyun) are committed to implementation of their ideological vision of Islam in the state and/or society." J. L. Esposito, (ed.), "Islamist", *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 201

education, textbook contents have become more and more religious-based conveying non-inclusive material. Indeed, by rejecting, condemning and even sometimes attacking any other belief or even interpretation, as some examples will show, extremist messages are conveyed through education to sometimes very young kids in particular, and more generally, to the entire society.

For the sake of keeping the presentation brief, we will restrain it to two major countries in the region: Egypt and Saudi Arabia and in the case of Egypt, only on Al-Azhar¹² educational curriculum.

2. The example of Al-Azhar

In January 2015, just a few days before the Charlie Hebdo terror attacks in Paris, during a speech given at an official celebration of Islam's Prophet Muhammad's birthday, Mawlid el Nabawi, Egyptian President El-Sissi, called for a renewal of religious discourse, meant to confront extremist ideology.¹³ The Egyptian President called on the Awqaf Ministry (Religious Endowments) and Al-Azhar, the highest Sunni authority in the country, to do more to combat extremist ideology and promote a moderate understanding of Islam. During his speech, El-Sissi specifically called on Al-Azhar scholars to lead the process of revitalizing religious discourse in Egypt and confronting extremist ideology and incitement to violence. Later on, in January, El-Sissi said during the World Economic Forum held in Switzerland: "We should stop and change our religious rhetoric from faulty ideas which lead to (terrorism)," adding that this could only be achieved by scholars from Al-Azhar.¹⁴

However, later on, President El-Sissi has stated that Al-Azhar had failed to modify Egypt's religious discourse: "You are the one responsible for religious discourse", El-Sissi said to the official representatives of the institution, adding that "the role of clerics is not to give speeches in mosques, but to spread peace among humanity. [...] When I tackled the idea of a religious revolution, I didn't mean imposing [change through] violent actions, rather I

¹¹ Salafism is a Sunni religious movement advocating a return to religious and social practices in the Muslim community at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his first disciples, the pious ancestors (salaf). Part of its priorities is the moral reeducation of the Muslim community. Salafists have a strict literal reading of the founding texts of Islam, the Quran and the Sunnah. They reject Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) as well as so-called blameworthy innovations (bid'ah), and postulate that their interpretation is the only legitimate one. J. Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad: Salafi Jihadism and International Order*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 2014.

¹² This millennial institution is one of the main theological centers of Sunnism. It is both a Mosque and a center of education (schools, Universities and Higher Institutes).

¹³ W. Abdul Rahman, Egypt: Sisi calls for "renewal" of religious discourse, Asharq Al-Awsat English, January 2nd 2015, <http://english.aawsat.com/2015/01/article55340001/egypt-sisi-calls-for-renewal-of-religious-discourse>

¹⁴ World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, January 21-24 2015, Davos-Klosters, <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2015/sessions/egypt-world>

meant to revolutionize our thoughts in order to make them to fit the time and also to improve the image of Islam.”¹⁵

But why has El-Sissi talked about Al-Azhar in particular? Perceived by some in the West, as a moderate religious institution, Al-Azhar is seen by many intellectuals, politicians and even President El-Sissi, as having been partly responsible of vehiculating and spreading problematic messages to generation upon generation through their textbooks and curricula.

One of the most concrete examples would be the terminology used to describe the non-Muslim, varying from a more respectful and inclusive expression, Ahl el Kitab, People of the Book, to non-believers or infidels, kuffar. “Some of the texts studied by Sunni scholars at the university teach that Muslims should not allow “infidels” [kuffar] to build churches and that Christians should be forced to pay a special tax [jizya] or face death.”¹⁶

But Al-Azhar has been criticized for quite a few decades. Taha Hussein had already said, referring to this institution he knew from inside for having studied there, that it was a conservative, even retrograde, fortress, refusing to adapt to its century.¹⁷ And he knew what he was talking about since a group of Azhari ulama declared that he was an apostate because they considered that his work was against Islam.¹⁸

Farag Foda, a prominent intellectual¹⁹ and human rights activist, was assassinated on June 9 1992 by members of Islamist group al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya after being accused of blasphemy by a committee of clerics (ulama) at Al-Azhar University. They had adopted a previous fatwa by Al-Azhar. In this fatwa, Foda was accused, together with other secularist writers, of being “enemies of Islam”.²⁰ In a statement claiming responsibility for the killing, Foda who advocated a separation of religion from the state, was accused of being an apostate from Islam by the Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya who explicitly referred to the Al-Azhar fatwa. An Al-Azhar scholar, Mohammed al-Ghazali, later asserted as a witness before the court that it was not wrong to kill an apostate. Al-Ghazali said: “The killing of Farag Foda

¹⁵ El-Sisi says Al-Azhar has failed to renew Islamic discourse, Ahram Online, July 14th 2015, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/135369/Egypt/Politics-/ElSisi-says-AIAzhar-has-failed-to-renew-Islamic-di.aspx>

¹⁶ M. Samaan, N. Squires, ‘Thou shalt not kill’: Pope Francis urges Islamic leaders to reject violence carried out in the name of religion, The Telegraph, April 28th 2017,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/28/thou-shalt-not-kill-pope-francis-urges-islamic-leaders-reject>
¹⁷ T. Raineau, Mendiante et orgueilleuse ? L’université d’al-Azhar et l’enseignement supérieur égyptien (1860-1930), Enseignement supérieur, pouvoirs et mondialisation dans le monde arabe, 131 (June 2012), 111-126, <https://journals.openedition.org/remmm/7639?lang=en>

¹⁸ G. Naiem, Egypt’s Identities in Conflict: The Political and Religious Landscape of Copts and Muslims, McFarland, London, 2018, 185

¹⁹ Well known University Professor, writer and columnist.

²⁰ S. Bar, Warrant for Terror: The Fatwas of Radical Islam and the Duty to Jihad, Rowman & Littlefield, London, 2008, 16.

was in fact the implementation of the punishment against an apostate which the imam (the Islamic leader in Egypt) has failed to implement.”²¹

But as shown, this phenomenon is not at all new. It is just the fact that after the 2017 Palm Sunday’s terrorist attack in which 45 persons were killed in two churches, it has reached important media attention. And critics towards Al-Azhar have increased, since it is seen by many as having a direct and significant influence on pupils’ and society’s perception of the “Other” and therefore of the non-Muslim, the non-Sunni or in general anybody considered to have a deviant behaviour or belief. Numerous politicians, analysts or scholars agree that some of the conveyed messages can be directly interpreted as a “license to kill”.²²

Renown writer and thinker Dr. Khalid al-Montaser personally addressed to Al-Azhar, an article published in Egyptian newspaper El-Watan News.²³ He wonders how Al-Azhar could possibly continue to promote enmity for unbelievers or deviant -Sufis, Shiites, philosophers and Christians- and even continue to incite their murder. “Is it possible at this sensitive time—when murderous terrorists rest on texts and understandings of takfir,²⁴ murder, slaughter, and beheading—that Al-Azhar magazine is offering free of charge a book whose latter half and every page—indeed every few lines—ends with “whoever disbelieves [infidels] strike off his head”?”²⁵

This is indeed quite worrying since it is estimated that almost one fifth of the country’s undergraduates are enrolled in the Azhari system.²⁶ Indeed, the importance of Al-Azhar network since its 1961 reform by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser²⁷ has continuously been increasing in the country, having a greater impact on education and society. There are currently more than 2 million pupils enrolled in more than 9000 schools around the country, and almost half a million on students attending Al-Azhar University, Higher Institutes and research centres.

²¹ N. Darwish, *Cruel and Usual Punishment: The Terrifying Global Implications of Islamic Law*, Thomas Nelson, Edimburg, 2009, 144.

²² Angry debate in Egypt over reforms in Islam against radicals, Mail Online, April 26th 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-4446522/Who-speaks-Islam-reform-Debate-heats-Egypt.html>

²³ K. Montaser, Dear Sheikh of Al-Azhar ... Has Mohamed Emara become more important than the homeland?! (in Arabic), El-Watan News, February 1st 2015

<https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/65350>

²⁴ The takfir is a controversial concept in Islamist discourse which consists of declaring that someone is an unbeliever (kafir) and no longer Muslim. This is considered to be a death sentence.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Egypt, Institute of National Planning , *Egypt Human Development Report 2010: Youth in Egypt – Building Our Future*,

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/Egypt%20Human%20Development%20Report%202010.pdf>, 46

²⁷ This reform consisted in modernizing the institution and introducing secular faculties (Engineering, Medicine, etc.).

Since the 1960's, with the development and expansion of education in Egypt, Al-Azhar educational system has also parallelly developed throughout the country.²⁸ But this wouldn't stop there: although it is an Egyptian institution, Al-Azhar has a worldwide vocation in spreading and preserving its religion. Together with Azhari knowledge and know-how and funding, educational systems throughout most of Arab countries have been Islamized. Textbook contents have evolved. More diverse historical, linguistic or poetic references have progressively disappeared giving way to texts based on single and more restrictive religious sources, i.e. literal Islamic ones. This shift has inevitably led to a radicalization of minds and spirits, of both male and female pupils and students.

Messages of violence, rejection of the Other, perception and presentation of citizenship,²⁹ or even as we have seen above, texts calling for converting or killing the non-believers were becoming more and more common. With the development and expansion of education, they were affecting an increasing number of pupils from Primary and Secondary schools around most of Arab countries. And paradoxically, with girls' accession to education, they were more and more exposed to this restrictive and narrowing interpretation.

The combination of both a stricter islamization of educational contents³⁰, a narrower approach of religious texts and a lack of interactive pedagogy in which pupils and students would be encouraged to develop critical spirit, have logically and inevitably led to "an explosive mixture".

Without going into an exhaustive presentation of textbooks, here are some examples.

2.1. A passage stressing the religion's superiority over other religions, notably the People of the Book:³¹

Christians and Jews.

Both the Torah and the Gospels have been portrayed as distorted scriptures whose followers are infidels and are destined for hell,³² and are hypocrites: "the assistants of the

²⁸ Al-Azhar Higher Education system counts 87 Faculties, 15000 teaching centers and 500 000 students, <http://www.azhar.edu.eg/> In addition, Al-Azhar manages a national network of schools with approximately two million students. N. J. Brown, Post-Revolutionary al-Azhar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2011, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al_azhar.pdf, p. 4.

²⁹ E. Abdulhameed, Egyptian Education and Its Relationship to Citizenship Culture: Status and Prospects (in Arabic), Carnegie Middle East Center, 2012, 15–16; K. Khanekah, Education for Citizenship in Iraq (in Arabic), Carnegie Middle East Center, 2012, 16–17; M. Faour and M. Muasher, Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future, Carnegie Paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2011, 13, 14.

³⁰ Concerning Syria, see J. M. Landis, Islamic Education in Syria: Undoing Secularism, November 2003, http://joshualandis.oucreate.com//Islamic%20Education%20in%20Syria.htm#_ednref1

³¹ Y. Manor, Inculcating Islamist Ideals in Egypt, Middle East Quarterly, 22:4 (Fall 2015), <http://www.meforum.org/5480/inculcating-islamist-ideals-in-egypt>

³² At-Tarbiya ad-Diniya al-Islamiya, grade 1, part II, 2010, p. 22; idem, grade 1, part I, 2002, p. 1. (in http://www.meforum.org/5480/inculcating-islamist-ideals-in-egypt#_ftn9)

Jews and pagans are more dangerous since they are outwardly believers, but inwardly infidels. Therefore, the Muslims must beware them.”³³

2.2. Eating dead Jews, Christians and infidels halal if necessary

Perhaps one of the most dramatic episodes, was depicted in an article published in the Egyptian online newspaper Egypt Independent, belonging to the well-known media group Al-Masry Al-Youm, which title was: “Al-Azhar textbook: Eating dead Jews, Christians and infidels ‘halal’ if necessary”. In this article, based on Al-Azhar education textbooks, there are some quite violent and alarming texts:

“In the book “Persuasion in Resolving the Words of Abi Shoga” that takes after the Shafi School of jurisprudence, the author says a Muslim warrior may kill and eat infidel men, women and children if they were not warriors themselves.”³⁴

Indeed, it can be read in this 3rd Secondary Azhari education textbook, on page 256:

“We allowed the eating of the flesh of dead humans... under necessary conditions. It [dead human flesh] must not be cooked or grilled to avoid haram (wrongdoing)” ... “and he can kill a murtadd (apostate) and eat him. He can kill the married adulterer, the fighter, whoever gave up praying and whoever has a punishment on him even if the Imam did not give his permission for the killing.”

On the same topic, an Egyptian scholar, during a Prime-Time TV show, commented:

“[This textbook], taught to general high-school students mentions that those who don’t pray can be grilled and then eaten.”³⁵

3. The Case of Saudi Arabia

According to Bader El-Rashed, a Saudi writer and journalist, although school curricula, the religious curriculum in particular, were modified by the Ministry of Education, doubts remained, however, that religious education had been sufficiently modified given that the educational sector is believed to be mainly dominated by the conservatives.³⁶

³³ *ibid.*, grade 1, part II, 2010, pp. 9-15, 33; *idem*, grade 5, part II, 2010, p. 33; *idem*, grade 7, I, 2002, pp. 22, 25; Mubahathat fi Ilm at-Tawhid (an-Nabuwat) (Studies in Theology: Prophecies), al-Azhar, grade 10, 2002, pp. 28-31.

³⁴ Al-Azhar textbook: Eating dead Jews, Christians and infidels ‘halal’ if necessary, Egypt Independent, April 1st 2015, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/al-azhar-textbook-eating-dead-jews-christians-and-infidels-halal-if-necessary/>

³⁵ Egypt Salafist University: It's OK to kill unbelievers and eat them!, January 17th 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmsrBtRx1Pk>

³⁶ How Saudi Arabia is distancing itself from Islamic State, Al Monitor, September 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/originals/2014/09/saudi-arabia-deny-link-extremism-wahhabism.html#ixzz3n27PB5Xg>

Here are some examples of schools textbooks for Islamic Studies³⁷

3. 1. [PAGE 29] “Monotheism and Jurisprudence”, First Grade (6 years), 1426-1427, 2005-2006

My Religion is Islam

[...] Every religion other than Islam is false.

God said, “If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter, He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good).” (Qur'an 3:85)

Th 3. 2. [PAGE 30] “Monotheism and Jurisprudence”, First Grade (6 years), 1426-1427, 2005-2006

“For Discussion

What is the foundation of Islam?

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate words (Islam, hellfire):

Every religion other than _____ is false. Whoever dies outside of Islam enters _____.”³⁸

A little further on the same page, the 6 years old pupil can read and has to answer the following question:

“Give examples of false religions, like Judaism, Christianity, paganism, etc.

Explain that when someone dies outside of Islam, hellfire is his fate.”

Not only this kind of expressions and phrasing is not taught anymore, at least in Western Catholic schools, but it is quite concerning that 6 years old pupils are already given this kind of perception of the ‘Other’.

3. 3. [PAGE 49] “Monotheism and Jurisprudence”, Fourth Grade, 1425-1426, 2005-2006

Another example from Grade Four (9 years old):

“Question 5: Is belief true in the following instances:

³⁷ Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies: Arabic with English Translation, Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House with the Institute for Gulf Affairs, Washington, 2006, <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/TextbooksArabicExcerpts.pdf>

³⁸ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - Ministry of Education - Education Development – “Monotheism and Jurisprudence”, First Grade, 1426-1427, 2005-2006.

- a. A man prays but hates those who are virtuous.
- b. A man professes that there is no deity other than God but loves the infidels.
- c. A man worships God alone and loves the believers.”³⁹

3. 4. [PAGES 14, 15] “Monotheism, Hadith, Jurisprudence, and Qur'anic Recitation”, Sixth Grade, 1425-1426, 2005-2006

“It is not permitted to be a loyal friend to those who oppose God and His Prophet

Third: Whoever obeys the Prophet and accepts the oneness of God cannot be loyal to those who oppose God and His Prophet, even if they are his closest relatives.

The proof is in the Qur'an: “Thou wilt not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, loving those who resist Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). Allah will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the Party of Allah. Truly it is the Party of Allah that will achieve Felicity.” (Qur'an 58:22)

Lesson Instructions:

us, I am a Muslim and I will not accept any religion but Islam.

Loyal friendship means love and aid to God, His Prophet, and the believers in words and deeds. [...] It is forbidden for a Muslim to be a loyal friend to someone who does not believe in God and His Prophet, or someone who fights the religion of Islam. A Muslim, even if he lives far away, is your brother in religion. Someone who opposes God, even if he is your brother by family tie, is your enemy in religion.”

It would be legitimate to wonder what kind of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims are expected by these teachings.

4. Calls for a reform

We have witnessed many reform attempts in different countries.⁴⁰ But either they have not been able to get adopted or, when so, have rarely been implemented. They have anyway in most cases failed to curb fanaticism, extremism, and violence because these countries are still struggling with jihadism.

³⁹ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - Ministry of Education - Education Development – “Monotheism and Jurisprudence”, Fourth Grade, 1425-1426, 2005-2006.

⁴⁰ Mainly in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt or Morocco.

Paradoxically, in some cases, these curricula reform attempts have even strengthened the view that Islam, “the only true religion,” is considered indeed as being the beginning and end of national identity. In many Arab countries, any other identity, cultural, linguistic or religious, tends to be erased. In Egypt, this is the case for Coptic⁴¹ as well as for Nubian culture, history and heritage. “Nubian activists explicitly have referred to a ‘Process of de-Nubianization,’ one that includes resettling Arab groups in the lands to which Nubians wish to return; renaming these sites with Arabic place names; ‘pushing Nubians into Arabicization through biased educational curricula at the expense of their own languages and culture;’ providing inadequate political representation of Nubians in the Egyptian government; and finally, not upholding the obligation to protect Nubians from discrimination.”⁴²

Nesma Assem Mansour writes that her “[...]” study results show that the representation of Nubians, especially, in discussing the ancient Nubians in textbooks almost always appears within the discourses of power over Nubians. The dominant discourses include the discourse of superiority and othering, while legitimating power over Nubians for economic and security reasons. On the other hand, the discourses around contemporary Nubians are more inclusive and can be considered as attempts to positively represent Nubians through ‘mentioning’ their culture, histories, and displacement ‘problem’; however these attempts are rather superficial and do not capture the complexity of the Nubian case.”⁴³

Concerning Copts, Ehaab Abdou argues that in his “textual analysis of Egyptian history textbooks from 1890 until 2017 [he finds] that, with few exceptions—contrary to widely circulated speculations—Coptic history has consistently been included, but allocated a disproportionately smaller space vis-à-vis other eras. The analysis also illustrates how Copts are constructed as a largely persecuted and victimized people, with few contributions—implying a narrative arc of decline”.⁴⁴

Although the above mentioned examples are obviously not directly linked to radicalization, they are meant to reflect the place the ‘Others’ have in textbooks. What is furthermore interesting is that these ‘Others’, both Copts and Nubians, as well as Amazigh in Northern Africa countries,⁴⁵ are the pre-Islamic conquest indigenous people of these countries.

⁴¹ E. Saenz-Diez, La place des Coptes dans l’enseignement en Egypte, *Confluences Méditerranée* 75 (2010/4), 238, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-confluences-mediterranee-2010-4-page-91.htm#no10>

⁴² M. Janmyr, Nubians in Contemporary Egypt: Mobilizing Return to Ancestral Lands, *Middle East Critique* 25:2 (2016), 127-146, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19436149.2016.1148859>

⁴³ N. A. Mansour, Discourses around Nubians: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Egyptian Social Studies and History Textbooks, Submitted to International and Comparative Education Department In partial fulfillment of the requirements of Masters of Arts in International & Comparative Education, The American University in Cairo, May 2017.

⁴⁴ E. D. Abdou, Copts in Egyptian history textbooks: towards an integrated framework for analyzing minority representations, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 50:4 (2018), 476-507, <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F00220272.2017.1398352>

⁴⁵ Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

As we have previously seen, reformists and intellectuals would commonly stress on the necessity of “purging the curricula of erroneous interpretations and materials inciting to violence and extremism” and inculcating “moral values independently of religious ones.”⁴⁶ But religious, and even sometimes, political leaders, would commonly retort that it is only a problem of obsolescence: current curricula only need to be updated and adjusted to the spirit of the era, hence insinuating a formal problem. Content should not be deeply modified.

Calls to change the curricula involving “the elimination of passages calling for jihad⁴⁷ or the killing of polytheists”,⁴⁸ usually spark both vehement opposition and enthusiastic support. Detractors usually claim that the planned reforms could “undermine the Arab and Islamic identity of [the] curricula” or that it was a corollary of an U.S. plan.⁴⁹ Others usually oppose the reform on the grounds that “the teaching of moral values and the teaching of religion are inseparable, and both are anchored in Islam.”⁵⁰

In an article in the Egyptian newspaper, Al-Ahram, columnist Hazem Abdel-Rahman recently argued: “how can we expect national unity if we teach our children that their fellow countrymen ... are followers of a flawed faith, whose scriptures are [full of] mistakes and distortions?” Adding: “The [custom of] applying the term “infidel” to the followers of other faiths must be stopped, once and for all. This epithet is very dangerous, and constitutes a license to kill [the members of other faiths].”⁵¹

Reformists therefore call for refraining from teaching children anything that maligns the Christian and Jewish faith. Quran verses that stress the values of coexistence, mutual brotherhood, and cooperation among people, and those that stress the individual’s freedom to choose his faith, free from any kind of coercion must therefore be carefully picked out.

There is a strong and urgent necessity to renew the religious speech in general, and to review education programs throughout the Arab World.

⁴⁶ Purging the curricula of erroneous interpretations and materials inciting to violence and extremism.

⁴⁷ Although Jihad (which is a personal effort, struggle to follow the right path) has different meanings, it is most frequently associated with war. R. Jackson, *What is Islamic philosophy?*, Routledge, London, 2014, 173.

⁴⁸ Al-Misriya (Cairo), April 29th 2010; Al-Masri al-Youm (Cairo), May 3, 2010, in *Inquiry & Analysis* 608, The Middle East Media Research Institute, Washington D.C., May 7th 2010

⁴⁹ Al-Misriya, April 29th 2010, in *Inquiry & Analysis* 608

⁵⁰ Al-Jumhuriya (Cairo), April 30th 2010, in *Inquiry & Analysis* 608. Y. Manor, *Inculcating Islamist Ideals in Egypt*, *Middle East Quarterly*, 22:4 (Fall 2015), <http://www.meforum.org/5480/inculcating-islamist-ideals-in-egypt>

⁵¹ Al-Ahram, May 2nd 2010, in *Inquiry & Analysis* 608.

5. Examples of violent religious discourse

5. 1. From Al-Azhar

In May 2016, Sheikh Al-Azhar met with Pope Francis at the Vatican. Al-Azhar, said that El-Tayeb had accepted Francis' invitation in order to “explore efforts to spread peace and co-existence”.⁵² This encounter was very important, because it was the first one since the crisis that followed the Regensburg discourse given in 2006 by former Pope Benedict XVI.⁵³

Less than a month after the Vatican encounter, it seemed that the discourse was slightly different from a peace and coexistence one.⁵⁴ In a daily show aired on several Egyptian TV channels and posted on the official YouTube channel of Al-Azhar, it was said that “The four schools of law all concur that apostasy is a crime, that an apostate should be asked to repent, and that if he does not, he should be killed. [...] The concepts of human rights are full of ticking time-bombs” and in Muslim society, sexual liberty and homosexuality are diseases. “The problem is that the [Islamic and Western] civilizations are different. Our civilization is based on religion and moral values, whereas their civilization is based more on personal liberties and some moral values.”

Coming back to apostasy: “There are two verses in the Quran that clearly mention apostasy, but they did not define a specific punishment. They left the punishment for the Hereafter, for Allah to punish them as He sees fit. But there are two hadiths [on apostasy]. According to the more reliable of the two, a Muslim can only be killed in one of three cases, one of which is abandoning his religion and leaving the community.”

5. 2. From Mecca, praying around the Kaaba

During an aired public prayer in Mecca: “O Allah, grand victory, dignity and empowerment to our brothers Mujahideen (Jihadists) in Yemen, in Sham (Syria) and Iraq.

Grant them victory over the godless Rafidah (Shia Muslims). (bis)

Grant them victory over the treacherous Jews, and over the spiteful Christians.”⁵⁵

⁵² Top Muslim cleric and Pope embrace in historic Vatican meeting, Middle East Eye, 23rd May 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/top-imam-and-pope-embrace-historic-meeting-vatican-861586574>

⁵³ Regensburg lecture, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regensburg_lecture

⁵⁴ It was declared on a TV interview posted on the official Al-Azhar Youtube channel on June 16, that in Islam, unrepentant apostates should be killed. In Islam, Unrepentant Apostates Should Be Killed; Homosexuality Is a Disease, MEMRI, <https://www.memri.org/tv/sheikh-al-azhar-ahmad-al-tayyeb-islam-unrepentant-apostates-should-be-killed-homosexuality/transcript>

⁵⁵ Ibrahim Issa presents a video of the imam of the Haram al-Makki, who calls for a victory over the Shiites, Christians and Jews, Ibrahim Issa, Al Qahira wal nass, <https://www.facebook.com/660967007254709/videos/1184714154879989/>

5. 3. Examples of violent religious discourse in Western countries

We also have numerous examples of religious preaches or religious discourses in Western countries where some messages clearly call for non-integration and even for the use of violence. There are some of them who are star imams in France⁵⁶ having a great impact through Internet, with more than 30 million views of their “YouTube tutorials”.⁵⁷

Below are some examples. The first one is a “course” given to children about how listening to music is like listening to the devil and might change you into monkeys and porks. The second one is on how women who go out without hijab don’t have honor and should not be surprised of being used or abused by men. And finally the third given in Orlando⁵⁸ (FL) on is on how homosexuals should be killed. Those speeches were freely given in Europe and North America, even sometimes to young children ... Some may say that they don’t represent Islam, but as seen in Recommendations and conclusion,⁵⁹ there lies a fundamental point regarding the official representativity of Sunni Islam.

5. 3. 1. On Music (Brest, France, 2013) Imam Rashid Abou Houdayfa, Al-Sunna Mosque, children religious class

An example from Rashid Abou Houdayfa, imam of Brest, North Western city of France, in a class to children, was:⁶⁰

- “Allah, when he speaks about music in the Quran el Karim, he reminds us that it is the words of Shaitan (the devil). [...] Those who listen to music and to lyrics, whom do they listen to ... ?

- Shaitan

- Some people, because they have listened too much to Shaitan [...] will be devoured by the Earth. And they will be changed into monkeys and porks. [...] Those who like music, are those who in a certain way would like to be changed into monkeys and porks. Empty your phones and MP3 and substitute the music by the best thing: the Quran.”

⁵⁶ One of them is mentioned below.

⁵⁷ G. Kristanadjaja, Pourquoi ces 5 imams cartonnent sur YouTube, Libération, February 8th 2016, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/02/08/pourquoi-ces-5-imams-cartonnent-sur-youtube_1429862

⁵⁸ B. Richardson, Imam speaking in Orlando said gays should be killed ‘out of compassion’, The Washington Times, June 13th 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jun/13/farrokh-sekaleshfar-imam-speaking-orlando-said-gay/>

⁵⁹ See below, Recommendations and conclusion.

⁶⁰ Pour un imam de Brest, “la musique est la créature du diable”, Europe 1/Le JDD, September 25th 2015, <http://www.lejdd.fr/Societe/Religion/Pour-un-imam-de-Brest-la-musique-est-creature-du-diable-752701>

5. 3. 2. On Women and veil (Brest, France, 2013) Imam Rashid Abou Houdayfa, Al-Sunnah Mosque, Friday sermon⁶¹

“And where is your hijab when you go out? [...] How can a woman say that she is decent and go out without her hijab? The hijab is what makes women decent. And without decency, women don't have honor. And if a woman goes out without honor, then she should not be surprised that men, Muslims or non-Muslims, abuse her and use her as an object”.

5. 3. 3. On gays (Orlando, FL, USA, 2013) Sheikh Farrokh Sekaleshfar, the Hussein Islamic Center, Orlando

In Orlando, in a 2013 speech Sheikh Farrokh Sekaleshfar said this regarding gays:⁶²

“Death is the sentence. We know there's nothing to be embarrassed about this, death is the sentence... We have to have that compassion for people, with homosexuals, it's the same, out of compassion, let's get rid of them now.”

6. Islamic State's propaganda and communication skills

ISIS is using modern social networks and modern technologies. Contrary to Al Qaida, which presented very long and theological complex messages, the Islamic State's ones are more direct and quite fancier, interleaving religious references (Quran's verses and religious texts) between images and using sound and images effects that are more attractive to young people. It is clear that they spend a lot of money and time in their communication propaganda: films, English magazine Dabiq,⁶³ the French one Dar al-Islam⁶⁴ as well as the Turkish version, Konstantiniyye.⁶⁵

Although they obviously do not have a strong theological basis, these publications and quite advanced communication tools are obviously not only meant to be for propaganda, but mainly for recruitment of both women and men. And they were indeed quite successful in doing so.

Their films are not only limited to acts of claims or speeches, but often take the form of feature films. They are often built in the same way: extracts from Quran and prayers followed by scenes of extreme violence, mostly filmed by the jihadists themselves, showing their exploits. Another specificity of these films is that they are often aimed at a

⁶¹ Une femme sans voile « ne doit pas s'étonner que des hommes abusent d'elle » Rachid Abou Houdeyfa, <https://la-voie-de-la-raison.blogspot.com/2016/04/Rachid.Abou.Houdeyfa.html>

⁶² Gays Must Die Says Speaker At Orlando Mosque - WFTV 9 Orlando Report, YouTube, April 6th 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBlwxqqAprQ>

⁶³ Islamic State's (ISIS, ISIL) Horrific Magazine, Clarion Project, September 10th 2014, <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq>

⁶⁴ New issue of The Islamic State's magazine: “Dār al-Islām #10”, Jihadology, August 20th 2016, <http://jihadology.net/category/dar-al-islam-magazine/>

⁶⁵ “Kostantiniyye magazine”, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantiniyye_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantiniyye_(magazine))

Western audience, as shown by the use of English and the Hollywood style staging (special effects drone camera works, etc.).

Some of them are also meant for young women, offering them a secure environment, and lauding their role within the organization and their stories as wives, mothers and even martyrs.

Other videos show how ISIS is meant to build and secure, and not only destroy. And they are at least as frequent as those showing extreme violence. Their discourse of “building” and not just destroying shows them collecting taxes, providing security, administering justice, providing services and housing to citizens under ISIS’ control and to foreign immigrants. It is aimed to show a contrast with the anarchy, sectarian violence, and corruption characterizing much of Syria and Iraq in past years. They even show how they build new mosques.⁶⁶

They also use their “media” to claim responsibilities in the different terrorist attacks led in Western countries. They did it for Charlie Hebdo (January 2015), for the November 13th 2015 attacks in Paris (Bataclan, etc.) as well as for the more recent ones in Brussels (22nd of March 2016). It is interesting to show their dialectic and how they try to justify their attacks. They also give some religious and theological explanation of what is an apostate, in order perhaps to counteract the fact of killing “innocents” (Bataclan, Brussels’s airport and metro) or even Muslim civilians:

“Contrary to popular misconception, riddah (apostasy) does not exclusively mean to go from calling oneself a Muslim to calling oneself a Jew, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or otherwise. In reality, there are only two religions. There is the religion of Allah, which is Islam, and then the religion of anything else, which is kufr. Allah said, {Verily, the religion according to Allah is Islam} [Sourate Al-‘Imrān: 19], and He said, {And whoever seeks other than Islam as a religion, it will never be accepted of him, and he will be among the losers in the end} [Sourate Al-‘Imrān: 85]. So whatever is not Islam is not the religion according to Allah and it will never be accepted. Rather, it is the religion of losers in the end, which is kufr, as Allah said about the kāfirīn, {in the end, they are the losers} [Sourate An-Nahl: 109]. Therefore, anyone who falls into kufr has left Islam, even if he claims to be a Muslim. Ibn Hazm said, “There is no religion except Islam or kufr; whoever leaves one of them inevitably enters the other, as there is nothing in between them” [Al-Fisal].⁶⁷

This, somehow, reminds us of Ibn Khaldun, whom talking about Christians, said in the Muqaddimah: “We do not think that we should blacken the pages of this book with discussion of their dogmas of unbelief. [...] All of them are unbelief. This is clearly stated in

⁶⁶ A. M. Fernandez, ISIS Promotes Image Of Building, Not Just Destruction, MEMRI Daily Brief, July 2nd 2015, <https://www.memri.org/reports/isis-promotes-image-building-not-just-destruction>

⁶⁷ The Murtadd Brotherhood, Dabiq 14 (April 12th 2016), <https://www.clarionproject.org/docs/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>

the noble Qur'an. [...] It is (for them to choose between) conversion to Islam, payment of the poll tax, or death."⁶⁸ They even give History Class⁶⁹ and present a Film selection.⁷⁰

6. Role of social media and networks

Some experts ask to have a tighter control on social media and networks and exercise a tighter control of their content in order to limit violent messages which can easily lead to radicalization. Although the role of amplification and of being a free tribune to jihadists and radicals is obvious and has been proven, it is still very hard to do so.

The Recorded Future Internet security team found 60,000 pro-ISIS Twitter accounts in September 2014 despite the fact that their mere existence is a clear violation of Twitter rules.⁷¹ Six months later, a Brookings study found similar numbers.

A recent report in France has shown how social networks are a very important tool of communication and ideological expansion for these groups.⁷²

7. Recommendations and conclusion

Before proceeding to the conclusion, we would like to underline that for the sake of brevity, we have only taken into consideration and presented religious discourses calling for violence and discrimination towards the ones considered as non-believers, the other.

- Social networks play a fundamental role in propagating ideas and ideologies, and so is the case for Islamist or even jihadist ones. Hakim El Karoui, author of a recent report published by L'Institut Montaigne on the fabric of Islamism,⁷³ describes in detail how one of the keys to the attraction towards this discourse, is the successful passage of Islamists from the real world to the virtual one. Professing a break with the Republic and the "tares" of French society, they have succeeded in imposing themselves on the Net and social networks.⁷⁴ It shows, among other ideas, how with the power of fire and audience, social

⁶⁸ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, Pantheon, New York, 1958, 473-480.

⁶⁹ The Murtadd Brotherhood, *Dabiq 14* (April 12th 2016), <https://www.clarionproject.org/docs/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>

⁷⁰ *ibid*

⁷¹ A. M. Fernandez, *Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks* The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers 2015 (October 2015), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/10/combating-isis-propaganda-fernandez/isis-propaganda_web_english_v2.pdf

⁷² See below Recommendations and conclusion: social networks.

⁷³ H. El-Karoui, *La fabrique de l'islamisme*, Institut Montaigne, September 2018, <http://www.institutmontaigne.org/publications/la-fabrique-de-lislamisme>

⁷⁴ J. Chichizola, C Cornevin, *L'alarmante propagation de l'idéologie islamiste*, *Le Figaro*, September 9th 2018, http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2018/09/09/01016-20180909ARTFIG00153-l-alarmante-propagation-de-l-ideologie-islamiste.php?utm_source=app&utm_medium=sms&utm_campaign=fr.playsoft.lefigarov3

networks like Facebook or Twitter help propagate these messages of Internet and become a major tool of proselytism.⁷⁵

- Ten centuries after the question was raised, Islamic scholars still discuss the issue of knowing whether or not the door of *ijtihad* (the effort of interpretation) has been closed. The whole question is: can we, and to what extent, re-interpret the Quran? Islam is facing an epistemological dilemma: to what extent, or what margin do Muslims have in order to interpret or have a contemporary reading of a universal, non-created and revealed text, which is considered by Muslims as being the Word of God, not an inspired text.

- There is also a need of definition: what is “real Islam”? Often, after jihadist attacks, political and religious leaders proclaim that it is not “real Islam” but without saying what is real Islam. Since there is no clergy in Sunni Islam, the range of interpretation is wider than for instance in Catholicism where you have more “boundaries”. In Sunni Islam, several figures play the role of religious authority, but they are hardly institutionalized, and, above all, they are not hierarchically organized.

Concerning the doctrine, there is no single institution, such as a church having the monopoly of the religious domain, nor a class of consecrated individuals or interlocutors wholly dedicated to religious functions; one cannot, as in the case of Iran for example, speak only metaphorically of a “clergy”.

As for the interpretation of the corpus, in Islam, the texts of the Quran and of the Sunnah, or prophetic tradition, are those which are authoritative in a primordial way. But the interpreters of the texts differ on how to read them and to solve the questions they ask.

This multiplicity of actors and the lack of a single and recognized interlocutor make the task arduous.

- In Western countries, one first step would be to take judiciary measures towards the imams based in Western countries who have a closer control on schools, Fridays’ sermons, etc. and who teach or preach violence.

- We should encourage Muslim scholars, intellectuals or politicians, who are courageously asking for a reinterpretation of certain texts, knowing that it will be a difficult and long term work. Although quite numerous, they are an ultra-minority group comparing to the mainstream or the conservative ones. But it seems to be the only way in order to change minds.

This is exactly what Egyptian President El-Sissi has repeatedly being asking for⁷⁶ (i.e. purging religious discourse of extremist ideas, and reforming religious discourse) and as we have previously seen, has not been followed by the mainstream Religious Scholars.

⁷⁵G. Des Roseaux, S. Saulnier, Islamisme : un réseau propagandiste organisé et globalisé, Le Figaro, September 9th 2018, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2018/09/09/01016-20180909ARTFIG00149-un-reseau-propagandiste-organise-et-globalise.php>

- Of course, in Western societies we had in ancient times, and the Middle Ages, similar discourses, made by prominent politicians, Christian theologians, Churchmen, or thinkers. But for different reasons, notably theological ones, there has been a consensus in Western countries, on officially and unconditionally rejecting such ideologies.⁷⁷

We would like to conclude by saying that although some changes have been performed, unless a deep reform, and not only some cosmetic changes, of both curricula contents and pedagogy is achieved, there will be no substantial changes. “Attempting to address the question of intolerance, radicalization, and extremism in the Egyptian educational system must begin by addressing the very structure of that system and not merely changing curricula.”⁷⁸

During his 2017 speech at Al-Azhar University, the Pope insisted: “there will be no peace without an appropriate education of the younger generations. And there will be no appropriate education for young people today unless the education offered corresponds to the nature of man as an open and relational being. [...] Education offering respectful openness and sincere dialogue with others by recognizing their fundamental rights and freedoms, especially religious freedom, [...]”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Egypt's Sisi calls for purging religious discourse of extremist ideas, Ahrām Online , June 29th 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/232135/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-Sisi-calls-for-purging-religious-discourse-.aspx>

⁷⁷ This might not be true for certain Churches or “born again” ideology specially present in North America.

⁷⁸ S. Tadros, A Reform Agenda For Egypt, Hudson Institute, April 2nd 2015, <https://www.hudson.org/research/11187-a-reform-agenda-for-egypt>

⁷⁹ E. Saenz-Diez, Egypt: A Call for Openness, Europe-Infos 205 (June 2017), <http://europe-infos.eu/a-call-for-openness>