

# Islam and Egyptian Higher Education: Student Attitudes

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## Introduction

Too often educational planners, policy makers, and researchers consider educational change as primarily a function of techno-rational planning. However, the literature on education reform and planning increasingly illustrates the importance of historical, political, and socioreligious context in the process of reform.<sup>1</sup> In countries of the Islamic Middle East it is particularly critical to acknowledge the increasing salience of religion and religious movements when investigating social and political phenomena. To reduce Egypt's educational development to a mechanical exercise in rational planning without fully recognizing its religious and cultural dimensions is to tell an incomplete story. However, the conflicting visions and interpretations of Islam in Egypt have created a certain ambiguity in the country's education, as well as in other aspects of national thought and life. Egyptian universities, in particular, have emerged as important battlegrounds in the struggle to articulate a viable solution for a disunity of educational ideologies.

To examine the nexus between Islam and education in Egypt, a sample of 381 university students in Cairo were surveyed about their feelings toward the role of Islam in the state-sponsored universities. An analysis of their responses suggests the following: (1) at least among a literate urban (Cairene) student population, a heavy majority considers the national system of education to be too "Westernized"

the Islamic idiom acts as a common cultural reference for Egyptians in the education debate, interpretations of the key terms of this language are far from homogeneous.

#### Survey of Egyptian University Students

A study of this nature is of possible theoretical and empirical interest, as it demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between education and religion within Islamically oriented nations, even amid diverse interpretations of the Islamic vernacular. While various descriptive studies have been conducted on Egyptian education from perspectives of history and economic development, there is conspicuously little research in the English-speaking world on the function of religious culture within Egyptian education. As one of the largest and most important countries in the Middle East and Africa, Egypt is looked to by much of the region for direction in everything from mass media to religious interpretation. The influence of Egyptian educational policy certainly does not terminate at Egypt's borders, as its institutions of higher learning have influenced the development of education in many Islamic countries throughout the world. As other nations in the region emerge from their colonial experience and attempt to indigenize their educational systems, many look toward Egypt. A study of Egypt's national discourse on education might provide insight into a broad range of concerns shared by developing nations that have been marginalized by modernity and neocolonialism and that are now trying to revive and reinforce national culture through education.

In spite of the pervasive importance of socioreligious influences on national education in Egypt, only rarely have attempts been made to describe this relationship through systematic, empirical-based investigations. Public opinion and survey studies actuated in Egypt are limited by a whole host of factors, but primarily by the technical difficulties of conducting representative attitudinal surveys and by the tight restrictions placed on outside observers.<sup>2</sup> Although there is relatively open access to higher education in Egypt and few formal screening measures, national university students represent a socioeconomic cross section of mostly middle and upper classes. Egypt is still characterized by a high rate of illiteracy, effectively eliminating 50 percent of the population from higher education opportunities.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while the national university is a fertile ground in which to measure and observe important variable sociocultural relationships, caution is necessary in general-

<sup>2</sup> Bradley J. Cook, "Doing Educational Research in a Developing Country: Reflections on Egypt," *Compare* 28, no. 1 (1998): 93-103; Mark Tessler, *The Evaluation and Application of Survey Research in the Arab World* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987); Mark Tessler and I. Warriner, "Gender, Feminism, and Attitudes toward International Conflict: Exploring Relationships with Survey Data from the Middle East," *World Politics* 49: 250-81.

<sup>3</sup> Nader Fergany, *Strategic Issues of Education and Employment in Egypt* (Cairo: Al-Mishkat, 1995).

izing its relevance to the larger society. Generalizations drawn from any specialized segment of a population must always be treated with appropriate circumspection. However, student surveys in Egypt are arguably less suspect than those taken in North Atlantic countries because Egyptian students mirror parental attitudes more closely. Fewer age-related differences in lifestyle can be found between university students and parents since most students live with their parents and are subject to greater parental control than their counterparts in many other countries.<sup>4</sup>

Students constitute one of the most informed, energetic, and progressive elements of any society. By virtue of their youthful idealism, relative freedom from adult obligations, and acute political awareness, they present a critical mass that can influence the pace of social change. "Students as a stratum," writes Seymour Lipset, a noted observer of student movements, "are more responsive to political trends, to changes in mood, to opportunities for action than almost any other group in the population."<sup>5</sup> This observation unquestionably holds true for the Islamic Middle East in general and for Egypt in particular. Indeed, the relatively recent rise of Islamist ranks around the world has largely been sustained by the energy of secondary and university students. Studies done not only in Egypt, but other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, testify to the pivotal role of students in the politics of demonstration and protest.<sup>6</sup> Campus politics are becoming an increasingly important dimension of national politics; thus, the significance of politics in education cannot be overstated. Lipset comments that "any efforts to analyze the future of politics, whether domestic or international, will ignore the students at the peril of being in error."<sup>7</sup>

Egypt is no exception, having had a long history of student activism beginning with the establishment of Cairo University in 1908. Since that time, Egyptian universities have been the scene of some of the country's most intense social unrest and harshest state control. Several studies have been done on the turbulent history of conflict between Egyptian students and the state, but these are unfortunately dated by a decade or more. Student protest has taken on various forms over the years, with the nationalist movements of the 1930s and 1940s giving way to the leftist opposition in the 1960s and

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Sell, "International Affinities in Modern Egypt: Results from a Social Distance Survey of Elite Students," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (1990): 59–84.

<sup>5</sup> Seymour M. Lipset, "The Activists: A Profile," in *Confrontation: Student Rebellion and the Universities*, ed. Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol (New York: Basic, 1968), p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Abdallah, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt* (London: Al-Saqi, 1985); Hag-gai Erlich, *Students and University in Twentieth Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Cass, 1989); Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 423–53; Henry Munson, "The Social Base of Islamic Militancy in Morocco," *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 2 (1986): 43–60; M. Hermassi, "La Societe Tunisienne Au Miroir Islamiste," *Magreb-Machrek* 103 (1984): 82–91; Halim Barakat, *Lebanon in Strife* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Seymour M. Lipset, "The Possible Effects of Student Activism in International Politics," in *Students in Revolt*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 521.

1970s. Through the various stages of student political activism, the Islamic movement has been a consistent voice of opposition, gaining strength since the 1980s as a highly rational counterideology to Western-inspired influences refracted into Egypt's cultural and intellectual life.

One possible explanation for the visible role of Islam on university campuses is the awareness Egyptian students have of the dismal employment prospects that await them. In a study on Algeria, Peter von Sivers suggests that young people often cling to traditional beliefs as a means of self-protection against the failures and shortcomings of modern government schemes and periods of political and economic uncertainties.<sup>8</sup> Islamic social movements are symptomatic of the profound economic development and social change Muslim cultures are experiencing with the intrusion of modernity—particularly the Western variety. While recent economic and political strains have partial explanatory power over the Islamic movement in Egypt, it is also true that Islam has been a constant yet mercurial feature in the Egyptian polity as a basis of political legitimacy and as an ideal social order. Most studies done in the West have shown that university education is a strong corrosive agent of students' religious sentiments.<sup>9</sup> Recent studies of Islamically oriented countries, however, show that the university experience actually engenders religious attachment.<sup>10</sup> Gregory Starrett reiterates: "Contrary to the expectation of educational theorists who encouraged schooling as a remedy to 'traditional' mentalities, the growth of the secular education in Egypt has encouraged rather than discouraged attachment to Islamic culture and the rise of the Islamic Trend."<sup>11</sup>

Over 10 years ago, Donald Reid wrote a chronicle of Cairo University in which he noted, "The university had a secular tone from the start, but religious issues were never absent."<sup>12</sup> Reid's observation holds true not only for Cairo University, but for all national universities in Egypt. The American University in Cairo (AUC) might conceivably be an exception, but as a private liberal arts institution it is in a category distinct from the national universities. With a student body consisting mostly of the privileged elite, AUC is unrepresentative of higher education in Egypt. Even so, the secularism found at AUC is different in both form and magnitude from its secularist

<sup>8</sup> Peter von Sivers, "National Integration and Traditional Rural Organization in Algeria, 1970–80: Background for Islamic Traditionalism?" in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, ed. Said A. Arjomand (New York: State University of New York, 1984); see also Mark Tessler, "The Origins of Popular Support for Islamist Movements," in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa*, ed. John P. Entelis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Felman and Theodore Newcomb, *The Impact of College on Students*, vol. 1, *An Analysis of Four Decades of Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> Ninian Smart, "Three Forms of Religious Convergence," in *Religious Resurgence*, ed. Richard Antoun and Mary Hegland (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Starrett, "Our Children and Our Youth: Religious Education and Political Authority in Mubarak's Egypt" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1991), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 233.



interviews conducted by a nonnative researcher, both female and male Egyptians administered the questionnaires, indicating a knowledge of local conditions. Researchers who were native Egyptians were able to clarify any misunderstandings the respondents might have had and to refine the social relevance of the instrument. Questions were phrased in a near-colloquial language that could be understood by all social strata. Appropriate attention was given to rigor as the survey instrument was pretested and refined, and interviewers were carefully trained and monitored.

To protect those involved and to encourage freedom of expression, anonymity was assured. The questionnaire contained no information that could directly or indirectly lead to the identification of the respondent; therefore, name, address, or place of work was not requested or recorded when inadvertently mentioned by the respondent. In addition to collecting direct answers, interviewers were also instructed to gauge certain independent variables such as socioeconomic status and social orientation through various subjective indicators. Socioeconomic class was a difficult variable to determine with precision, but it could be inferred in a general sense from the occupation of the father. Other subtle clues were used to give a rough impression of the respondents' approximate socioeconomic level: upper class, middle class, or poor.<sup>14</sup> It is apparent from this and other data that the majority of higher education attendees in Egypt are drawn from the middle classes.<sup>15</sup>

stance, it is not the degree of religiosity of the respondent but rather his or her sociocultural orientation that is perhaps most useful in explaining the variance of attitudes toward educational policy in Egypt.

In assessing the respondents' normative sociocultural orientations, they were asked, "How would you align yourself in the current debate in education between the liberal forces and the traditional forces?" The respondents could answer (1) liberal (*mutaḥarir*), (2) traditional (*taqlīdī*), or (3) a mix (*khalīl*) of the two depending on the issue, thus intimating a possible moderate (*mi' tadīl*) position. The semantic connotations of the words *mutaḥarir* and *taqlīdī* imply one's commitment to social and cultural norms, not necessarily one's level of religious commitment. *Mutaḥarir* involves nuances closer to socially "modern" or "open minded." *Taqlīdī* denotes a position that is essentially "socially conservative."

#### Analysis and Findings

Statistically, 29.6 percent of the sample answered "traditional," 26.7 percent answered "liberal," and 43.7 percent considered themselves somewhere in between the two positions depending on the issue at hand (see table 1).

The intention was to administer the survey to as large a sample as possible across majors representing humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences. A total of 20 faculties were represented in the sample, with 22.3 percent from commerce, 19.6 percent from arts, 14.6 percent from medicine, 8.5 percent from law, and the remainder spread among other faculties. The average age of the sample was 22, with 41.2 percent in their third year at university (see table 2). This factor is significant because most of the re-

TABLE 2  
Student Year at University

Year	Frequency	%
1	37	10.0
2	78	21.1
3	152	41.2
4	81	22.0
5 (graduate student)	18	4.9
6 (graduate student)	3	.8

Note.—Frequency missing = 12.

spondents had had at least 2 years of experience at the university, ample time to form responsible and grounded opinions pertaining to the university culture.

#### Religious Instruction as Part of the National Curriculum

The survey results indicate that a majority of the respondents (73 percent) support religious instruction as a compulsory part of the state-sponsored national curriculum. Respondents were asked: “Should religious instruction be a required component of the Egyptian national curriculum?” The respondent could answer (1) “yes,” (2) “no, it should remain a private matter (*āmr shakhsī*),” or (3) “it should be maintained, but limited to extracurricular activities and not required.”

Religion is currently a requisite component of the national curriculum at the primary (*al-ibtidāʾī*), preparatory (*al-ī dādī*), and secondary (*al-thānūwī*) levels and is regulated by the Ministry of Education. Out of the 30 hours a week that students spend in school, 3 hours are dedicated to religious study at the primary level and 2 hours at the preparatory and secondary levels. Though once a subject on the *thānūwīyya ʿamma* exam (the qualifying exam for university admission), religion does not now figure in the overall score of the exam and is, therefore, not necessary for graduation. A distinction must be made between “ethical” or “civic” education, which involves teaching children tolerance, honesty, good citizenship, and so on (of which there is nearly unanimous agreement as to its importance), and religious education. While both are concurrently taught in schools, religious education in this sense is intended to reflect such things as the study of the Qur’an and the Sunna (sayings and actions) of the prophet Muhammad.

An additional 17.3 percent of the respondents indicated that while religious education should remain an offering in the schools, it should be limited to certain extracurricular activities and not required for graduation. Only a small minority (9.7 percent) regarded religious education as a private matter (*āmr shakhsī*) with no place in the state’s curriculum. It is clearly evident that religious education is perceived as an important, if not vital, com-



TABLE 3  
Religious Education in the National Curriculum

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic†			Orientation‡		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Traditional (%)
Yes	73.0 (278)	77.1 (175)	66.7 (102)	51.6 (49)	79.4 (158)	84.0 (68)	18.0 (18)	90.9 (149)	97.3 (108)
No	9.7 (37)	8.4 (19)	11.8 (18)	17.9 (17)	7.0 (14)	4.9 (4)	33.0 (33)	1.2 (2)	0.0 (0)
Limited	17.3 (66)	14.5 (33)	21.6 (33)	30.5 (29)	13.6 (27)	11.1 (9)	49.0 (49)	7.9 (13)	2.7 (3)
Total	100.0 (381)	59.7 (227)	40.3 (153)	25.3 (95)	53.1 (199)	21.6 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.7 (164)	29.6 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 = 5.046$ ; df = 2; probability = .080.

† Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 31.613$ ; df = 4; probability = .001.

‡ Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 219.181$ ; df = 4; probability = .001.

is perceived by many as being correct in principle, providing a good environment for moral development but offering an inferior education by not instilling the skills and knowledge needed for modern life. Critics of the Al-Azhar system often point to its mechanical transmission of knowledge, which is said to be primarily memorized without critical reflection.

#### Religious Education at the University

While the question discussed in the last section illustrates the importance the respondents attach to religious education in the state system, it does little to indicate whether the extent of religious education is sufficient in their minds. As stated earlier, the religious curriculum is mandatory only at the primary, preparatory, and secondary levels. No such requirement exists at the national universities. The glorious period for many believers was the first century of the Islamic era, when the Prophet Muhammad and the rightly guided caliphs presided over a society that strictly adhered to the spirit and letter of the Qur'an and Sunna. During this era, the Islamic empire thrived as the doctrine of *tawhīd*—the oneness of the material and the spiritual—was conserved and maintained. Education, during this era, was not considered an activity separate from religion. According to many Muslims, modern life has caused many, including whole governments, to stray. Most Egyptians regard Islam as essential at all levels of human intellectual development. Thus, it might be expected that Egyptians would support religious education not only at the lower levels of the state system but at all levels—including the university. To confirm this hypothesis, the sample was asked: "Given that religious education is required at the pre-university levels, is it enough, or should the requirement be extended to the higher levels of education?" The respondents were given the choice of (1) "religious instruction at the pre-university level is sufficient," or (2) "it should be extended to the higher levels."

Of those surveyed, 67.1 percent judged that a religious education requirement should be extended to the university level, while 32.9 percent felt that religious instruction at the preuniversity level was sufficient (see table 4). A difference was found between genders, with 73.4 percent of the males supporting the extension compared with 57.5 percent of the females. Both socioeconomic status and sociocultural orientation were associated with the response. Middle- and lower-class students were disproportionately more supportive of the religious education extension (75.8 and 75.3 percent, respectively) than were elite students (only 43.2 percent), which implies that there might be an inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and religiosity. Those classifying themselves as socially "moderate" or "traditional" Muslims were highly supportive of religion being offered at the higher levels of education, with 88.3 and 91.0 percent, respectively, in

TABLE 4  
Religious Education Extended to the University

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic†			Orientation‡		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Tradi- tional (%)
Sufficient	32.9	26.5	42.5 (65)	56.8 (54)	24.2 (48)	24.7 (20)	93.0 (93)	11.7 (19)	9.0 (10)
Extend	67.1 (255)	73.4 (166)	57.5 (88)	43.2 (41)	75.8 (150)	75.3 (61)	7.0 (7)	88.3 (144)	91.0 (101)
Total	100.0 (380)	59.6 (226)	40.4 (153)	25.4 (95)	52.9 (198)	21.7 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.6 (163)	29.7 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 10.542$ ; df = 2; probability = .005.

† Frequency missing = 7;  $\chi^2 = 34.975$ ; df = 4; probability = .001.

‡ Frequency missing = 7;  $\chi^2 = 231.541$ ; df = 4; probability = .001.

favor. However, only 7.0 percent of the liberal students supported the same position.

Somewhat noteworthy was the negative association of the respondents' age to supporting the extension; 70 percent of the students sampled who were in their first year supported extending some sort of religious requirement to the university curriculum compared with 61.7 percent of the fourth-year cohort. However, this association could perhaps be explained by the antiestablishment positions typically adopted by younger generations. The greater demands toward the "Islamization" of higher education could express a trend of student culture in general, particularly among younger students.

Some of the more conservative respondents not only felt that religion was an important subject of study at all levels of education but felt that the state was actually failing to provide adequate religious preparation for children. As a result, many drew a link between the current state of social decay and economic dependency of Egypt and the lack of spirituality in the educational system.

#### Islam and the National Education System?

To push the issue further, it seemed important not only to ascertain whether Egyptian students felt that a religious curriculum component should be included at the university level, but also to find out what they thought about a more comprehensive Islamic approach to all facets of university learning. Creating an educational system based on Islamic principles while also accounting for the modernizing needs of contemporary society has been the subject of several World Conferences. These conferences have aimed at removing the dichotomy of religious and secular education from the current educational systems of Islamic countries.<sup>19</sup>

Those calling for Islamization of education consider it one of the keys to the revitalization of Islam. The conferences have resulted in a comprehensive collection of theory and practical recommendations for Islamic education. However, as comprehensive as the conferences have been in formulating important philosophical foundations, only a few isolated examples of successful Islamicized educational systems can be cited.<sup>20</sup> Islamic institu-

<sup>19</sup> Syed Muhammad Al-Naqib Al-Attas, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (Jeddah: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979). The 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca had a defining effect on the development of Islamic education and inspired an Islamic education series published by Hodder and Stoughton: books in this series include *Crisis in Muslim Education; Muslim Education in the Modern World; Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective, Philosophy, Literature and the Fine Arts; Curriculum and Teacher Education; and Education and Society in the Muslim World*. Also in the wake of the conference, several follow-up conferences, symposia, and seminars have been held in Islamabad (1980), Dhaka (1981), Jakarta (1982), Islamabad (1982), Kuala Lumpur (1984), Khartoum (1987), Cairo (1989), Qusantinah, Algeria (1989), and Amman (1990).

<sup>20</sup> Iran is perhaps the only real example of a state having achieved an "integrated" Islamic school system. The secular-religious dichotomy remains in varying degrees, even in the most staunch Islamic

tions have the distinct mission of approaching knowledge from the metaphysics of the Qur'an and the Sunna as they strive for integration of secular and religious instruction. Even Al-Azhar, "that ancient bulwark of conservatism," can point only to limited success in eliminating the secular-religious dichotomy.<sup>21</sup> "Despite a widespread and sometimes deep consciousness of the dichotomy of education," writes Fazlur Rahman, "all efforts at a genuine integration have been largely unfruitful."<sup>22</sup> Thus, by and large, no system has really provided a model that is completely satisfactory from a Muslim perspective.

The respondents were asked, "How would a university with a more Islamic orientation influence your education?" The question was clarified by giving hypothetical examples: "What if history, biology, finance, English literature, etc. were taught from an Islamic perspective?" Students could choose one of three answers: (1) "It would affect my education positively," (2) "negatively," or (3) "not at all." A 67 percent majority had a positive association with a comprehensive Islamic approach to their education, while only 22 percent answered a negative relationship. The remaining 11 percent answered that it would have no effect at all on their education (see table 5).

A much larger percentage of males than females responded that their education would benefit from a more Islamic orientation (72.7 and 58.2 percent, respectively). Socioeconomic status also appeared to be a factor, with more than 71 percent of students in the lower classes responding that a university education with a more Islamic outlook would be beneficial. Only 49.5 percent of the elites answered the same way.

Those categorized as socioculturally "traditional" expressed more positive responses, with 94.6 percent considering the prospect beneficial. A large majority (81.7 percent) of the "moderates" also considered an Islamic orientation positive, while only 10 percent of the "liberals" did. Most liberals (75.0 percent) responded that a university education with more of an Islamic climate would have negative repercussions.

#### Student Attitudes toward Western Influences in Education

President Hosni Mubarak has recognized the political expediency of developing educational policy that accommodates national culture. Western influences and the Islamic resurgence have brought to the forefront of the Egyptian consciousness issues such as identity, cultural authenticity, Western domination, and modernization. In various public discourses, Mubarak has

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states such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Sudan. This is a possible indication of the extreme difficulty of putting Islamic educational theory into practice.

<sup>21</sup> Abdul Latif Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (London: Luzac, 1972), p. 120.

<sup>22</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 130.

TABLE 5  
Islamization of Curriculum

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic <sup>†</sup>			Orientation <sup>‡</sup>		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Traditional (%)
Positively	67.0 (255)	72.7 (165)	58.2 (89)	49.5 (47)	71.4 (142)	74.1 (60)	10.0 (10)	81.7 (134)	94.6 (105)
Negatively	22.0 (84)	16.3 (37)	30.7 (47)	41.0 (39)	16.1 (32)	16.1 (13)	75.0 (75)	4.9 (8)	.9 (1)
No effect	11.0 (182)	11.0 (25)	11.1 (17)	9.4 (9)	12.6 (25)	9.9 (8)	15.0 (15)	13.4 (22)	4.5 (5)
Total	100.0 (381)	59.7 (227)	40.3 (153)	25.3 (95)	53.1 (199)	21.6 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.7 (164)	29.6 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 11.479$ ; df = 2; probability = .003.

<sup>†</sup>Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 26.025$ ; df = 4; probability = .001.

<sup>‡</sup>Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 242.331$ ; df = 4; probability = .001.

emphasized the need for “radical reform” (*al-aṣlāh al-jidrī*) within education to assimilate modern skills while also embracing attitudes and outlooks more in tune with those of the society as a whole. As a result, the Ministry of Education has redesigned its policies to accentuate indigenous Egyptian culture at all levels of education. The National Project was designated to (1) reinforce Egyptian national identity (*al-hūwīyya al-qawmīyya*) through the study of Egyptian historical heritage, (2) reaffirm the study of the Arabic language (*al-luḡhat al-ʿarabīyya*), and (3) raise the profile of religious values (*al-qīyam al-dīnīyya*).<sup>23</sup>

A secondary objective of the present study was to measure whether Egyptians consider the National Project as being successful in affirming Egyptian cultural heritage or whether they believe that it reflects more Western paradigms of thought. Political elites in Egypt are sympathetic to certain Western ideals and ways of thinking, but media coverage reveals that many Egyptians feel the National Project gives lip service to Egypt’s cultural heritage but falls short of its stated goals and intentions. An abundance of critical editorials, articles, and books indicate that many Egyptians detect a value system in the national curriculum that does not reflect the national cultural ethos. In this instance, respondents were queried: “Do you agree with those who say that schools are becoming too Westernized and should be more Islamic?”<sup>24</sup>

Most of those interviewed (67.5 percent) agreed that the existing system of education is indeed too Westernized and in need of a more Islamic essence (see table 6). The difference in opinion between genders was significant: 74.9 percent of the males surveyed judged the system too Westernized, compared with 55.6 percent of the females. There was also an association between students’ socioeconomic status and their responses: Only 45.3 percent of elites agreed that the system was too liberal, while 72.9 and 79.0 percent respectively of the middle and lower classes concurred. Religious orientation also provided a differing range of opinions. Of those classifying themselves as “liberals,” only 13.0 percent agreed that the system was too Westernized, while most of their “moderate” and “traditional” peers agreed with this position (83.5 and 91.9 percent, respectively).

Many educators and students expressed how uncomfortable they were with certain subjects as presently taught in their institutions, and in-depth interviews with students revealed some interesting opinions. Most disciplines at the university remain essentially those inherited and imported from the West. Mahmud Faksh, in his study on education and national integration in Egypt, has written of “the struggle between two ideological orientations”

<sup>23</sup> Arab Republic of Egypt, *Mashrūʿ Mubārak al-Qawmī: Injāzāt al-Tāʾīm fi ʿArbaʿ Aʿwām* (Mubarak’s national project: Educational achievements in four years) (Cairo: Al-Ashraf, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> The word chosen to further clarify the question was *mutafarnija*, a recognized colloquial term for “Westernized” or “Europeanized.”

TABLE 6  
Excessive Western Influences on Education

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic <sup>†</sup>			Orientation <sup>‡</sup>		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Tradi- tional (%)
Agree	67.5 (257)	75.3 (171)	55.6 (85)	45.3 (43)	72.9 (145)	79.0 (64)	13.0 (13)	83.5 (137)	91.9 (102)
Not Agree	32.5 (124)	24.7 (56)	44.4 (68)	54.7 (52)	27.1 (54)	21.0 (17)	87.0 (87)	16.5 (27)	8.1 (9)
Total	100.0 (381)	59.7 (227)	40.3 (153)	25.3 (95)	53.1 (199)	21.6 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.7 (164)	29.6 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 = 16.494$ ; df = 2;  $p = .0001222$ .

<sup>†</sup> Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 = 16.494$ ; df = 2;  $p = .0001222$ .

<sup>‡</sup> Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 = 16.494$ ; df = 2;  $p = .0001222$ .

TABLE 7  
University Education through an Islamic Perspective

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic†			Orientation‡		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Tradi- tional (%)
Yes	26.0 (99)	30.0 (68)	20.3 (31)	12.6 (12)	23.1 (46)	48.1 (39)	1.0 (1)	11.6 (19)	69.4 (77)
No	26.2 (100)	20.3 (46)	35.3 (54)	49.5 (47)	19.6 (39)	17.3 (14)	84.0 (84)	8.5 (14)	1.8 (2)
Some	47.8 (182)	49.8 (113)	44.4 (68)	37.9 (36)	57.3 (114)	34.6 (28)	15.0 (15)	79.8 (131)	28.8 (32)
Total	100.0 (381)	59.7 (227)	40.3 (153)	25.3 (95)	53.1 (199)	21.6 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.7 (164)	29.6 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 =$

creating a form of compartmentalization of knowledge, one “traditional religious” and the other “modern secular,” in the minds of students.<sup>25</sup>

Since the first World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977, there have been attempts to integrate various disciplines with an Islamic *weltanschauung*. Subjects in the humanities and social sciences are more vulnerable to Western influence than are those in the hard sciences, but tremendous energy has been exerted in the Islamization of knowledge in all academic disciplines.<sup>26</sup> The question was posed to the respondents: “Do you feel that subjects at the university should be taught through an Islamic perspective?” Answer options ranged from (1) “Yes,” (2) “No,” to (3) “Some subjects should while others no.” Most students interviewed were not opposed to learning Westernized subjects, but most of them considered it a means of cultural defense. When asked whether subjects at the university should be taught through an Islamic perspective (*munzūr islāmī*), 73.8 percent of the students polled answered yes in some form (see table 7).<sup>27</sup>

Only 26.2 percent answered that academic subjects studied at the national universities should not be taught through an Islamic framework. Of those supporting the teaching of some or all university subjects through an Islamic outlook, more were males than females (79.7 percent as opposed to 64.7 percent), underscoring again that women in this survey exhibited less conservative attitudes than men. Students from lower socioeconomic classes and more traditional perspectives tended to exhibit stronger feelings that university subjects should be taught through an Islamic viewpoint than those from elite and more liberal orientations.

Those proposing a greater infusion of Islamic education into the national universities are not merely suggesting more courses on Islamic thought and theology. At least 25 percent of those interviewed wanted a transformation of the entire curriculum to make it compatible with Islamic life and morality.

While some desire a university education completely imbued with an Islamic educational philosophy, others simply want a curriculum that is an accurate reflection of history and culture, not some unrecognizable Western version. Even Egyptian Christian intellectuals, like Rafik Habib, recognize the importance of religious instruction in crystallizing Egypt’s identity. “We are living in a disturbed state,” Habib has insisted: “In the West it is law that

<sup>25</sup> Mahmud Faksh, “The Consequences of the Introduction and Spread of Modern Education: Education and National Integration in Egypt,” *Middle East Studies* 16, no. 3 (1977): 42–55.

<sup>26</sup> Organizations involved in Islamicized curriculum design are the Islamic Academy in Cambridge, England; the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, Virginia; and the Institute of Islamic Education and Research of Bangladesh in Dhaka. The periodical *Muslim Education Quarterly* regularly publishes papers on the Islamization of knowledge, as does the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*. Hodder, Stoughton and King ‘Abd al-Aziz University have produced a series of books related to the Islamization of a wide range of subjects: *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective*; *Philosophy, Literature, and Fine Arts*; *Curriculum and Teacher Education*; and *Education and Society in the Muslim World*.

<sup>27</sup> Of the 73.8 percent, only 26.0 percent answered an uncategorical “yes,” while 47.8 percent felt that only “some” subjects should be taught through an Islamic perspective.

organizes society, here it is religious doctrine and social networks. Our history now is the Western version of our history. It becomes very difficult to know yourself. When we read about us in Western histories, it is not us.”<sup>28</sup>

As the data clearly demonstrate, many respondents feel there is considerable room to incorporate more Islamic influences at their universities. However, not all Egyptians feel this way. In fact, according to the survey, 26.2 percent of those interviewed considered the university an inappropriate place for religious instruction. Some people insisted that if students desired more religion in their education, they could opt to attend Al-Azhar University, an institution with a distinctly religious mission. The national universities, some argue, should provide an objective and nonpartisan education, without the baggage of religious dogma. When asked whether subject matter should be taught through an Islamic perspective, some doubted whether it was even possible to teach certain subjects through an Islamic lens. For instance, the hard sciences and mathematics, because of their cultural neutrality, pose interesting challenges to those wanting to “Islamicize” them. Dr. ‘Abd al-Fatah Galal, an educational advisor to President Mubarak, related in an interview, “I do not believe in an Islamic approach to education. How do you teach chemistry, for example, through an Islamic perspective? Chemistry is chemistry.”<sup>29</sup>

Most, however, spoke in terms of adopting a middle ground, or as one academic put it, “catching the bar in the middle.” Nearly half of the respondents (47.8 percent) felt that at least some of the disciplines offered at the national universities could benefit from an Islamic outlook. Most of the respondents who were interviewed clearly felt that Islam has an unexplored but circumscribed or moderating role at the university. A university education, in the opinion of many, should seek to strengthen rather than undermine faith by providing a climate of belief. Few suggest that the national universities should pattern their curriculum offerings after Al-Azhar. Apparently they realize that a balance must be struck between gaining the skills necessary for modern life and instilling morals and righteous living.

#### Student Perceptions of Academic Freedom

Since the days of Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser, political interference at the national universities has been nearly routine, an irritating source of grievance for many in the academic community. Censorship in various forms (and often with the collusion of presidents, deans, and other administrators) has historically been commonplace, particularly for those with politically dissident voices. Though public universities are a venerated bastion of free ex-

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Hammond, “The French Connection,” *Cairo Times* (February 18, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the author, January 29, 1998. However, even the most neutral of sciences have proponents pushing an Islamic agenda. Some have even spoken about “

pression in the West, Egyptian national universities have often been the setting for suspensions, dismissals, and even imprisonment for academics and students. Egypt is certainly not alone in a region where “academic freedom remains a rare commodity,” but it is certainly the most visible because of its pivotal position politically and culturally.<sup>30</sup> Since education in all countries is an indispensable tool for supporting the goals of the state and constructing national myths, most governments maintain tight control over all levels of the educational system. The Egyptian state is particularly wary of university students because of their energy and potentially damaging visibility. Further, students can be important agents for social and political change since they are likely to be government leaders of tomorrow.<sup>31</sup>

This can be particularly threatening to political elites in a quasi-police state like Egypt. Education in Egypt is highly politicized, and the state frequently leverages its control over organizations representing university students. An equally virulent form of academic censorship in Egypt relates to critical research on topics of religion. As the state seeks to suppress opposition in any form, Islamic extremists have invoked their own narrow definitions of acceptable research and scholarly pursuits in the name of morality. This has led to banning books, censoring films, and even sanctioning physical attacks on secular intellectuals. Secular proponents must be extremely circumscribed in discussing their opinion of Islam or its representatives in public. Secularists who venture critical expression must do so with extreme caution and moderation. They often must qualify their words with an apology or with an explanation that their thoughts are not meant to attack religion but merely to remove some of the dust that may have accrued over generations.

The university environment, generally a refuge for academic pursuits, has been a casualty in the highly charged religious environment of Egypt. Thus, the academic community, including students, must navigate a tight intellectual course as they write and express themselves. Political critique and socioreligious criticism are minefields laid by two different social groups whose interests seldom overlap. In such an environment of fear, some intellectuals have given up on certain types of creative expression and inquiry. A form of self-censorship is occurring as academics either avoid sensitive issues for fear of penalty or choose to water down their scholarship to accommodate the tight censorship margins.

To what extent, then, is academic freedom limited in Egyptian higher education, and in what forms do those limitations take? The sample was

<sup>30</sup> Joe Stork and S. Niva, *Academic Freedom in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Research and Information Project, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Tessler (n. 2 above); Sell (n. 4 above); Raymond A. Hinnebusch, “Children of the Elite: Political Attitudes of the Westernized Bourgeoisie in Contemporary Egypt,” *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 4 (1982), 535–61.

TABLE 8  
Academic Freedom

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic <sup>†</sup>			Orientation <sup>‡</sup>		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Tradi- tional (%)
		Yes	30.3 (115)	27.0 (61)	35.3 (54)	33.7 (32)	32.3 (64)	22.2 (18)	47.0 (47)
No	69.7 (265)	73.0 (165)	64.7 (99)	66.3 (63)	67.7 (134)	77.8 (63)	53.0 (53)	71.8 (117)	81.1 (90)
Total	100.0 (380)	59.6 (226)	40.4 (153)	25.4 (95)	52.9 (198)	21.7 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.6 (163)	29.7 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 2;  $\chi^2 = 2.976$ ; df = 1; probability = .085.

<sup>†</sup>Frequency missing = 7;  $\chi^2 = 3.384$ ; df = 2; probability = .184.

<sup>‡</sup>Frequency missing = 7;  $\chi^2 = 20.273$ ; df = 2; probability = .001.

TABLE 9  
Sources of Pressure

	Percent
Politics	60.0 (237)
Religion	32.2 (127)
Self	4.8 (19)
Other	3.0 (12)
Total	100.0 (395)*

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Accounts for multiple answers.

asked, “Do you feel as a student that you are allowed an acceptable amount of academic freedom? Yes or no.” The survey indicates that the perceived lack of academic freedom was felt uniformly across the various socioeconomic strata. Those with more “moderate” or “traditional” orientations, however, felt much more constrained in their ability to express themselves (71.8 and 81.1 percent, respectively) than did those classified as “liberal” (53.0 percent; see table 8).

If respondents answered that they have experienced insufficient academic freedom, a clarifying question followed: “If no, the pressures are coming from where?” Four options were made available: (1) “Political sensitivity (government),” (2) “Religious sensitivity,” (3) “Self censorship,” or (4) “Other.” After several months of observation, it became manifestly clear that the risk of dissent at the national universities comes not only from a politically repressive government but also from a puritanical Islamist right. Nearly 70 percent of the students were of the opinion that their campuses did not provide an acceptable amount of academic freedom, with 60 percent of them attributing this deficit to a sensitive political environment (see table 9).

#### The *Hijāb* at the University

One of the most controversial and contested debates in recent educational history concerns the Ministry of Education’s policy against the *hijāb* (head covering) in schools. The *hijāb* is important in Islamic society both as a symbol of a woman’s commitment to God and as a form of protection from the unwanted advances of men. In July 1994, the minister of education, Hussein Kamal Baha Eddin, imposed a controversial policy limiting the prevalence of the *hijāb* in schools and universities and in so doing touched a sensitive public nerve. It is quite clear to observers of contemporary Egyptian society that the *hijāb* has broad-based support crossing a wide strata of social classes and age groups. Certain studies estimate that as many as 80–90 percent of Egyptian women wear the *hijāb*.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Aymen Khalifa, “Patriarchy Reexamined,” *Civil Society* (March 1996), pp. 22–24.

Most of those women who wear the *hijāb* attest that apart from their religious convictions, the *hijāb* is an important aspect of their ability to work. A woman in a *hijāb* is protected from the indignities that often accompany certain public spaces. To these women the *hijāb* is liberating and has a humanizing effect in a world that often objectifies them. “Part of the effort of a working female,” one Egyptian woman wrote, “is to protect herself against the endless ordeal of sexual harassment.”<sup>33</sup> The *hijāb* allows women to carve out a legitimate public space for themselves. Dressing as a “virtuous sister,” a woman has a choice: “either looking secular, modern, feminine and passive, or becoming a religieuse, hence formidable, untouchable and silently threatening.”<sup>34</sup>

However, the *hijāb* is perceived by many officials in Egypt as an overt manifestation of political Islam. Hence, one of the express intentions of the minister’s 1994 decree was to “prevent extremists from infiltrating schools and forcing upon students a so-called Islamic costume, which reflected a political—not a religious—identity.”<sup>35</sup> The move triggered an immediate and fierce response from the general public. The minister stubbornly defended his policy in spite of intense criticism. Most Egyptians consider wearing the *hijāb* to be divinely ordained, and challenging it only made the minister appear hostile to Islam. Support for the *hijāb* came from the grassroots level, but it was also underscored and reinforced by the religious leadership.<sup>36</sup> As Islam is becoming more visible on university campuses around Egypt, do students desire a certain forced Islamic milieu in order to create a more compatible atmosphere for Islamic cultural mores? To better understand where university students stand on the issue, they were asked, “Should women be required to wear the *hijāb* while on university campuses? Yes or no.” While the majority of the sample thought women should wear the *hijāb*, few (27.8 percent) felt they should be forced to do so (see table 10).

More males (32.6 percent) than females (20.9 percent) felt women should be required to wear the *hijāb* while on campuses. Many Egyptians consider the bare head of a woman to be indecent and sexually provocative, stirring up unwelcome temptations. Some men want women to wear the *hijāb* so they will not inadvertently commit the sin of lust. Most students, however, felt women should be left alone in their choice. The survey indicates that the lower the economic status of the students, the more likely they would be to support an *hijāb* policy on university campuses. Not surprising was the fact that 100 percent of those calling themselves “liberal” rejected an imposed

<sup>33</sup> Fadwa El Guindi, “Veiled Activism,” *Femmes de la Mediterranee Peuples Mediterraneens*, no. 22–23 (1983), p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Hussein Kamal Baha Eddin, “The Unveiling,” *Al-Ahram Weekly* (August 10, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Roweida Youssef, “Tantawi Still Isn’t as Vitriolic as Gad Al Haq,” *Middle East Times* (May 22, 1997), p. 5. See also Bradley J. Cook, “Egypt’s National Education Debate,” *Comparative Education* 36, no. 4 (2000): 477–90.

TABLE 10  
*Hijab at the University*

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic†			Orientation‡		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Tradi- tional (%)
Yes	27.8 (106)	32.6 (74)	20.9 (32)	9.5 (9)	26.1 (52)	51.8 (42)	0.0 (0)	9.8 (16)	78.4 (87)
No	72.2 (275)	67.4 (153)	79.1 (121)	90.5 (86)	73.9 (147)	48.1 (39)	100.0 (100)	90.2 (148)	21.6 (24)
Total	100.0 (381)	59.7 (227)	40.3 (153)	25.3 (95)	53.1 (199)	21.6 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.7 (164)	29.6 (111)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 = 6.203$ ; df = 1; probability = .013.

† Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 39.793$ ; df = 2; probability = .001.

‡ Frequency missing = 6;  $\chi^2 = 208.104$ ; df = 2; probability = .001.

*ḥijāb* requirement, while 78.4 percent of those who listed themselves as “traditional” supported such a requirement.

Generally, a greater level of social conservatism was found among students in fields such as medicine, engineering, and law. This is interesting because these fields have a higher social definition and status, and thus are usually reserved for the brightest and best students, based on the *thānūwiyya ʿāmma* (required general secondary certificate examination) score. This does not imply that students who have more socially conservative dispositions are not among the best and brightest: they clearly are. The students with higher economic status are generally found in the more coveted fields because they have greater opportunities to prepare well academically for the qualifying examinations, being able to afford higher quality secondary education through private lessons. Students from lower social classes tend to be found in the humanities and social sciences since they generally score lower on the *thānūwiyya ʿāmma* (having had less opportunity for supplemental academic assistance), keeping them from the more prestigious faculties. The faculties of Medicine, Engineering, and Law, faculties with traditionally elitist reputations, now include some of the most socially conservative students on university campuses, but not the poorest. More of these students tend to be middle class, a demographic that is consistent with Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s membership profile of Islamic activists.<sup>37</sup>

Students in these faculties appeared to have the strongest achievement motivation of any student groups, but without the economic advantages of the higher elites. The brightest students from the middle and upper part of the lower classes appear to find ways to succeed despite economic disadvantages. Elite students tend toward such faculties as Economics, Political Science, and Communications, which exhibit more gender interaction and fewer signs of overt Islamic symbolism.

#### The University and National Character

A question of interest has been whether the current education system fosters a unique Egyptian character or identity (*al-shakhsīyya al-maṣriyya*). The issue of national identity is replete in the Egyptian social discourse, but few attempts have been made to measure and describe it.<sup>38</sup> In his book entitled *Ḥumūm al-Taʿlīm al-Maṣri* (Concerns of Egyptian education), Syed Ismail Ali points out the risks of establishing a system of education based on something other than the national religious ethos. With the introduction

<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim (n. 6 above).

<sup>38</sup> Shimon Shamir, “Historical Traditions and Modernity in the Belief-System of the Egyptian Mainstream,” in *Patterns of Modernity*, vol. 2, *Beyond the West*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (London: Pinter, 1987); Rivka Yadlin, “The Egyptian Personality: Trends in Egyptian Character Literature,” *Asian and African Studies* 14, no. 1 (1980): 1–19; B. Weiss and A. Green, *A Survey of Arab History* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985); Sell.

of modern European education in the early nineteenth century, Ali asserts, Egyptian society began to “divide into two distinct halves.”<sup>39</sup> One half retained the traditional system imbued with Islamic teachings, while the other half modeled itself after Europe. He argues that the division was not simply an ideological difference between traditional religious schools and those of “modern civilization,” but that it extended far deeper into the Egyptian psyche. “Both sides,” he writes, “implanted and produced personalities carrying two different cultural styles.”

Reinforcing this schism was the British occupation at the turn of the century, which created a political elite enamored with all that was Western. More recently, Ali writes, Egypt’s elite has held the United States “as the guiding light of its thoughts and goals.”<sup>40</sup> The relationship with the United States, he says, has caused an even deeper division, as Egypt has been “directed politically, socially and economically in a way that contradicts what is in the hearts and minds of its educators.”<sup>41</sup>

This reliance on foreign models of education, which deny Islam as a dominating educational philosophy, is causing—he claims—a form of cultural “schizophrenia” (*infisām*). The competing orientations of Egypt’s modern history is causing, in the words of one scholar, “much pain, uncertainty, equivocation, and proneness to illusion and emotionalism.”<sup>42</sup> “Egyptian education,” notes another scholar, “is a house divided against itself. The basic conflict in education has prevented a unification of the national culture.”<sup>43</sup> The dichotomizing effects of modernity and Westernization produced a “polarized culture that has persisted to the present.”<sup>44</sup> To assess the degree of the above assertions as it relates to the university experience, respondents were asked, “Does a university education as it currently exists conflict with the Egyptian-Islamic national character (*al-shakhṣīyya al-maṣrīyya*)? Yes, no, or to an extent.” According to the survey, 61.6 percent of the respondents felt that their university clearly conflicted with their own interpretation of *al-shakhṣīyya al-maṣrīyya* to some degree (see table 11).

*Al-shakhṣīyya al-maṣrīyya* is a term about which there is little consensus. However, at the 1993 conference at Al-Mansūra University on “Religious Instruction and the Formation of the Egyptian Individual,” a baseline definition of the Egyptian character was derived that involved common language and a shared sense of history and culture. According to Dr. Al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-

<sup>39</sup> Syed Ismail Ali, *Humūm al-Ta’līm al-Maṣrī* (Concerns of Egyptian education) (Cairo: Al-Awla, 1989), p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Malcolm H. Kerr, “Egypt,” in *Education and Political Development*, ed. James Coleman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 184.

<sup>43</sup> Russell Galt, *The Effects of Centralization on Education in Modern Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1936), p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Kerr, p. 160.

TABLE 11  
Conflicts with National Character

Response	Total (%)	Gender*		Socioeconomic†			Orientation‡		
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Elites (%)	Middle (%)	Low (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Tradi- tional (%)
Yes	28.4 (108)	29.2 (66)	27.4 (42)	12.6 (12)	25.8 (51)	49.4 (40)	4.0 (4)	9.1 (15)	76.4 (84)
No	38.4 (146)	32.3 (73)	47.7 (73)	58.9 (56)	34.3 (68)	25.9 (21)	89.0 (89)	26.8 (44)	10.9 (12)
Some	33.2 (126)	38.5 (87)	24.8 (38)	28.4 (27)	39.9 (79)	24.7 (20)	7.0 (7)	64.0 (105)	12.7 (14)
Total	100.0 (380)	59.6 (226)	40.4 (153)	25.4 (95)	53.1 (198)	21.6 (81)	26.7 (100)	43.8 (164)	29.4 (110)

Note.—Frequencies are in parentheses.

\* Frequency missing = 1;  $\chi^2 =$

‘Aziz Bahwashi, “Religion is also one of the components of the Egyptian national character—if not the most important.”<sup>45</sup> Other analysts have arrived at similar conclusions.<sup>46</sup> Only 38.4 percent responded that the current educational system did not conflict with the Egyptian national character regardless of their respective definitions. Elites and liberals were more likely to judge the existing system as having no conflict, while 76.4 percent of the traditionalists quite markedly felt a conflict.

### Conclusions

Arriving at definitive conclusions is difficult at best when evaluating the multidimensional factors influencing education in a complex society like Egypt. Indeed, while a study of this nature might, however dimly, reveal “the issues,” it does little in answering the questions. While there appears to be a sharp polarization in defining Islam’s role in public education in Egypt, a precise solution has been painfully elusive. A deeper and more fundamental question concerns what and whose Islam is at issue? Who is in a position to define what is “appropriate” and what is not? Perhaps these questions are topics for further empirical research. What is clear, however, is that education in Egypt must have an overarching moral purpose in its objectives and not merely function as a tool to further state socioeconomic objectives.

The findings of this study suggest that the national education system as it presently stands in Egypt may have some potentially destabilizing effects on national development and cultural identity. According to these data, a heavy majority of respondents consider the national system of education to be too Westernized and desire more of an Islamic texture in both university subject matter and daily life. A majority also approve of a religious education requirement at the university level where none presently exists. When asked if subjects at the university level should be taught through an Islamic perspective, a large majority felt they should, in some form or another. Although there is little agreement as to what an “Islamic perspective” might be, almost 70 percent of those surveyed indicated that a university with more Islamic orientation would be desirable and would enhance their education. The findings do indeed reveal a relatively higher unanimity among socioeconomic and sociocultural orientation clusters about the lack of academic

<sup>45</sup> Al-Sayyed Bahwashi, “Dawr al-Tarbīyya al-Islāmīyya fī Tanmīyat al-Shakhṣīyya al-Qawmīyya al-Maṣrīyya li Muwājahat Mukhaṭīr illa-Nizām al-‘Ālimī illa-Jadīd” (The role of Islamic education in developing the Egyptian national character in facing the non-new world disorder), in *Al-Tarbīya al-Dīniyya wa Binā’ al-Insān al-Maṣrī* (Religious instruction and the formation of the Egyptian individual), vol. 2 (Cairo: Dar Jama‘at al-Mansūra, 1994), p. 440.

<sup>46</sup> Shamir; Yadin; S. A. R. Muhammad, “Dawr al-Tarbīyya al-Islāmīyya fī Binā’ al-Shakhṣīyya al-Muslima fī Ḍau’ Malāmih al-Nizām al-‘Ālimī illa-Jadīd” (The role of Islamic instruction in building Islamic character in light of the features of the new world order), in *Al-Tarbīya al-Dīniyya wa Binā’ al-Insān al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dar Jama‘at al-Mansūra, 1994).

freedom, as well as about the importance of Islamic curricular content (see tables 4, 5, 6, and 8).

However, when it comes to practical policies such as incorporating Islamic contents (table 7), the imposition of the *ḥijāb* on campus (table 10), or determining the degree of contradiction between the current higher education system and the Egyptian personality (table 11), one notes that respondents are much less in agreement. Indeed, the distribution of responses represents positions that are much more diametric. What is particularly noteworthy is that “moderates” are in greater accord with “traditionalists” over matters of principle, but then largely disagree with them on matters of pragmatic policy (e.g., *ḥijāb*).

Such findings suggest that Egyptian society is itself deeply divided over educational policies, with often competing and sometimes irreconcilable imperatives. Most Egyptians simply want an educational system that preserves the integrity of Islam and allows them to feel “confident,” as one professor of education confided, that their “children may grow up learning how to be honest, honorable, patriotic, friendly and generous. This is what Islam can do.”<sup>47</sup> Undoubtedly, such objectives are nearly universal, but there is, of course, always a normative gap between the multifarious visions and interpretations of Islam in Egypt. In all complex societies the development of education—and the means by which it is delivered—results from the persistent struggle among competing social groups seeking dominance or influence.<sup>48</sup> Education in Egypt, not unlike elsewhere, has a deeply imbedded political dimension with intense disagreement among its various constituencies as to the best way to maneuver. In this sense, while all perhaps agree that education should lead to similar outcomes (marketable skills, better citizenry, enhanced quality of life, etc.), the manner in which to do so is far less evident, and its political analogs even more complex. A majority of those surveyed were generally dissatisfied with present educational policy. One source (perhaps the most visible) of this discontent appears to be with the political elite, who are often accused of scripting religious education in a limited, partitioned way, underestimating or ignoring a majority that calls for an alternative educational paradigm—whatever their definition.

The preponderance of the data does indeed illustrate a form of dissonance in education in Egyptian higher education. However, it is far too simplistic to place full fault at the feet of the state, which has its own constellation of ideological orientations and economic objectives. The state certainly plays center stage in creating a more democratic, accommodating, and pluralistic higher education system; but at the same time Egyptian civil society,

<sup>47</sup> Interview with author, January 14, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Dale Eickelman, “The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978): 485–516.

with its own complex alignments and inherent power relations, will have its say, too. Thus, while there appears to be general dissatisfaction with the current state of education, a positive resolution to Egypt's self-proclaimed "educational crisis" (*al-āzma al-ta'limīyya*) will likely continue to be frustrated by competing orientations, differing interpretations of identity, and perhaps irreconcilable social choices.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> President Hosni Mubarak in a speech to the People's Assembly, November 11, 1991. As found in Arab Republic of Egypt (n. 23 above), p. 7.

**Appendix  
Questionnaire**

University:

Faculty:

Major:

Year:

Age:

Gender:

Region of Origin:

Occupation of Father:

- 1) Should religious instruction be a required component of the Egyptian national curriculum?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No, it should remain a private matter.
  - c. It should be maintained, but limited to extra curriculum activities and not required.
- 2) Given that religious education is required at the pre-university levels, is it enough or should the requirement be extended to the higher levels of education?
  - a. Religious instruction at the pre-university level is sufficient.
  - b. Religious instruction should be extended to the higher levels of education.
- 3) Do you agree with those who say that schools are becoming too liberal and should be more Islamic?
  - a. I agree.
  - b. I do not agree.
- 4) Do you feel that subjects at the University should be taught through an Islamic perspective?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No.
  - c. Some subjects should, while others no.
- 5) Do you feel as a student that you are allowed an acceptable amount of academic freedom?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No. If no, the pressures are coming from where? (Mark all that apply.)
    - i) Political sensitivity (government).
    - ii) Religious sensitivity.
    - iii) Self censorship.
    - iv) Other.
- 6) Should women be required to wear the *hijāb* while on the university campuses?
  - a. Yes.
  - b. No.
- 7) How would a university with a more Islamic orientation influence your education?
  - a. It would affect it positively.
  - b. It would affect it negatively.
  - c. It would have no affect.

- 8) Does university education as it currently exists conflict with the Egyptian-Islamic national character? (*shakhṣīyya maṣriyya*)?
- Yes.
  - No.
  - To an extent.
- 9) How would you align yourself in the current debate in education between the liberal and the more traditional forces?
- My views align more closely with the liberal perspective.
  - My views align more closely with the more traditional perspective.
  - My views are a mix between the two depending on the issue.