The Historical Effects of Centralization of Egyptian Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract

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This study compared how the centralization of Egyptian Islamic Higher Education historically affected educational quality, probity of school management and general levels of and appreciation for Islamic knowledge. This research compared characteristics of Egyptian Islamic Higher Education during four pivotal historical periods: the early medieval period (623-1300s C.E.); the 15th century; the 16th and 17th centuries; and the period of British and French colonization (the 19th and 20th centuries). The logic behind choosing these time periods for comparison was that they represented times of significant centralization/decentralization. Upon analysis of the effects of centralization and de-centralization, it has been found that the centralization of Islamic Higher Education in Egypt has had negative effects. It was identified that the centralization of Islamic Higher Education played a central role in decreasing educational quality, increasing corruption, decreasing general levels of and appreciation for Islamic knowledge, and even supporting Imperial initiatives. Such findings are important given the current geopolitical situation of increasing centralization of Egyptian Islamic higher education.

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Los Efectos Históricos de la Centralización de la Educación Superior Islámica Egipcia

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Resumen

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Este estudio compara cómo la centralización de la educación superior islámica egipcia ha afectado históricamente la calidad educativa, la probidad de la gestión escolar y los niveles generales de apreciación del conocimiento islámico. La investigación ha comparado las características de la educación superior islámica egipcia durante cuatro períodos históricos fundamentales: el período medieval temprano (623-1300s C.E.); el siglo XV; los siglos XVI y XVII; y el período de colonización británica y francesa (siglos XIX y XX). La lógica para la selección de estos períodos se debe a que representan épocas de significativa centralización/descentralización. Tras el análisis de los efectos de la centralización y la descentralización, se ha identificado que la centralización de la educación superior islámica en Egipto ha generado efectos negativos. Esta jugó un papel central en la disminución de la calidad educativa, el aumento de la corrupción, la reducción de los niveles generales y la apreciación del conocimiento islámico, e incluso del apoyo a las iniciativas imperiales. Tales hallazgos son importantes dada la situación geopolítica actual, con una creciente centralización de la educación superior islámica en Egipto.

Palabras Clave: centralización, islámico, educación superior, Egipto, análisis histórico

From the Medieval to the present, Islamic Higher Education in Egypt has witnessed an intense process of centralization. This study compares how, over time, the centralization of Islamic Higher Education affected educational quality, probity of school management and general levels of and appreciation for knowledge. This research involves comparing characteristics of Egyptian Islamic Higher Education at four pivotal points in time: the early medieval period (623-1300s C.E.); the 15th century; the 16th and 17th centuries; and the period of British and French colonization (the 19th and 20th centuries). The logic behind choosing these particular time periods for comparison is that they represent times of significant centralization/ decentralization of Egyptian Islamic Higher Education; upon analysis of the effects of (de) centralization, many useful lessons can be derived for suggestions on improving modern day Egyptian Islamic Higher Education.

Background of Islamic Education in Muslim-majority[1] countries

Seeking knowledge has been of particular interest in Muslim-majority countries for a long time, especially since what is academically[2] considered the advent of Islam, beginning with the first Qur'anic revelation— "Read/Recite! In the name of your Lord, who has created all that exists…" (Qur'an 96, v1) in the seventh century C.E. In Islam, acquisition of knowledge —the two types being that gained through revelation and that gained through the senses—is justified and directed by the provision that all knowledge gained be used in worship of the creator (defined broadly as any belief, speech, or action that pleases God as outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah) (Halstead, 2004). Accordingly, the most important type of knowledge in Islam is theological, meaning understanding the will and nature of *Allah* (Arabic for 'God') through the Qur'an (the literal word of God) and Sunnah (way of prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, on how to apply the former) (Uthaymeen, 2004).

Throughout Islamic history, once *ulamaa* (sg: *Alim*, 'scholars of the theological sciences') mastered foundational texts in theology, they would utilize this knowledge as lenses to support and guide the development of entire sciences (thereby fulfilling a communal obligation in knowledge production). There was never an artificial barrier constructed between

empirical sciences and revelation because Islam legislates that two Truths cannot contradict each other—and that Tawheed (the oneness of God and that none has the right to be worshipped except Him) implies a certain unity and intrinsic harmony in the universe due to the oneness of the creator. Seeking knowledge was for the purpose of increasing 'God consciousness' among people (Iqbal, 2007; Progler, 2001).

Unfortunately, much of modern (19th century onward) research done in the West on the Middle Eastern educational systems of the Middle Ages has glossed over most *non-theological* education that occurred in fields ranging from Medicine to Architecture; the result has been the confection of a revisionist history where the religious sphere of society was somehow divorced from the rest (Iqbal, 2007; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004, p.130), a political initiative probably highly motivated by modern debates on the role of 'religion'[3] ('deen') in Muslim-majority societies (Turner, 2007). Such selective memory leads to an easily consumed myth for a progressive-minded audience: that such people, who supposedly have nothing but theological knowledge, would either be particularly unsuitable for the modern world, or—an even more extreme presumption—that maybe Medieval Muslim-majority countries were even secular all along. This imagined history came into play later when colonialists needed to create a perceived inferiority in the 'native' cultures of those they conquered to justify their promotion of the Secular Humanist ideal, secularism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004, p. 128)—not without parallels in our own age of neo-colonialistic endeavors.

De-centralized Islamic Education In The Early Middle Ages

During the early Middle Ages, roughly the first 400 years of Islam (7th century-11th century), education in Muslim-majority societies revolved around the mosque, which is actually the center of most social activity in Islam. By the 14th century, Alexandria alone would have approximately 14,000 mosques (Szyliowicz, 1973, p. 53). Not only a place for ritual worship, the mosque was where Muslims irrespective of ethnicity, origin, age, or gender gathered to learn Islamic knowledge of various types—proper recitation of Qur'an, *Tafseer* (exegesis of the Qur'an), *Hadeeth* (the narrations of the Sunnah and their sub sciences), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence,

meaning the various rulings derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah), Arabic language and poetry, History, Medicine, and many others (theological and empirical). It would not be uncommon to find a 'student' population of a very sundry composition, from students who were ulamaa themselves to laymen, in the hundreds in one gathering called a *halaqa* (a circle of people around a alim giving a lecture). Islamic education in a mosque was very informal with most decision-making regarding everything from curriculum to schedules carried out by the individual ulamaa offering the lectures. Understandably, such an egalitarian method of education forged a strong Islamic identity and reinforced social cohesion (Berkey, 1992, pp. 7, 20; Gunther, 2006).

Specifically for children, a system of elementary education schools also existed, which were fairly indistinguishable from the *Kuttabs* (elementary schools with a little more focus on memorization of Qur'an). Both socialized students into a Muslim identity by memorizing the Qur'an by the time they were 8-9 years old, and taught them general skills like learning how to read and write, basic Geography, and Math. Teachers at these schools were expected to maintain high moral character as role models, have memorized the Qur'an, and know the basics of non-theological subjects (Szyliowicz, 1973, pp. 54, 57). Quality of education seems to have been praiseworthy at these schools given the high appreciation for Islamic knowledge that the above-mentioned principles promoted (Gunther, 2006). Upon finishing elementary schools/kuttabs, students could either enter directly into various trades and professions or continue onto *madaaris* for higher education which consisted of a base of one or more *Sharia* based—theological—sciences. Thereafter, students could choose to either specialize within this general theological base or build upon it and delve into other forms of positivistic natural or social sciences (Gesink, 2006, p. 327).

The *Madrasa (*pl.*madaaris*, lit: 'a place of study') was the central formal educational institution throughout roughly the second half of Medieval Egypt (11th century to 16th century). Madaaris were places of higher education usually attached to a mosque, and were funded by awqaaf (sg. Waqf)—theological endowments from charity contributions, usually in the form of a building or piece of land preserved to be used for theological purposes. Awqaaf were protected from taxes and state seizure (Gesink, 2006, p. 326). The term 'madrasa' was used interchangeably with 'mosque' since in reality a formal location was irrelevant to the learning process;

hence, madaaris still provided the same de-centralized structure as mosques. Decision-making regarding the structure and components of Islamic Higher Education was still made locally by the (usually unpaid) ulamaa who taught in the Madaaris. Accordingly, madaaris were only as good as their teachers, the ulamaa; ergo, after students had memorized the Qur'an and a certain amount of hadeeth they would start studying various treatises/books with their *Shaykh* (more or less a synonym for *Alim*). Ideally, texts were memorized as they were learned in depth—for example a hadeeth might be explained in regard to its place in *seerah* (the prophet's history), jurisprudence rulings, grammar, points of benefit, etc. Also, given that most ulamaa were not paid for their services, usually performing other forms of manual labor to fund themselves, ulamaa were more likely to be learning and teaching Islamic knowledge for metaphysical rewards as opposed to material ones (Gunther, 2006; Hefner & Zaman, 2007, pp. 45-47).

As it has probably been noticed, there was no 'high school' stage of education between elementary school and higher education mentioned here; this is because there was no concept of 'teenage hood' in most pre-modern societies. Therefore, graduates of kuttabs and others around the age of puberty either entered directly into madaaris/mosques or into the 'working world.' This study focuses on the experience of those who went to madaaris to continue a *formal* education (which would probably still be considered somewhat *informal* by current standards); however, even those that entered the formal labor force still participated in Islamic education given its central role in Muslim societies.

Quality Islamic education was a communal activity that hinged less on books or institutions than on whom one actually learned and received an *ijaza* from ('authorization to pass on their knowledge'); education was a very personal experience (Berkey, 1992, pp. 16, 18; Niell, 2006, pp. 484-485). Given the importance of the Alim in Islamic education, a student was expected to take up to two months in choosing a teacher, choosing on the basis of the *Alim's* own teachers'reputation, age, and character. The centrality of the teacher was evident in the fact that biographical dictionaries of medieval scholars listed all the scholars an alim had learned from and usually nothing about where the learning actually took place, except maybe just the region (which you could often just tell from the alim's last name) (Berkey, 1992, pp. 22-24). Needless to say, simply learning from a book was

considered illegitimate knowledge, and books themselves were just used for reference (Gunther, 2006). As guardians of the spiritual well-being of the society, ulamaa constructed intricate measures to preserve Islamic education as seen for example in the details of the ijaza or 'degree' system that was developed. Al Tusi, a medieval Alim, explained how, "memorizing two words is better than hearing two pages, but understanding two words is better than memorizing two pages", which highlights that scholars differentiated between *riwaya*, the ability to memorize and transmit knowledge, and *diraya*, the ability to critically analyze it and apply it contextually. This differentiation was reflected in what type of authorization one had to teach; ijazas ranged in degrees, from general transmission of knowledge (*tadrees*) to issuing legal fatwas using that knowledge (*iftaa'*), corresponding to the level of comprehension attained (Berkey, 1992, pp. 30-31). A fact often overlooked in discussions of the role of memorization in Islamic education (often politically motivated to portray a zombie-like system with no critical thought).

The ulamaa even had 'teaching assistants' (with varying levels such as *musamli, mufid,* and *mu'id*); these were advanced students of the shaykh who would repeat in a loud voice the lecture to others far away in the halaqa, explain various ideas and highlight points of benefit to those he was responsible for (Berkey, 1992, pp. 40, 42). This shows the great concern that ulamaa had as they believed themselves to be 'inheritors of the prophets' (as goes the belief in theological scripture) in maintaining the high standards of Islamic education. Being that so much of the authority in Islamic higher education was decentralized to local ulamaa, the pressure was also on them to uphold the quality, integrity, and spread of Islamic education to the masses (Gunther, 2006).

Centralizing Egyptian Islamic Higher Education

The first madrasa or university in general is famously known as al-Azhar (founded in Egypt by the Fatamids in the late tenth century), but madaaris can actually be traced back as early as ninth century Iran. The most famous madrasa of the early medieval period was that of Nizam al-Mulk, the Persian vizier to the Saljuq, in the late 11th century (Hefner & Zaman, 2007, p. 43). The Egyptian capital's first madrasa was built by Saladin in 1170 during the

Ayyubid dynasty. After the devastation of Baghdad by the Mongol invasion in 1258, Cairo slowly turned into the cultural/educational capital of the Muslim ummah[4] (Berkey, 1992, p. 9). By the 14th and 15th centuries, madaaris had widely flourished under the Mamlukes and had become much more systematized as the Mamluke ruling class heavily sponsored the building and maintenance of madaaris. Surprisingly, despite this patronage, the Mamlukes left the educational system very decentralized in most decision making like that which concerned curriculum, pedagogy, and structure (Hefner & Zaman, 2007, p. 45). This is even more unexpected since the Mamlukes (lit: 'one who is owned') were a military elite captured as slaves from wars and bred to be the successive rulers (in no way an inherited dynasty), and they married from local ulamaa families (Berkey, 1992, p. 11). Nonetheless, madaaris under the Mamlukes were fairly autonomous; only rarely would a waqf specify issues such as what subjects would be taught or at what times (Berkey, 1992, pp. 79, 87). One of the most famous of these madaaris and which provides an ideal prototype was al-Ashrafiyya in Cairo. It was constructed and endowed as a waqf by Sultan al-Ashraf Basrsbay. It had four halls surrounding the central courtyard, provided monthly salaries for the school's instructional staff, stipends for ten to twenty-five students per class, housing accommodations for students, and doubled as a mosque (as most madaaris did) (Berkey, 1992, p. 54).

Throughout the 15th century, madaaris flourished and became the major sector of employment for educational (ulamaa, 'professors', 'teacher's assistants', qadis, 'judges', etc.), 'religious' (preachers, *muezzins*, people that announce the calls to prayer, Qur'an recitors, etc.), administrative (financial administers, controllers, notaries, etc.), and supportive positions (everything from doctors and librarians to gatekeepers, janitors, and incense burners) (Berkey, 1992, pp. 63-66). Madaaris had become so systematic that ulamaa were often given paid leave for visiting family, making hajj, and being ill; there was even a system for substitute teaching (Berkey, 1992, pp. 92, 116). However, such increasing formality in the Mamluke educational system also had its drawbacks; now *appointments* in madaaris were heavily influenced if not selected by the Mamluke elite, giving preference to those who supported their initiatives. Centralizing decision-making under the authority of the ruling elite started to cause corruption and the financial

compensation now given to ulamaa had also begun to negatively affect ulamaa's scholarship and work ethic (Al-Jabartee, 1997).

Given the new material prospects and stability offered by the more bureaucratic educational system spread by the Mamlukes, many ulamaa lost sight of the metaphysical rewards of their efforts and viewing academia as a mere occupation became more prevalent. This also caused educational quality to suffer. Many 'professorships' were assigned in exchange for monetary 'gifts', and ibn Khaldun even lamented that many of the Mamluke elite started endowing schools as awqaaf as a way to manipulate the Islamic system of inheritance in a way that would benefit their heirs (Berkey, 1992, pp. 97, 134). As the scholars grew more and more dependent on the ruling elite, they grew less spiritual and sincere to their expected initial intentions for seeking knowledge—worship.

Numerous scholars (especially those who still taught traditionally, in mosques) themselves complained about the spread of extravagance among many scholars associated with the formal madaaris--their fancy clothes and turbans, lack of studiousness and serious scholarship, and ostentatious manners. One such alim, al-Subki, criticized the lowering of educational standards due to this trend, complaining "they look at *Mashariq al-anwar* of al-Saghani, *Masabih* of al-Baghawi and call themselves *muhadithun* [Hadeeth scholars]… and maybe study *Jami' al-usul* and '*Ulum al-Hadeeth* after that, or its abridgement by al-Nawawi, and they call themselves muhaddith of the muhadithun" (Berkey, 1992, pp. 184, 187). For someone to actually reach the level of these tomes (most of these are ten to thirty volumes long) would be quite an accomplishment in the present when there are very few major ulamaa left, but during that time period of scholarship, such works entailed a novice level of expertise. Closer ties between the ruling elite and ulamaa made many of the latter take lightly the hadeeth that "Whoever seeks knowledge to compete with the scholars or to debate with the ignorant ones *or so that the people's faces can turn towards him*, then Allah will enter him into the Hellfire" (USC, emphasis added). The negative effects of the centralization of Islamic higher education are even more apparent when sharply contrasted with the brief years of de-centralized madrasa administration under the Ottoman dynasty in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Brief Decentralization

In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire had taken over control of Egypt, but since the Ottomans' power was on the decline, Egypt retained a certain amount of autonomy. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman empire did not have much influence on the culture or daily dealings of Egyptian society mainly because it was involved with many other political crises and wars, trying to maintain its sovereignty and the integrity of its borders as a whole; hence, it did not try to 'Ottomanize' Egypt's educational system or impose its language once it gained control of Egypt (Daly, 1998, pp. 1-26). Even the local Egyptian viceroys did not manipulate or exert authority over madaaris during this time. This autonomy meant that neither the Ottoman elite nor the local Egyptian viceroys tried to impose political influence over the structure and appointments over the madaaris as the Mamlukes did, returning sovereignty and political neutrality to Egyptian madaaris.

The negative consequence to this sovereignty was that the Ottomans hardly sponsored the opening of any new Egyptian madaaris, leaving al-Azhar as the main, if not only, formal institution for Islamic higher education in Egypt by the 18th century (Al Jabartee, 1997). However, quality of Islamic higher education greatly improved during this time as tremendous scholarship was produced (Al Sirjaany, 2005); accordingly, quality proved more important than quantity as students of Islamic knowledge flocked from all over the Muslim world to learn at al-Azhar, making al-Azhar the hub of Islamic higher education as it brought in international talent and expertise (Daly, 1998, pp. 88-91, 96). The quality of Islamic higher education and its importance in societal cohesion had a positive correlation with the decentralization of decision-making and relative economic independence of educators from the ruling elite.

A Glance at Informal Islamic Higher Education for Comparison

Further proof of this correlation between the quality, access, and influence of Islamic higher education on the one hand and its de-centralization on the other may be seen in the fact that there is little or no recorded evidence of a pattern of decreasing educational quality, marginalization of the importance

of Islamic education, or increased corruption in the *informal* sector of Islamic higher education as political regimes rose and fell—they were relatively unaffected due to their distance from royal happenings (Al-Jabartee, 1997). In fact, many great non-madrasa affiliated ulamaa also appeared throughout the medieval period, possibly more than those officially employed by madaaris, like Hasan al-Basri (9th century), Khateeb al-Baghdadi (11th century), Ibn Athir (12th century), Ibn Taymiyya (13th century), Ibn Kathir (14th century), and al-Jabarti (18th century) (Al Salaaby, 2006; Najeebabadi, 2000).

Many such non-madrasa employed scholars had the best libraries in the Muslim world with everything from theological and astronomy related works to poetry and medicine. Even more amazing is that these scholars' libraries were often open for public use (and even borrowing)—people from all levels of the social scale (from incense burners to doctors) travelled to use their libraries (Daly, 1998, pp. 97-10; Iqbal, 2007). This had tremendous benefits in increasing literacy and knowledge acquisition among the masses since most people would not attend madrasas by the 18th century when there was only Al Azhar left (Al Salaaby, 2006; Najeebabadi, 2000). For example, al-Jabarti was an amazing scientist, historian, and theological Alim whose house was always filled with students. Some of them even lived with him and married from his family. Many students would often travel to just come see al-Jabarti's father's medical instruments (Al-Jabartee, 1997). Furthermore, most of the positive empirical sciences in Muslim-majority countries actually developed outside formal madaaris during the Middle Ages (Ali, 2009; Iqbal, 2007). The higher quality of informal Islamic higher education (which was decentralized by its very nature) offers further evidence of the positive correlation between decentralization of authority and better educational quality and access in formal Islamic Higher Education as it existed in the Middle Ages.

Hence, Napoleon would later record that one-third of the population of Cairo were literate, a relatively high figure for 1798. The effect of informal education on literacy was also apparent in the large number of 'vulgar' works, simplified summaries of larger theological works (many about how to be a good overall Muslim) designed for laymen—some even using colloquial Arabic by the 18th century (Daly, 1998, pp. 105, 109).

Looking back, it seems the best Islamic education was provided by ulamaa independent of any expectations from the ruling elite, whether in the formal or informal sector. Similar advice was *given by prophet Muhammad* when he stated "Whoever approaches the ruler's gates becomes afflicted. Whenever a servant [Muslim] draws closer to the ruler, he only gains distance from Allah", *and by his companions* when they warned "Don't go, even if they ask you to visit them just to recite *qul huwallaahu ahad [*the first verse of the smallest chapter in the Qur'an]" (USC, 39). These admonitions highlight the concern of prophet Muhammad and his companions with preventing Islamic education from being manipulated by elite rulers for their political ambitions. Underscoring this concept is the general apprehension about wealth's potential spiritual drawbacks if not used for the pleasure of God (such as charity, etc.) as also expressed by prophet Muhammad when he said the "biggest test/trial for my *Ummah* (nation) is wealth" (USC, 512). Lack of autonomy for educators left Ulamma more susceptible to the whims of the ruling elite and damaged the state of formal Islamic higher education in Egypt as explicated even by local historians of that era such as Al-Jabartee (1997).

The introduction of increased material benefits that could be earned by madaaris ulamaa if they became supportive appendages to the political regime in the late Middle Ages led to the decrease of educational quality, corruption, and decreased appreciation for the Islamic education they held in general. As al-Azhar became the bastion for Sunni Islam in 18th century Egypt, theological authority became even more centralized, and subsequently easier to manipulate as a mouthpiece for French and British colonizers.

Colonization and Neo-colonization Vis á Vis Centralization

In October 1798 the French colonized Egypt. Al-Azhar was pelted with canons, raided, and desecrated as French soldiers destroyed al-Azhar's libraries and relieved themselves on the remains, slaughtering anyone they came upon (Dykstra, 1998; Kincehloe & Steinberg, 2004, p. 127). Napoleon tried to find ulamaa to justify his invasion as a rescuer coming to free the Egyptians from the Turks; however, some ulamaa like al-Jabarti stood up to this onslaught (Al Salaaby, 2006; Al Sirjaany, 2005). The French knew the

strongest resistance to their forces would come from the ulamaa and other theological sectors of society; hence, they focused on subverting Islamic education, the roots of Islamic culture. One French author exclaimed, "We, the masters, should seize on our subjects in their early youth. We shall change the tastes and habits of the whole people…after the pattern of our laws" (Kincehloe & Steinberg, 2004, p. 128). Nonetheless, Napoleon would later find those who would 'trade their souls' for power and appointed ulamaa like Shaykh Khalil al-Bakri to promote popular support for the French occupation; those that didn't become 'government scholars' either fled the country or at least left their positions; some were killed in rebellions like those at al-Azhar (Daly, 1998, p. 125). Being that al-Azhar was now the main locus of Islamic education, it left the ulamaa all in one place for easy manipulation (Al-Jabartee, 1997; Hussein, 2008). By 1801, The French had been driven out of Egypt and Muhammad Ali emerged as official viceroy for the Ottoman Empire; now Ali planned to re-educate Egypt with Western military expertise/technology and accelerate Egyptian industrialization to keep European hegemony at bay (Fahmy, 1998). However, in arming Egypt with the previous colonizer's empirical sciences to fend off their canons, he replaced Islamic higher education with Western cannons (Kincehloe & Steinberg, 2004, p. 128).

Muhammad Ali, implemented a Western (French, British, and Italian) model of secular education in Egypt through 'civil schools' which trained students in military skills, engineering, medicine, foreign languages, and agriculture among other things; this process was called *Modernization* (Ofori-Attah, 2008, pp. 15, 18). However, this expansion was done at the expense of Islamic education; most periphery theological institutions were closed and al-Azhar (which Ali took control of through *patronage* of ulamaa) was overburdened with providing Islamic higher education for the entire country (Fahmy, 1998). The integrity of most establishment ulamaa had been severely compromised as will be detailed shortly. The technocratic graduates replaced al-Azhar graduates in the workforce as well. Foreign teachers were brought in to teach at the civil schools, and the student-centered pedagogy that was once symbolic of Islamic education was replaced by a lecturing ('banking') method transplanted from British Lancaster schools (Gesink, 2006, pp. 328-329). These Lancaster civil schools were used to create an obedient labor mentality among the masses,

while reserving intellectual activity for the new secular Western based universities being opened up for the elite--ideal for defending Western interests in the region (Szyliowicz, 1973, p. 127). Accordingly, the quality of Islamic higher education sharply decreased. Any issues that contradicted the Western value system became susceptible to adjustment and now intensity of education *really had* stopped at mere memorization (theological texts and everything else); the importance of Islamic higher education waned (Hussein, 2008). Since al-Azhar was the last institute for Islamic higher education and control of it was centralized under Muhammad Ali, the marginalization of Islamic higher education was decisive and would prove arduous to reverse.

Under de facto British control throughout the early 20th century, various descendents of the Ali dynasty continued this intellectual colonization as most remnants of local history, culture, and deen were removed from education (Gesink, 2006, pp. 329-330; Hunter, 1998). The growing civil schools also reduced access to education as a whole due to the new fees and preliminary language tests required for entrance, under Lord Cromer of Britain, which classified many more Egyptians as 'illiterate' (Ofori-Attah, 2008, p. 18). In short, the Modernization of Egyptian education throughout the early 20th century effectively secularized society and marginalized Islamic culture and education to the periphery—neo-colonization through a local but Western educated ruling class, which allowed for a 'semblance of native legitimacy' (Hussein, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004, p. 149). Islamic education's last institution, al-Azhar, was losing what little effect and legitimacy it still had in society.

Ali had also sent many ulamaa to France who not only brought back with them military science and technological expertise, but an entire Western liberal value system; *Modernization* came to mean *Westernization* (Hefner & Zaman, 2007, p.114; Tageldin, 2011). Modernism presented 'religion' as irrational (by the European Enlightenment definition) and Secular Humanism as rational and civilized (Moore, 2007, pp. 36, 57-58). At the time that Ali sent them, he simply intended to gain the scientific (as in the empirical based, not the more philosophy related social based sciences) expertise from the West, but those sent abroad did not get a customized curriculum; they also received the 'hidden curriculum' of Western liberal values (Hussein, 2008, pp. 19-20; Tageldin, 2011). These ulamaa were

highly affected by the Saint Simonists, believers in the 'religion of social science' to culturally and industrially *develop* Egypt, who tried to effectively replace deen with Western philosophy—like that of Voltaire and Maistre—and even more pragmatically with the belief system of nationalism (contrary to the Islamic precept of identity based on deen above any territorial/cultural labels) (Hussein, 2008, p. 16, 21; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004, pp. 142-144). Hasan al-Attar for example was sent to learn in Paris and later returned as an al-Azhar Alim to teach modernist reformer Tahtawi, who was key in Westernizing Egyptian schools (Imaara, 2011).

Tahtawi was not just impressed by French empirical science, he also tried to apply Western philosophy to theological texts and was one of the earliest Secular Humanist Muslims in the Muslim world calling for a new customized Islam that would agree with the Western value systems that he believed to be the new deen for the future. He praised nationalism, mixing of the sexes, and essentially any Western cultural trait as necessary for material progress, deeming practically the importation of any value system or behavior beneficial as long as it developed the economics of the country (Ali, 2009; Imaara, 2011; Sabrin, 2013; Tageldin, 2011). Most ulamaa were furious at this total disregard for Islamic culture and priorities to the extent that they labeled such ulamaa 'protestant'; however, there was little they could do while they remained employed by al-Azhar. Many scholars (Azhari and non-Azhari) spoke out against this intellectual colonization, but as Muhammad Ali had de facto marginalized other madrasas outside of al-Azhar and controlled the official discourse coming from al-Azhar, most views that didn't support the political regime were silenced (Hussein, 2008, pp. 22-24, 106).

Later protégés of Tahtawi throughout the 20th century, like Muhammad Abduh, would continue this cycle of neo-colonization through education, carrying the banner for a new *modern* Islam (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004, p. 129). The natural conclusion of the Secular Humanist beliefs Abduh inherited from Tahtawi was argued to be secularism and Islam was slowly pushed out of the public sphere (Hussein, 2008, pp. 91, 142; Sabrin, 2013). Contrary to what some scholars have often posited, that Islamic values themselves would have been somehow in conflict with Western empirical science or technology (Spring, 2006, p. 153), it seems it was rather the liberal value system that posed a problem for the native population as

modern studies of the Egyptian population suggest (Cook, 1999, p. 11). It seems Ali benefitted from Western expertise in the empirical sciences, but participated in his own country's intellectual neo-colonization in the process. Through centralized control of Islamic higher education in Egypt, quality declined, corruption of ulamaa seems to have been unavoidable, and Islamic higher education itself was de facto almost eliminated from society since it was so directly responsive to the political initiatives of one man, the head of state.

By the late 19th century, al-Azhar was the last Madrasa representing Islamic higher education in Egypt. Due to the military weaknesses perceived after French and British colonization, Muhammad Ali had sought to restructure the higher education system in Egypt by pushing Islamic higher education to the periphery and focusing tertiary education on military and industrial expertise he had transplanted from Western Europe. However in doing so, Ali delegitimized the last source of formal Islamic higher education in Egypt (al-Azhar), and placed it at the whims of his political regime. Since control of al-Azhar was completely centralized under Ali, Islamic higher education was manipulated as a source for justifying the political regime's Modernization/ Westernization of Egyptian society. By entrusting all decision making to the ruling elite, al-Azhar was no longer a place for quality Islamic scholarship, but rather an official mouthpiece for the government (Hefner & Zaman, 2007, p.108).

Under Egyptian president Gamal abd al-Nasser in the 1950s, awqaaf were "nationalized" completely (taken over by the ruling dictator) and the Reform Law of 1961 re-centered al-Azhar's "function and religious authority around the military ruling elite" (Hefner & Zaman, 2007, p. 117). The *Shaykh al-Azhar* (highest position in al-Azhar) rank and salary was made that of a regular government minister and the appointed were paid to issue *fatwas* (Islamic legal rulings) at the request of the ruler; non-government ulamaa were forced to resign (Hefner & Zaman, 2007, p. 118). Being that ulamaa were pressured to either comply with political demands or lose their position in the last madrasa representing Islamic education; this compromised the integrity of any ulamaa wishing to have a serious public voice in society. Islam was consequently marginalized from the public sphere and replaced with an intellectual neo-colonization of the mass Egyptian population until the 1970s when an Islamic revival would later

occur (Hussein, 2008). However, al-Azhar the sole *official* institute of Islamic higher education seems to have been effectively re-designed as a government medium. While most Egyptians now look to non-government ulamaa (at mosques and on television) for spiritual guidance, Islam does not seem to be as pervasive a means of identification and fabric of social cohesion as it was before.

Conclusion

From the Medieval to the Modern, the centralization of formal Islamic Higher Education in Egypt seems to have had negative effects. We have illustrated how, over time, the centralization of Islamic Higher Education played a central role in decreasing educational quality, increasing corruption, decreasing general levels of and appreciation for Islamic knowledge, and even supporting Imperial initiatives. In the early Medieval Islamic history of Egypt, Islamic education was highly accessible to the general masses, of high quality, and was pursued as a means to becoming more God conscious. Islamic education was an act of worship with solely metaphysical rewards. Islamic theological education was the primary source of identity and created a culture of knowledge among Egyptians since as far as we know the percentage of Muslims was not much different from the modern day statistics of roughly 93% of the population. Since there were no material benefits to Islamic education and the ulamaa who controlled it locally were autonomous, away from political pressures and influences, the integrity of formal Islamic education was preserved and flourished from the mosque to the madrasa.

However, throughout the 15th century when Islamic higher education become highly centralized, quality, the spiritual essence of formal Islamic education, and its place in society, suffered as madrasas themselves became primarily limited to higher education—realistically limiting the student population to a minority of the population—and became a mere occupation for material gain for many involved.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, numerous examples were given of how although lack of state sponsorship and decentralization often affected the *quantity* of Islamic higher education institutions, *quality* increased. Examples were also provided from informal Islamic higher education as

additional support for the positive effects of decentralized Islamic higher education.

Under the extreme centralization of Muhammad Ali in the 19th and 20th centuries, Islam itself was relatively speaking removed from the public sphere and replaced by Western philosophy and culture since centralization had reduced Islamic higher education to one institute whose credibility had been reduced to a mere mouthpiece for the ruling elite—whether indigenous or colonial in nature. This latter point has been one of the most important contributions of this study—the role that centralizing Islamic higher education in Egypt played in the colonial history of the country—facilitating political and intellectual colonialism.

Today, there has been much demand for Islamically compatible higher education in Egypt despite what little empirical research is allowed on such topics (Cook, 1999, p. 6). It has been seen that if Islamic higher (or pre-collegiate for that matter) education is to be revitalized in Egypt, ulamaa should be autonomous and independent of the ruling elite as to provide quality Islamic higher education that not only increases intellectual awareness of Islam, but re-positions it as a source of spiritual reinvigoration amidst the rampant socio-economic predicaments that exist. This seems to be a necessary first step to reviving Islamic education—its theological and empirical branches. It would not be a stretch of the imagination to say that more decentralization of Egyptian educational institutions in general would only increase quality of education given the unfortunate autocratic atmosphere even post WWII in Egypt. As much of the South is still struggling for liberation in a supposedly postcolonial era, there seems no escaping from the fact that without truly 'free' academic institutions, political and economic freedom will also remain a fantasy.

Note

[1] This term is used to avoid the exclusionary nature of 'Muslim World' that seems to portray Muslims living without interaction with non-Muslim controlled territories or that there were no non-Muslims living in Muslim-controlled territories. 'Islamic World' is also avoided since it seems to imply an Orientalist image that all happenings in such territories were solely directed by the dictates of theological scripture irrespective of culture, political factors, personal interests, etc.

[2] This is the perspective prevalent in modern day academic scholarship in contrast to the Islamic theological perspective that God only revealed one religion with initial differences merely in subsidiary issues, and that various peoples' tampered with certain aspects of scripture historically to produce the various 'man-made' variations that exist today as separate 'religions'.

[3] In Arabic, the language of the Qur'an and Sunnah, the word religion actually doesn't exist; the closest translation is 'deen' (way of life), one of the points that highlights the tension between Islam and secularism to the present.

[4] Muslims believe that all the prophets (i.e.: Adam, Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, etc.) all originally came with the same central message of *Tawheed* (worshipping only God), but different 'branches' or details (how to pray, etc.) contextual to their time period and location; each Prophet had their own 'branches' for their particular ummah (the ummah of the Jews, of the Christians, etc.), but all still technically 'Muslims' as long as they followed whatever legislation (*Sharia*) their Prophets came with at that time. Basically, they chose to do 'istislaam' or 'Islam' (which means submission) to the message their Prophet came with; hence, they were Muslim. Prophet Muhammad is believed to be the final Prophet from his time until judgment day for humanity. The Muslim *ummah* refers to the Islamic belief that all humans born after Prophet Muhammad's prophethood are technically considered from the ummah of Muhammad in a general sense (the *ummat al dawa* or 'invitation'), but those who choose to accept this invitation by believing and following him are the more specific *ummat al ijaaba* (ummah of those who responded), who are called Muslims today.

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