



The Secularisation of the Curricula in Muslim Lands

“Like a hidden rash that spreads”

(Translated)

During recent times, the Arab world region has been living through an intensive campaign against the educational curricula in many countries, like Tunisia, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco and Algeria. This is being undertaken using the argument of serving educational development and keeping up with the speed of knowledge. In regards to this there is no doubt that our educational curricula are in dire need of improvement and development, indeed for a radical change that establishes a new educational vision and creates an advanced knowledge revolution, that assists in the building of thinking and creative Islamic personalities distinguished by knowledge precedence and opens the doorways for the potentials and capabilities to be utilised to serve such a development.

However, despite that, the dangerous matter in this issue is that these changes fundamentally target the secularisation of the educational curricula and sever the link to the Islamic Aqeedah within the context of the war against “terrorism and extremism”. That is because the issue of the curricula in our Arab and Islamic region is not an internal matter arranged by the scholars and thinkers, and administered by specialists. Rather, it is a global matter subject to the supervision of the states of the western world which have adopted different ways to secularise it. That is like the interfaith conferences which regularly recommend changing the curricula in the Islamic lands to make room for closer relations between the religions. Or, in the form of the stipulations of the international grant bodies like the IMF and the World Bank, through the imposition of some educational curricula and the removal of others, in exchange for being provided grants, loans or cancelling some of the debts of certain countries. It can also be like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in which Europe obliges other states to change their curricula in exchange of grants, partnerships and other similar matters. In addition, there are the international conferences and seminars that different international bodies organise, like UNRWA, UNESCO and UNICEF, which attempt to integrate the global values “globalism” within the educational curricula and reinforce the thoughts that call to a new global system. They are preoccupied with two projects: One of them is concerned with the Middle-East region whilst the other relates to the Mediterranean states.

It can be observed that the demands for change imposed by major states are subject to the changing political events across the world and are connected fundamentally to the international stance taken towards Islam. Consequently, whenever the political awareness upon the basis of Islam increases within the Ummah, constrictions applied to the educational curricula increase, and the campaign of international recommendations for the necessity to alter them escalates, stating that they should not be hostile to the West, not incite Jihaad, a call to peace, normalisation with the Jewish entity, to the culture of tolerance, acceptance of the other and sociability. All of that serves the project of “combatting terrorism and extremism” like what happened in Iraq after the American invasion and also in Afghanistan when they worked to replace the curricula, as part of the war against Islam, to get rid of the concept of Jihaad against America. It is like the changes that took place in the Saudi curricula following the events of September 11 when they completely deleted the topic of Al-Walaa’ and Al-Baraa’ (Loyalty and Disavowal) from the subject of Tawheed. Or as witnessed in Casablanca following the explosions in Morocco which reached the extent of calls to

delete the word of Jihaad from every single school book. The same applies in respect to the Emirates, Kuwait and Yemen where the President exclaimed to his ministers: "We have to implement change in our educational curricula before a translator comes from America. That is because we are a Muslim people and there is not harm in lessening our religious dosage"!

Anyone examining the recent infectious sweeping alterations (to curricula) that spread just like the poet, Al-Akhtal, described as a rash. He would see that they have come on the back of a popular movement within the countries of the Arab revolutions and the lands of Ash-Shaam, where they raised their voices calling for the complete application of Islam and the expulsion of colonialism. This called for the obligation of standing against this Islamic expansion considered to represent a real threat to the West and its civilisation. So Jordan then took hold of the initiative to make alterations to the point that it reached the beard of the man and the Khimaar (veil) and dress of the woman in the pictures of the school reading books. It deleted a complete lesson about Surah Al-Layl and replaced it with a new lesson about swimming, just as it replaced a lesson called the number in the Qur'an Al-Kareem with a lesson called the small pigeon. At the same time, it cancelled the memorisation of Ayat of the Qur'an and the noble prophetic Ahaadeeth from some of the lessons. It is also changed the model for the lesson about Ibn Battuta, where it deleted the sentence that talked about him of how he had learnt the Qur'aan and poetry from an early age in his childhood. It was the same in Palestine as they deleted many of the Aayaat of the Qur'an which urge fighting the Yahood and the prophetic Ahadeeth that call to Jihaad and fighting the Kuffar. As for Algeria, the alterations of the Minister of Education Benghabrit stirred a wide debate. This ministry of this minister who has a very deep Francophone direction proposed at the beginning of the year to introduce the colloquial Algerian street language into the primary school levels of education to replace the Arabic Fus'haa (classical) language. That is in addition to what the local media circulated in respect to its ministerial departments referring to French experts to oversee the proposed reforms. They also placed the name 'Israel' instead of Palestine within the school geography books for the first year of middle school and then the ministry decided to withdraw that following the uproar causing them to claim it had been a printing error! As for Tunisia, then the minister of education recently presented his strategy for educational reform and proposed lightening the science subjects like maths and physics to provide sufficient room to teach music and dance in mixed schools and educational institutions, so that the students can feel happiness. Similarly, reading books for the early years contain texts and pictures that violate the sense of shame which stirred a wave of resentment amongst parents.

Consequently, the one who examines the alterations that have taken place simultaneously in the Arab countries, will perceive that the objective of the process of "educational reform" is not as they claim for the sake of developing the curriculum and improving their intellectual and knowledge level of the student. Rather, it only represents a process of fundamentally changing the concepts that the curricula are based and built upon which dictates the targeting of the Deen, values, history and the Shar'a. This is what completely obliterating the Islamic identity means. The problem is therefore not the replacement of some terms that incite sensitivity or provoke follows of other Shar'iyahs (ways). Rather, it is the complete secularisation of the educational programme so that generations are destroyed, intellectually and in terms of civilisation and knowledge, where they no longer have any benefit in respect to the Deen or in respect to knowledge.

The way we have described the changing of the curricula does not mean that they are in origin sound and free of corruption. That is because the issue of secularising the curricula was included within the western colonial plans at the time of the fall of the Ottoman Khilafah state and the French and English occupation of the lands of North Africa like Morocco,

Algeria and Tunisia all the way to Egypt. That was then followed by the American military and cultural colonialism and that is exactly what the Director of Education George Hardy in Morocco had become aware of during the colonial period when he said: “The military victory does not mean the complete victory. Force builds empires but it is not what guarantees its continuance and perpetuation. Heads bow before cannons whilst the hearts continue to be fed with hate and the desire for revenge. It is necessary to subdue the souls after completing the subduing of the bodies. Although this task is not as noisy as the other, it is nevertheless difficult like it and in most circumstances, it requires a long time (to accomplish)”.

From that time on there have been consecutive secularising campaigns against the lands of Islam and they used education as a cultural weapon to demolish the fortress of the Ummah from within. The calls of orientalism, missionaries and westernisation came to dominate over the educational curricula and that began to be accompanied by the promotion of the Aqeedah (belief) of the separation of the Deen from life. They tied the term secularisation (‘Ilmaaniyah’ in Arabic) to the word ‘Ilm’ (knowledge) to promote this Aqeedah that completely contradicts with Islam. It was therefore a great deception to present the word ‘Ilmaaniyah’ (secularism) as being derived from the word ‘Ilm (knowledge) in the Arabic language as a translation for the word ‘secularism’ in the English language which is not connected to the word ‘knowledge’ within their dictionaries. Rather, it is representative of a comprehensive idea about the human, the universe and life adopted by the West.

At that time the European occupation sought to appoint French and English foreign directors of education in Egyptian, Algerian and Moroccan schools, to oversee and supervise the educational process directly and to prepare local capabilities within foreign student programmes producing later those who were considered to be the pioneers of educational reform. This was like the reforms of Muhammad Ali Pasha in Egypt and the foreign students that he dispatched where the number of students that he sent to Europe reached 319. Their model and blueprint was Rifaat Tahtawi the author of the book: “The Extraction of Gold or an Overview of Paris”. After his return from France, he wrote and praised the French life in all of its elements, including their manner of thinking, education and the way the individuals interacted with one another. And what Lord Cromer illustrated in relation to the intellectual infiltration of the minds through these foreign student programmes was not insignificant when he said: “The young men who received their education of sciences in England and Europe lose their cultural and spiritual linkage to their homelands whilst at the same time they are unable to belong to the land that gave them their culture. As such, they are split in the middle, torn”.

Muhammad Ali and his family worked to contain the civil education and side-line the Azhar education and remove it. The main goal of his policy was to make Egypt a part of Europe as his son Ismail used to say and he was certain that change would never occur unless the education was westernised.

The contagious spread of curricula changes reached many Islamic countries, including Tunisia at the hands of a young cultured generation who had been educated within French universities and filled with the secular western culture. At the head of them was Bourguiba, the Tunisian president following the illusion of independence. He was considered to be a son of France and he was influenced in particular by Mustafa Kemal, the demolisher of the Ottoman Khilafah. From the moment that he assumed the position of ruling, he worked deliberately to secularise the educational curriculum under the grand title of “Modernising education”. He had no need of the University of Zaitouna institution and considered it as being “A traditional institution that does not provide other than traditional education focused upon the basis of the Deen”, according to him. And the transformation of the religious

Zeitouna University that had deep roots in the history of the Islamic society into a mere faculty for Shari'ah and Usool ud-Deen, upon the modern format, submitting in its curricula and programmes to the line of the authority of the modern state. The aim was to exclude it from political and cultural participation whilst considering that the traditional group who had arisen from Az-Zaitounah (i.e. religious education) were dislocated by a deep historical gap from the knowledge revolution and its reforms had not been directed towards the production of creative minds and industrial skills. This only translated to mean an attempt to wipe the slate clean with the Arab Islamic culture which Bourguiba would always show contempt towards and regarded it as a cause for backwardness.

In regards to Morocco and Algeria, the French colonialist sought to undermine the Arabic language, fight against it and to adopt the French language from the primary school level. The malicious French policy was able to shape a group of cultured people who had become separated from their people, scorned their Ummah, integrated into the European civilisation, adopted the French nationality and defended France to the death. Particularly from the beginning of the 20th century and whilst the keys for change were in their hands they desired for this change to be deep and rooted to leave its destructive effects within the generations to follow. Consequently, the work to westernise the education represented their starting point and their objective.

The Church also supervised a large part of the education sector in the Mediterranean region where the French Governor at that time Admiral de Gueydon issued his orders in the year of 1871 to the 'White Fathers' (members of a French missionary organisation) saying: "If you have striven to make the peoples incline through education and what you direct them towards in terms of good, then you have by these efforts of yours provided a mighty service to France. Continue your work with shrewdness, wisdom and caution, and you will have support from me and you can fully depend upon us".

The work in Lebanon and Syria to secularise the curricula was focused and powerful. This was as the Arab orientalisists sought to influence the education policy and particularly as they excelled in the Arab language. So they distorted the radiant Islamic history and transformed it into a history of a repressive empire. They were also concerned with the Arabic language and delved heavily into the translation of French poetry, prose and texts, which sought to promote the western values about happiness, human, and life.

The gravity of the war against the education curricula increased when America entered the Islamic lands. Campaigns, conferences and seminars took place one after the other which were concerned with the matter of secularising the curricula within the Islam world and particularly in the Middle-East and Arab Gulf. They took place as part of the war against "terrorism" and to erase the negative image of America, the Jewish entity and the western world in general. The statements were very clear in the Camp David agreement and the Oslo and Madrid Accords. In 1979, the following was mentioned in the constitution of the organisation "Islam and the West" overseen by UNESCO and headed by Lord Caradon: The school book compilers should not issue judgements upon values whether explicitly or implicitly, just as it is not right for them to present the religion as a criteria or goal.

Consecutive reports have come prepared by a group of American political experts like the No. 19 group or Rand and AIPAC institutions. They have presented a host of studies and recommendations which are raised to the US National Security Agency and some to the President directly. In some of the reports it was stated: "The objectives of the American campaign against "terrorism" can only lead to control over the coming generations for a period of ten years and this can only be considered as a temporary sedative. However, changing the educational curricula from the primary stage is what guarantees the existence

of non-terrorist generations”.

Consequently, the objective of “secularising the curricula” is not a new matter and the focus was not knowledge as much as the focus upon secularisation. This is what has led many of the Arab lands to occupy globally low educational levels according to the US foreign affairs report about education in the Arab world. The aim from all of this focus upon the curricula is therefore not to bring about a knowledge revolution in the lands of Islam but rather it is to spread ignorance, backwardness and to cut the link to Islam.

In conclusion, we present the most significant recent directives or instructions related to the secularisation of curricula in the Arab world:

1 - For the curricula to be free of animosity to the West and any encouragement to undertake Jihaad against the American allies, the Jews and the West in general.

2 - To make the curricula incline towards peace and tolerance.

3 - To circle within the orbit of the western culture.

4 - To erase the Islamic culture and the Islamic personality.

5 - Normalisation with the Jewish entity through the curricula and to discourage fighting them.

6 - The curricula focus upon the memorisation of information and repetition without creativity or innovation.

7 - The most important reason is that the Shar’i Deeni (religious) education is the number one enemy to the American and Western policy.

However, in spite of all of these international efforts and global conspiracies imposed over the educational curricula in the Islamic world and which have extended over a whole century, the American, French and English policy was incapable of succeeding completely in its colonialist plans nor were they able to contain all of the generations and colour them with the western culture. That is because what we are witnessing today in terms of the Ummah moving towards the resumption of the Islamic life via the establishment of the Khilafah (Caliphate) upon the methodology of the Prophethood, reflects the strength of the Aqeedah within the minds of the people and their hearts. And that the revivalist change that the Ummah desires is established fundamentally upon changing the balances of ruling within the world and restoring the authority of Islam. In addition, the Muslims comprehend well the enormity of the evil that is desired for them by others and as such they are continuing to move on to accomplish an intellectual and ideological revolution, from which a knowledge and industrial revolution will result. They do not rely upon these set curricula because they are firstly and lastly a western production which does not seek goodness or success for them. As for Islam, then it remains within them and that is because the Book of Allah is still amongst them. As long as they hold on to it, they will never be misguided after that ever.

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