# The Child in Modern Cairo

*Parenting and Religion in the Egyptian Middle Class*

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# Preface

Being a mother of four and a Muslim in a Christian majority country I have myself spent many hours pondering how to raise my children in the best way. This is also a topic many other minority parents here in Norway think about and discuss frequently. This inspired me to try to figure out how parents in a Muslim majority country think about children upbringing.

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# 1 Introduction to the Theme and Structure of the Study

## 1.1 Introduction

How are children viewed in Islam? Western scholars have written much on the child in Christianity, but what about the child in Islam? Children rights and how the young ones are taken care of has been an interesting subject for me all the way back to when I learned about the new children's law in Egypt back in 2008. I later realized that there is not that many subjects in academia that touches upon children rights or discusses it. In the autumn of 2011 I found a course in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo. The course was called "Just a Child. The Child in Diaconia, Church and Society" and the course focused on childhood in Norway and in Christianity (UiO, 2011).

I enjoyed the course and it inspired me to learn more about the relationship between children's rights, how children are raised and the Islamic faith. In particular, I was curious about how parents relate to Islamic traditions as they decide on how to raise their children and what Islamic traditions to maintain and what to disregard. In what follows, I have adopted the perspective of Talal Asad on Islamic tradition by regarding practice that is argued for by relating to past Islamic discourse and how the practice best can be carried on in the future as part of the Islamic tradition (Asad, 1986, p.14). By the expression "Muslim culture" I regard any culture with a Muslim majority as a Muslim culture. On the other hand, I will use the term "in Islam" to refer to practices and such that are part of a discourse that relates to Islamic sources and past Islamic practices.

As I started to search Islamic literature, I realized that it was much easier to find what duties the children have to their parents, for instance, than what rights the child enjoys in Islam. There was also little advice to parents on how to raise children. Even so, children are cherished by Muslims and are often mentioned to be of paramount importance in the family. I felt sure there must be more to the story than what I found at first attempt. The interplay between religious thought and society in general is prominent in the family. That's where private faith and thought meets society, making it interesting as a topic for a master thesis in the field of religion and society. A great amount of research has been carried out on Islam from a feminist point of view and discussing the position of women in Islam and Muslim majority societies. I discovered that there is very little research available on how Islamic

sources and thought influences how families decide to raise children. The family is often described as the building block of society in religious societies, but in Islamic texts it seems that the building blocks of the family are granted little attention.

Understanding the clockwork of the family can be considered paramount to understanding any society that has not adapted to the welfare state. In particular, it is interesting to understand better what role religious sources of information play in parent's choices with respect to how their children are taught and raised. This thesis looks at what rights the children have in Islam. What does actually Islamic sources tell about children and child rearing? In particular, is there any clear guidance in Islam with respect to what values to focus on when raising your children? Many Muslim parents here in Norway spend quite a lot of time thinking about what is the most important values to teach their children, but to what extent do parents in a Muslim majority society take religion into consideration as they raise their children? I also wanted to uncover how important religious teaching is for the maintenance of gender differences in Muslim majority societies.

The thesis based upon information collected through qualitative interviews with parents that look upon themselves as practicing believing Muslims and Copts in middle class Cairo in Egypt and field work carried out there. Therefore the thesis will focus on the Egyptian middle class of Cairo, rather than Muslims in general. To provide a theoretical framework for the thesis, the relevant parts of traditional Islamic sources for child rearing have been gathered and discussed, as well as more modern works by Islamic scholars that are popular in Egypt. The position of the child in Islamic teaching is compared to the legal framework laid out by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Egyptian law as well as the little Islamic law and jurisprudence that is relevant to children.

## 1.2 The Research Method

As little research has been done on how parents in Muslim majority countries actually think about the child in a religious perspective I found a qualitative study for my topic to be the most suitable. I knew early on that I wanted to carry out qualitative interviews with parents in Cairo, Egypt, as I have lived in Egypt and fully master the Egyptian dialect of Arabic. Most Egyptians consider themselves religious, and I chose to pick parents that view themselves as religious in the sense that they consider religion a part of their daily life and as something important to themselves. I interviewed five Muslim couples, two Coptic couples and a

separated Coptic mother. All the couples have two or more children of both genders, except one of the two Coptic couples. It was important for me to interview couples with both daughters and sons, as I wanted to explore how girls and boys are raised differently and whether such differences are based upon religious views.

I interviewed the husband and the wife of each couple separately, so that they could speak more freely and to avoid spending time on discussions between the husband and wife. The informants are all born and raised in Cairo, and they have lived there all their life. I had planned to spend one hour on each interview. In reality the duration of the interviews was between 20 and 120 minutes. The interviews were supplemented by field studies of how families actually interact. Further details on the research method are provided in Chapter 3.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The overarching aim of this thesis was to study how children and their rights are viewed in Islamic sources on the one hand and how much emphasis Muslim parents place on Islamic teaching when they raise their children. The following four research questions have been investigated in this work:

1. What values does Islam recommend that parents teach their children and what values do the parents feel are the most important?
2. How much emphasis do parents in Cairo place on religion when it comes to choosing how to raise their children? Do secular sources such as the UN Convention on the Right of the Child influence parents?
3. To what extent do parents justify maintaining gender differences in raising children by referring to religious sources?
4. How important is religion as compared to the general influence of society on how parents decide to raise their children?

## 1.4 Relevant Research

As mentioned earlier there is not much research available on the position of the child in Islam and children's rights in an Islamic context. The family as a whole has however been the topic of several works related to legal matters. In Abdullahi A An-Na'im´s book *Islamic Family Law in a Changing World* (An-Na'im, 2002) the history of Sharia and an overview of its application in Muslim majority societies in family matters is presented. From the legal point of view, Dejo Olowu (2008) focuses on the child and how the rights and needs of children can be cared for in a sharia context.

Some work has also been done on the topic of the Islamic family in the social context. Tove Stang Dahl wrote the work *The Muslim Family*. The work is a result from fieldwork in Cairo in the 80's and her work was carried out in collaboration with Unni Wikan. However, both Dahl and Wikan carried out their work among the poor of the slums of Cairo. I have found some books and articles written by Islamic scholars that are read by Egyptians on how to raise children according to Islamic sources (Ulwan, 2004; UNICEF, 2005; Ayoob, 2006). Even though these works would not be considered research in the western academic tradition, they are included since they are important to understand the Egyptian view on the matters at hand. Finally, an article titled *The Child as Gift* by John M. Hull compares how Christianity, Islam and Judaism can work in UN children's rights.

Plenty research has been carried out on the topic of Islam and women's rights and women's position within Islam. Since the thesis will also consider gender issues within the family, with a special focus on how children are raised, this research is also relevant for this work. Examples of a work I will look closer at are *Women and gender in Islam* by Leila Ahmed, works by Amina Wadud on feminism in Islam and books by Tariq Ramadan.

## 1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 gives a short introduction to the Egyptian society and religion in Egypt. The emphasis of this chapter is on the middle-class of Cairo. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the thesis work is presented and discussed as well as the informants. Parenting in Islamic sources and teaching is outlined in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5 I discuss Children's rights, Islam and the informant's view of the right of children.

Chapter 6 discusses what values and religious skills the informants focus on when raising their children. The views of the informants are related to the Quranic verses and *Hadiths* that Egyptian middle-class Muslims often quote in discussions about religious values. In the case of the Coptic informants, their use of Sunday schools is also discussed.

Gender differences and gender roles in the family are discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter presents the informant's views on gender and how they justify teaching daughters and sons different skills and values.

Finally, the thesis is summarized and the results are discussed in Chapter 8.

# 2  Egypt and Islam

## 2.1 Introduction

This work focuses on the Islamic tradition of the educated middle class of Cairo in Egypt, where the majority is following Sunni Islam. The largest religious minority Egypt is the Christians. The Christians mainly belong to the Coptic Evangelicals Church and this minority is estimated to make up about 10 % percent of the total Egyptian population (Neill, 2006, p.485). The fact that the majority of the 80 million residents living in Egypt are Muslims played a vital role in the Egyptian constitutions following the 23 July Revolution in 1952. The country has a long tradition of being one of the leaders in Islamic studies due to the presence of Al-Azhar University. The Islamic Al-Azhar University was founded in 970 or 972, and has since enjoyed a prominent role in Islamic studies in the Arab world (Encycopædia Britannica, 2015).  At this university, Muslims from around the world come to improve their knowledge of Islam. In this sense, many consider Egypt an important country in the Islamic world. Since this work is seeking to explore the interplay between religion and culture, Egypt with its significant Coptic minority is suitable for such a study. In Egypt, it is possible to interview Muslims and Copts with very similar cultural and economical background. Such a comparison is difficult in for instance my home country, Norway, as Christians and Muslims tend to have different cultural and economical backgrounds.

## 2.2 Egypt in Facts and Figures

The Arab Republic of Egypt is situated to the east in North Africa at the intersection of Africa and Asia. The country shares borders with Libya, Sudan, Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories. It is the Arab country with the largest population, with almost 87 million residents, according to 2014 estimates (IBRD IDA, 2014).

Religion seems to play an important role in the social lives of many people in Egypt. Despite Egypt having secular regimes since the 1919 revolution, the country has been the source of the most influential Muslim movement in North Africa, the Muslim Brotherhood (An-Naim, 2002, pp. 151 - 153). Egypt being the meeting point of several cultures in the region has also resulted in the four Sunni schools of Islamic law represented among the population. The Hanafi school is considered the most important law school by the authorities and when

Islamic jurisprudence is applied in civil law today it is based upon Hanafi sources (An-Naim, 2002, pp.169-174).

The country's population is a young population, with 49.9% of the population aged 25 years or younger. Children younger than 14 represent 31.1% of the total population. The median age of the population is, in fact, only 25.1 years as can be seen from table 1.06 in the UNICEF report "UNICEF Children in Egypt: a statistical digest" (UNICEF, 2014, p.5). The country is undergoing large scale urbanization and today the population is largely urban with more than 40% of the population living in the larger cities of the country according to table 1.14 (UNICEF, 2014,  p.10). Approximately 20% of the total population of Egypt lives in the capital, Cairo, and its surrounding areas.

Egypt is considered a lower middle-income country, with a GDP of 262,832 US Million dollar according to table 14.15 (UNICEF, 2014, p.224). Its 2014 human development index (HDR, 2014) is ranked 110, placing it in the medium human development category. Still, Egyptians often claim that their country is underdeveloped. Unplanned power cuts are common and many aspects of public services suffer from poor planning.  Since the uprising in 2011, Egypt has experienced many political changes and yet another revolution in 2013. The 2013 revolution was in part caused by water restrictions, petrol shortages and random power cuts. Most people also feel that the security situation of the country has degraded since early 2011 and the high number of reported bomb attacks add weight to the claim. The many protests, the uprisings and the revolutions have left the Egyptian society in turmoil (Abdul-Hamid, 2011).

In total, about 22% of the country's population is living below the poverty line (IBRD IDA, 2014). Many families encounter difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities in raising their children due to their precarious financial situation. Most families have to cover school fees or expenses related to education as well as hospital fees for their children (IBCR, 2007). This has the potential to compromise the rights of children to education and health. Youth unemployment is high. The total unemployment rate for those aged 15-29 is 38.9% (IBRD IDA, 2014). Only 34.4% of the urban population is covered by a health insurance (UNICEF, 2014, p.228). The government has expressed its commitment to reducing regional differences, but poverty remains mainly concentrated in rural Upper Egypt governorates of Assiut, Menya, Suhag, Qena, Beni Suef and Aswan, while the larger cities, including Cairo, are more prosperous (IBCR, 2007).

## 2.3 The Egyptian Society is Layered

Most Egyptians see Egypt as a layered society, and most of the residents have a clear idea about their own place in society. As suggested by Bourdieu (Bordieu, 1989) social class depends upon how material, social and cultural resources are distributed through society. In Egypt the layered and divided society can be seen clearly from economical facts. In 2008 two Egyptian brothers were on the top hundred of the richest people of the world. At the same time the UN estimated that between 30% to 40 % of all the Egyptians live under the line of poverty. In Egypt it is also common to find fashionable villas next to slums (Selvik and Stenslie, 2011, p. 49).

Economy is, however, not the only divide in Egypt, but rather the easiest to measure. Egyptians themselves probably consider education the most important measure of social status in the country. People also place emphasis of your geographical origin when placing you on the social ladder. The class division also results in the various classes of society following slightly different social codes. There are few arenas where social classes with great distance mix. The children of the vegetable seller, children of the teacher, and children of the businessman would, in general, not play together or attend the same schools or clubs. People with a Western-oriented way of thinking rarely talk to or work with people with a more traditional set of values. Jobs are often advertised within a social network, thus contributing to making most workplaces homogeneous in values and cultural aspects.

However, the current elite or upper class of Egypt is not identical with the upper class of the colonial period of the country, as great social change has taken place over the last century. It is commonplace in post-colonial societies that decolonization results in an emerging elite that reproduces inequalities between classes, gender and religious groups, and the layered structure of the Egyptian society can also be understood in this context (Al-Ali, 2000, Introduction, 1. paragraph). Before the revolution in 2011, Egypt was perfect example of what is called clientelism. Personal dependency in Egyptian politics was said to be a school example of clientelism. Egypt's 1971 constitution gave the president broad powers. He could appoint and dismiss governments and prime minister and had the right to dissolve the national assembly. All leading posts in the National Democratic Party that the president was the leader of were filled by personal appointment of the president. The president used his powers given to him by constitution to fill the whole system with reliable supporters and to

reward his loyal servants (Selvik and Stenslie, 2011, pp.58-62). Today, it is too early to say whether the recent revolutions have made substantial changes to the clientelism of Egypt, or not, and if the old elite of the Mubarak rule will simply be replaced by another elite or by a new social structure.

Egypt has a rather large, educated middle class. I have chosen in this work to define the social classes by listing typical criteria used by Egyptians themselves to define someone's social status. A typical Cairo citizen would consider anyone doing manual work as lower class. In general it is the poor or those without education above primary school that carry out simple manual work. Wealthy people, those with prominent positions in society, or people with a combination of well-respected education and a high yearly income, are considered to be the upper class. Another requirement to be upper class would also be that you live in the better parts of town, and that your (if applicable) peasant origin is not visible in the way you talk or act.
Upper class Egyptians of the new-rich kind have often a tendency to mix an English or French term in about every sentence they utter, unless they belong to the ever more rare traditionally-oriented part of the upper class. More traditionally oriented upper-class Egyptians can often be identified by their speaking of standard Arabic rather than the Cairo dialect, in addition to being wealthy. The middle class is situated between these two extremes. The middle class is also divided into a Western and a traditionally oriented part. This work will focus on the middle class that is traditionally-oriented, in which people speak Arabic in complete sentences, pray and dress in what is referred to as modest style. This is probably how the majority of the middle class of Cairo acts.

In particular, Judy Brink studied the patterns of child rearing in a small village in Giza, north of Cairo. Her studies showed a clear divergence between how educated and uneducated mothers raised their children (Brink, 1995, pp.84-85). The uneducated women would use a short-term form of discipline for their children, and the fathers are regarded as the authority figures of the house and responsible for disciplining the children. The result is also that the fathers/husbands have to raise their children and serve as the authorities to their children and wives. The children learn to take care of their siblings and to rely on their mothers. This is what the mothers desire, and their parenting skills achieve this goal. Educated mothers breastfeed their children less and they make the children sleep in separate beds. Educated mothers also purchase toys for their children to play with. The children of educated mothers

will not learn to take care of their younger siblings, unlike the children of the uneducated, but they have to study hard and are expected to become professionals. The educated mothers expect their children to live separate lives as adults, and do not expect that their sons will live with them after they get married, unlike the uneducated mothers (Brink, 1995, pp. 90-91). This illustrates how the social identity of a family is of great importance in a society such as Egypt.

Another example is that among poor people, it is common that women have their first child before turning 19. In 2008, the mean age of first childbirth was 22.9 years (IBRD IDA, 2014). For women without education, the mean age of first childbirth is only 20.3 years, while women with education above the secondary level have their first child at the mean age of 24.5 years according to the information in tables 4.8, 4.9, 5.9, and 8.4 of "Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000" (El-Zanaty and Way, 2001, pp. 53-54, 69, 104). The same figures show that the level of education is of far greater importance regarding when a women gets married and has her first child, compared with factors such as where she lives or whether she works for cash or not. There are also large differences between the urban and rural regions of Egypt.

## 2.4 Status of the Child in Egypt

Egypt was one of the first countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are signs that the status of children has improved significantly in recent years, and in 2008, the Child Law was updated to guarantee

> *"... children the right to life, survival and development within a harmonious family environment." (Abdul-Hamid, 2011, p. 97)*

Egypt has made great progress with respect to child mortality. In the period of 1990 - 2009, the child mortality rate for children under the age of one was reduced from 66 to 18 per 1,000 live births. This large reduction in child mortality is thought to be due to improvements in health care, a focus on breastfeeding, and early disability diagnosis. For children aged less than five, the figures reduced from 90 to 21 per 1,000 live births (Abdul-Hamid, 2011, p.97). As described below, school enrolment has also increased in the entire country.

Even so, there are still many worrying child-related issues in the country. One example is that the percentage of children under the age of five suffering from anemia increased from 30% to 49% in the period of 2000 - 2005. This indicates that there is a general lack of knowledge about proper child nutrition, in addition to the problem that many children suffer from food deprivation (Abdul-Hamid, 2011, p.98).

## 2.5 The Educational System in Egypt

School is compulsory by law for children aged 6 - 14 years. At present, 9 out of 10 children enjoy this right (UNICEF website; Zanaty and Way, 2001, Chapter 15). For the population aged 15-24, about one third is illiterate, with the gap between males and females being much smaller than for the older population (Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2003).

The net primary school enrollment is 90.6% and 80.9% for preparatory school in total for 2013 and 2014, respectively (UNICEF, 2014, p.115). These figures represent a large improvement as compared with the same figures for 2008/2009. The enrollment figures for females have been increasing for several years. However, for preparatory school enrollment, the gender difference in enrolment has increased for 2013/14. The net secondary school enrollment, for all types of secondary education, is 57.2% (UNICEF, 2014, p.115). The figures for school life expectancy from 2011/12 show that both girls and boys are expected to stay in school for approximately the same duration (UNICEF, 2014, p.140).

Egypt has an educational system in which children may start pre-primary education at the age of four and is available to beyond the age of 22 for those who continue with their academic studies. The mandatory education in Egypt consists of primary education that lasts for six years and preparatory school that lasts for a further three years. Following their compulsory schooling, students may continue with secondary education. The school system of Egypt has as many as 16 million students and 1.6 million paid employees, making it one of the largest pre-university school systems in the Arab world (Abdul-Hamid, 2011, p.96). There are two options, college preparatory studies and vocational training (Neil, 2006, p.487).
There are both private and public schools in Egypt that all follow the government curriculum. In addition, there are religious schools called Azhar schools. The only schools that do not follow the governmental curriculum are the international schools (Neil, 2006, p.485).

The Egyptian school system is strict, with exams or tests that must be passed every term. The child must pass exams to be allowed to continue to the next grade. The pressure on the students is significant to earn good results. The highest pressure is during the last year of preparatory school and the last year of secondary school (Neil, 2006, pp.487-488). The exam system favors memorization rather than reasoning, and only word-by-word answers matching they keys earn a passing score. In the international school survey TIMSS, the Egyptian 8th grade results gives the Egyptian school a score of 391. The international average is 500, and the Norwegian school system scored 469 in the same survey (TIMSS, 2007, p.2). One of most commonly quoted reasons for dropping out of school in Egypt is that the child failed exams (Zanaty and Way, 2001, p.204). The classrooms are often overcrowded, with more than 40 pupils per teacher being a common figure, especially in the countryside. A ministerial directive discourages corporal punishment in the school, but it is believed to be commonly practiced in the Egyptian school system. The widespread use of corporal punishment contributes to making many pupils dislike school. After illness, the child not wanting to attend school is the most common reason for children missing school in Egypt (Zanaty and Way, 2001, p.207). It is a well-known fact that dropping out of school often starts with the child missing school for "not wanting to attend".

In general, Egyptian people consider private schools to be the preferable alternative, as the quality of the public schools is considered to be low. If you cannot afford to send your child to a private school, then you must pay for private lessons outside school for your child in order for them to have a chance at succeeding, unless you have an exceptionally clever child. Those who can afford neither are also often also those who have little education, thus making it ever more difficult to increase the general educational level of the population (Sobhy, 2012, p.48).

The educational law of 1981 stipulated that compulsory education provided by public schools should be free (Abdul-Hamid, 2011, p.96). Since 1999, children have had the right to nine years of education and, as stated earlier, this education is compulsory. In practice, parents need to pay registration fees, health insurance fees, and buy uniforms and school supplies (Abdul-Hamid, 2011, p.96). Egyptian parents view education as important for success and for social mobility. In the 1980's, private tutoring started to be used to a greater extent, and since then, its use has escalated among everyone that can afford such lessons. Private tutoring is now reported to be used by as much as 50 % of the pupils in primary school,  74 % in

preparatory school, and as many as 80 % of secondary school students. There are few other countries that utilize this extent of private tutoring in their educational system (Sobhy, 2012, pp.48-49).

The Egyptian government has attempted to reduce the market for private tutoring and has worked to make  tutoring available for all by requiring that schools provide in-school tutoring after regular school hours. This program is often called simply "magmu'at" (literally translates as "collective") and it is regulated by Ministry of Education regulations. The same teachers who instruct the pupils during the day provide these tutoring lessons after regular school hours. It is obligatory for the school to provide this service, but the parents are free to choose between the in-school tutoring and private lessons (Sobhy, 2012, p.49). However, this program did not prevent the private teachers outside the regulated magmu'at from continuing the tutoring. Also, the students are pressured into taking private lessons so that they will have the possibility of passing the exam and being treated better. The public school is considered to be of poor quality, with teachers having low qualifications and large classes, and it is believed that approximately one third of those who complete the compulsory 9 years of public school are practically illiterate (Sobhy, 2012, pp.50-51).

## 2.6 The History of Education for Girls in Egypt

Education in Egypt for girls in the lower to middle class was a lacking aspect because the traditional schools that is called the "Kuttabs" where the children were taught to read and write had a very low percentage for girls. This reflected that it was mainly boys that learned to read and write. This gave women a disadvantage in gaining knowledge of their rights or duties in a modern society where information usually is passed on in writing. Women often relied on male relatives and authorities to guide them on what was right and wrong. Not being able to read and studying restricted the role women could take on in society, as well as limiting their own possibilities in life.

It was not until the 1830's that missionary schools were opened for girls and by the year 1875 about 3,000 Egyptian girls were attending.  In 1887, the number there had increased to 4000 girls attending. Most of the girls attending these schools were Copts, but some few were Muslims (Ahmed, 1992, p.135). At the same time Khedive Ismail declared that schools are

the "base of every progress", and as a result of this there was a recommendation of establishing schools all over the country.

In 1870's a book published by al-Tahtawi, an important Egyptian thinker who started a movement of Islamic modernity and a national project to modernize the school system, stated that the school is for both genders and explained why it was imported to educate the girls too. The education of women would, according to al-Tahtawi, lead to more harmony in the marriage, and that it would benefit society for women to be able to carry out the type of work men usually do, within the limits of their physical capabilities. He argued that men and women are not different with respect to the level of intelligence, but rather only with respect to the femininity or masculinity of their bodies (Ahmed, 1992, p.136).

In 1873, the government established the first girl school. In 1875 there was 5,362 pupils attending primary governmental schools and out of this 890 were girls. When the British occupied Egypt in 1882 the educational expansions was slowed down in general by the political decisions taken by the occupying power. This affected the girls' education as well.  The colonists did not help the Egyptians in general to get educated and did not see the value of governmental expenditure in the educational system. The very same year Egypt was occupied, the school tuition fees were raised considerably, thereby making it financially impossible for many to send their children to school (Ahmed, 1992, p.137).

Another example of how the school situation and educational priorities changed is that in the year 1881 (prior to the British occupation) about 70 % of the students in the governmental schools received economical help covering clothes, tuition and books. About ten years later, in 1892, more than 73 % of the students paid their own expenses in every respect.  In 1901 the situation for many of the male students was that they did not have the financial capability of continuing their education in secondary school. Nationalist intellectuals and Islamic reformist like Jamal al- Din al-Afghani and Muḥammad  'Abduh emphasized the importance of education, but they were not able to change the situation of the countries (Ahmed, 1992, pp.136-137).

The first governmental secondary schools admitting girls were opened in Cairo by the end of the 19th century.  Governmental schools for girls were establish in the provinces in 1909 and the first governmental girl school in Alexandria was opened in 1917. But the numbers of girls

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attending public schools had decreased by about 15 % by the year 1914, as compared to the enrollment numbers of 1875. However, an increase in enrolment of girls in missionary schools was seen in the same period. For instance, in 1914 the American missionary schools alone had 5,517 girls enrolled. As mentioned, most of the pupils in missionary schools were Copts. This implies that the likelihood of a Christian girl receiving formal education was much higher than for Muslim girls in this period. The big demand and lack in governmental schools resulted in the uprising of a large number of private foreign schools (Ahmed, 1992, p.138).

The importance of girls' education was recognized and by 1930, the number of girls attending school had risen to 24 % of the total school population (Ahmed, 1992, p.189-190). The first women to attend university education in Egypt were matriculated in 1929. By 1937 there were 1 979 women holding university degrees. By 1947 the number of women with university degrees had increased to 4 000. The number of women attaining formal education continued to rise and today, the number of girls completing high school is almost equal to that of boys in urban Egypt (Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2013).

Today, figures show that families in general spend equal amounts on the education of boys and girls, and that the school attendance of girls and boys are equally high for urban areas. The figures also show, that a surplus of mothers considers it more important for boys to attend university as compared to girls. The majority, however, report that the talents of the child is the most important factor for university attendance (Zanaty and Way, 2000, pp. 209-212).

## 2.7 Gender in Contemporary Egypt

The gender of the child plays a role in how parents decide to teach children in most societies, including the Egyptian. Gender limits children's actual opportunities by how children are taught to view themselves through socialization. It is important to understand how the gender of a child affects his or her upbringing. One aim of this study is to shed light on how girls and boys are raised, and also how the role of the mother in the family as opposed to the father is viewed by the Egyptian middle-class society of Cairo.

Gender is considered a crucial part of your identity in Egypt and most Egyptians place emphasis on your gender. Farha Ghannam's work *Live and Die Like a Man* is one of few academic books on gender in the Middle East that focuses on how boys are raised (Ghannam, 2013). Since the book is based upon fieldwork in a middle class district of Cairo, it is of special relevance to this work. The book reveals how boys and girls are raised differently. Boys are taught to be tough, protect their sisters, and run errands and to navigate the city on their own from a young age. Women play a significant role in shaping boys into the role of men, as women still are the main caregivers of young children in Cairo. Girls, on the other hand, are not taught to be independent in the same way as boys and might therefore easily grow up lacking some of the skills to fully master living in a complex city like Cairo. It is common in Egypt to remain living at home as long as you are unmarried. Young unmarried women are generally permitted by the family to attend university to get an education and work once they have graduated. They might also be permitted to go shopping on their own and to visit relatives. Few unmarried women are allowed further liberties. On the other hand, unmarried men would be allowed to do more or less do as they please. Men would also be allowed to live away from their family due to work, while even shorter trips for unmarried women is unthinkable for most families.

## 2.8 What is a Muslim According to Islamic discourse?

There has been a long-standing consensus among Sunni scholars about the following being the six pillars of faith, namely the six principles of faith that Muslims strive to remain faithful to:

- God
- God's angels
- God's messengers
- God's books
- The last day
- Divine preordainment, good or bad

God has sent prophets to the people to inform the people of the right way. To be a Muslim you must believe in all the prophets sent by God (Quran 2:4). When explaining the background for the pillars of faith, Quranic verses such as (Quran 2:2-2:5; 4:136) are commonly quoted, as well as *Hadiths* such as the following:

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It was narrated that 'Ali said:

*"The Messenger of Allah said: 'No slave truly believes until he believes in four things: in Allah alone with no partner; that I am the Messenger of Allah; in the resurrection after death; and in the Divine Decree (Qadar).'" (Book 1, Hadith 85).*

The work "Pillars of Eemaan" from the Saudi-Arabian Ministry of Higher Education is a typical example of the traditional theological presentation of the pillars of faith for the sake of enlightening the believer (Scientific Research Admission of Islamic University, 2014). Furthermore, Muslims are expected to practice Islam according to the five pillars of Islamic practice:

- The act of *Shahada*: Declaring that there no god except God and that Muḥammad  is the messenger of God
- *Salat*: Ritual prayers five times per day
- *Zakat*: Giving alms
- *Sawm*: Fasting the month of Ramadan
- Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca

Of these five pillars 3, 4 and 5 are obligatory only if you are capable of performing them. *Shahada*, *Salat* and *Sawm* the essential practices to adhere to as a Muslim. Scholars commonly view practice and faith as equally important. Worship in Islam plays a major role in the daily life because believers are expected to pray 5 times throughout the day. Before prayer they must purify themselves by washing (ablution) and making sure they only pray in clean places. Muslims fast the month of Ramadan every year. The Muslim fasting is done by not drinking or eating or engaging in sexual activities from dawn until sunset. For the fasting to be accepted by God, Muslims have to not only stay away from food and drinking but also avoid what is unlawful in Islam. Examples are lying, stealing, insulting, backbiting and slandering. In Islam if a person is blessed with wealth that person is to give to those that do not have money and are in need (Vogt 2005, pp. 75-79).

*Halal* is lawful for a Muslim to do. Examples of this are eating in proper amounts (most food), doing good deeds, most jobs and trade. On the other hand has there is *haram*  which is unlawful, forbidden and punishable from the viewpoint of religion. Examples of this are consuming alcohol, killing, eating pork meat, slandering, stealing and so on. Because the

Islam also covers several aspects of social conducts. The informants saying that they teach their children the five pillars of practice and to distinguish between the lawful and unlawful, are in fact referring to a rather large amount of practical and moral knowledge.

## 2.9 Sources of Guidance in Islamic Theology

Muslims believe that the Quran is protected by God and cannot be changed. It is still memorized and recited by Muslims around the world. The Quran is in Arabic and the Arabic language is therefore important to many Muslims. The verses included in the Quran are generally believed by Muslims to be the direct words of God, transmitted to the prophet by the archangel Gabriel. This makes the teachings of the Quran the main source of guidance for Muslims. The doings and sayings of God's last prophet Muḥammad  is considered by Muslims as an example from God for Muslims to know how to practice their religion. Everything the prophet did and explained was memorized by his companions and retold to others. These sayings were collected and written down after the prophet passed away. The sayings of prophet Muḥammad, *hadith,* are another important source of guidance for the believers. The sayings called *Hadith* are sayings of the prophet that are not revelations. The Quran and *Hadith* are the main sources of guidance for a Muslim and the basis of the Islamic law and ethics; sharia. The practice of applying sharia to practical situations and real life questions is called *fiqh* in Arabic. Muslims may well discuss various schools of *fiqh*, but that there is only one sharia.

## 2.10   Religious Studies in the Egyptian School

Religious studies are an obligatory part of the education in Egypt. In public primary, preparatory and secondary schools, the students have two-three lessons per week during compulsory schooling. Muslims take classes in Islam and Christians in Christianity. There is no alternative for children that do not follow one of these two religions. Typically, the teachers providing classes in Islam are paid staff members of the schools, while the Christianity classes are taught by volunteers (Neill, 2006, p.485). Students must pass exams every year to progress in the school system. The students must also pass tests in the subject of religion, but the religion score is not included when the total average score of the student is calculated (Neill, 2006, p.488). When the religious subject is not included as part of the final score, the students do not invest as much time and effort into this subject as they do in other subjects. When one looks at this fact, it seems that religion is not an important component of

the educational system in Egypt. However, it is important to note that the Islamic religion is not only taught to the children in the religion subject, but religious texts are also included in other subjects. The Arabic language and social studies are subjects that include aspects of the Islamic religion. In Arabic language Quranic verses are used to illustrate grammar and *Hadiths* are provided for reading practice and Islamic texts are also used in other ways to illustrate aspects of the language (Neill, 2006, pp.493-496). Islamic history is given a major role in textbooks in the social studies subjects (Neill, 2006, p.497). I have personally also seen Quranic verses used in introductions to science books for public schools. There is in this sense no doubt that the Egyptian education in an Islamic one (Neill, 2006, p.482). The inclusion of Islamic holy texts in most school subjects, and not only the religious, strengthens the Coptic student's feeling of otherness.

There is also a separate Islamic educational system in Egypt called Al-Azhar schools. These schools follow the general curriculum in addition to a separate Islamic curriculum that includes the subjects of Quranic recitation, Quranic exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence. These schools and their curriculum are overseen by the Al-Azhar institute. The Al-Azhar institute in turn is overseen by the Prime Minister directly. In the 2000's the enrollment in Al-Azhar primary schools accounted for about 4% of the total enrollment (Groiss, 2004, pp.13-17). Al-Azhar secondary schools account for almost a quarter of all non-technical secondary school students and if you have completed secondary school in the Azhar system you are only eligible to study at Al-Azhar University. Al-Azhar University is the largest in Egypt and accounts for about 17% of all students in higher education in Egypt.

In addition there are several private schools. They must adhere to state-approved curricula, but are allowed to teach additional material and use extra books that are not required to be state-approved for use in schools. Some private schools are run by Christian organizations and focus on the Christian faith, and others again by other Islamic organizations than Al-Azhar. Most private schools are run by non-religious groups and organizations (Groiss 2004 pp 13-17).

In addition to the religious subject in the school a new subject called "Moral and Values Education" was introduced in 2001. One of the goals of this subject is to bring Christians and Muslims closer and another is to teach the pupils that they share the same set of values and morals (Kouckok, 2005, p.159 ).This new subject that was launched in 2001 and was revised

in the second school year after that to include references from the Quran, the *Hadiths* and the Bible. There were several references from the Islamic scripture and one from the Bible. This was because several Islamic leaders expressed that values and morals could not be thought without religion. The aim of this subject can also seem to be more nationalistic than ethical, as several of the examples provided for the students emphasize the importance of placing country before family and such (Neill, 2006, pp.493-494). The subject was canceled after it had existed for a couple of years and was supposed to be reintroduced after 2010. Because of the political situation in Egypt after the 2011 uprising there has not been any news about reintroducing the subject again (Larvik, 2014, p.98) and it has so far been replaced by other subjects either. However, with the current debate where the school system of the country is given the blame for extremism and terrorism it is likely to see changes to see major changes to the curriculum and how the educational system is organized (Chastain, 2015; Tadros, 2015).

# 3  Data, Method and Ethical Considerations

As discussed in Chapter 2, the income, social group identity and place of living, has the greatest impact on how people live and raise their children. One would not expect to make the same findings among the poor and the middle class, for instance. Given the limited scope of this thesis work, I had to make chose one part of society to study. The large middle class of Egypt was deemed suitable for this study, as informants from this layer of society have education above the preparatory level and thereby are more used to expressing their thoughts and discussing ideas. People of the middle class usually possess a greater knowledge of their faith, as a result of literacy and access to private lessons while at school. Furthermore, people of the middle class lead lives that should offer opportunities to reflect on issues such as parenting skills. As I was familiar with life in the capital, Cairo, prior to starting this work it made sense to me to look for informants there. While the family life of the poor of Cairo has already been studied and commented on by researchers such as Wikan(1980), to my knowledge, little work has been done on the middle class of Cairo. This makes the middle class a more interesting theme for a field study.

Another reason for choosing the middle class is that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, a large portion of the upper class of Egypt is strongly Western oriented and I feared that a study of this portion of society would simply lead to similar results as a study of Muslims in Europe would.

## 3.1 The Search for Informants for the Study

The current study is mostly based upon empirical evidence from in-depth interviews with parents living in urban Cairo. An interview guide was developed prior to the interviews. Modifications of the guidelines were applied in the course of the study. At the same time, due considerations were made with respect to the desired qualities of the informants. This resulted in a set of criteria that the informants had to meet to be included in the study and the informants were recruited in couples according to what follows:

- All informants of the informants should be educated Muslims (Sunni) or Christians (Copts) and identifying themselves as middle class
- All informants should be parents with children of both sexes

- All informants should consider themselves to adhere to their religion and to practice it regularly
- The couples had to be willing to be interviewed man and wife separately

The reason for excluding people without any education is that it was found difficult to formulate questions in a manner that is understood equally well by both highly educated and illiterate. However, this requirement was just about not needed, as very few belonging to the middle class are uneducated. Since one of the goals of the study was to probe gender differences in how children are raised it was desirable with couples that have practical experience with raising both sons and daughters. For a similar reason I wished to interview man and wife separately. In doing so, I hoped that it would be easier to uncover gender differences in people's view of child rearing. My experience has also been that it is easier for a wife or husband to speak freely about matters such as children if they are alone.  This aim of the study was to learn about people who identify as middle class, so rather than attempt to decide in an objective way what layer of society informants belongs to I chose informants who see themselves as middle class.

The informants were recruited through the large, extended family of the author's husband and their friends and neighbors. A rumor of the description of the aim of the study and the needed qualities of the informants was spread in the network of the family. This process yielded, within rather short time period, several candidates that were interested in and willing to participate in the study. These candidates were then provided with information about the study directly from the author by phone and e-mail.

## 3.2 The Informants of This Study

The informants of the study had to meet a set of predefined criteria, as described in the previous section. To protect the anonymity of the interviewed details such as occupation and exact age have been excluded from this work. I decided on simply assigning a number to each couple. A short description of each couple is included below. Throughout the thesis I will stick to the numbering below when discussing the findings of the interviews. Couples 1-5 are Muslims and 6-8 are Copts.

**Couple 1**

Both husband and wife are in their late fifties and educated at master degree level. Both have high positions and have been working full time ever since finishing their studies. They have four grown up children, two female and two male.

**Couple 2**

This is a younger couple in their early thirties and they also have education at the master's degree level. The husband has paid work, while the wife works at home. They have three young children, two boys and a girl.

**Couple 3**

This is a middle-aged couple. The husband has education at the bachelor degree level and has paid work. The wife has a master's degree, but takes care of the household. They have two small children, a girl and a boy.

**Couple 4**

This is also a middle-aged couple. Both husband and wife have formal vocational training at the secondary school level and they are both working full time. They have two teenagers, a girl and a boy.

**Couple 5**

The couple is in their late thirties and is educated at the bachelor level. The husband works and the wife is responsible for the household. They have two young children, girl and boy.

**Couple 6**

This couple is in their early fifties. The husband has a bachelor degree and the wife has a PhD degree. Both are working full time and they have one young boy.

**Couple 7**

This middle-aged couple have formal vocational training at the secondary school level. The husband works and the wife takes care of the household. They have two teenaged girls and a small boy.

**Couple 8**

Only the wife was considered as the couple was living in separation. The children were raised by the wife only and lived with her permanently. The wife has vocational training at the secondary school level and is working full time at the local church. The three children are now grown up, two female and one male.

### 3.3 Ethical Considerations

The interviews of this study are all based upon informed consent (Thagaard, 2009, p.28). Information about the study and how the interviews and results were going to be treated was provided in English and Arabic. In cases where the potential informants seemed reluctant to participate, or to not understand what the study entailed, they were excluded from the selection. This process may have excluded potential informants that eventually might have wanted to participate, but as Egyptians find it hard to say no right out, this was still considered the more ethical approach.

Protection of the privacy of the informants and their anonymity is a basic ethical requirement (Thagaard, 2009,p. 27). This has been taken care of by storing all footage from the original interviews on non-communicating devices in a coded safe. Once the interviews had been transcribed and made anonymous, the original footage (mostly sound recording) was destructed. Furthermore, the project was approved under Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) prior to start and the data treated in accordance with the organization's requirements. It has been a time consuming process to leave out any details that might identify the informants to anyone related to my husband, as many informants were recruited through his network. Where needed, symbolical substitutions have been applied and biographical information has been provided in the text as the bare minimum so that the informants cannot recognize each other's (Thagaard, 2009, pp.224-226).

Finally, there are ethical concerns related to that the type of questions or me as the researcher might have influenced the results in an imbalanced way. Such considerations are treated below in section 3.4.3.

### 3.4 Methodical Details of the Interviews

In total, fifteen informants were interviewed in this study. Qualitative methods are used throughout this study. In this section the methodical details of the interviews is described and the suitability of the method is discussed.

#### 3.4.1 The Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview

As discussed in the section about existing research in this field, it is a rather new field of research. Qualitative methods are well suited in studies where you do not have very clear expectations to your findings and you need flexibility and openness (Thagaard, 2009, p. 12).

Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding. As one aim of this study was to shed light on a side of Islamic society that has not been mentioned often, I found qualitative methods suitable for this reason also.

The semi-structured interview entails that certain questions are predefined, and that the subject to be discussed is clear beforehand. At the same time, there is room for adjustments depending upon the replies and statements of the informants. Interview guidelines were developed inspired by the work of Kvale (Kvale, 1997). The semi-structured interview was chosen because one the one hand a set of questions is predefined setting the standard and making sure that the topics of interest are touched upon. On the other hand, the semi-structured format allows for the informants to jump in between questions and for the interviewer to dig deeper if something unexpected turns up.

### 3.4.2   The Setting of the Interviews

The interviews took place at the homes of the informants. Typically, the informants would serve tea and biscuits. The interview would only commence after a period of exchanging pleasantries such as asking about the health of each other's children and drinking tea, as going directly to doing your business is considered rude in any Arab culture. I dressed in trousers, a long blouse and an Islamic head cloth called hijab. My original idea, was to speak standard Arabic, but I when I actually started interviewing it felt natural to speak colloquial Egyptian Arabic.

Once we were done with the social requirements of the setting according to custom, I would start by asking whether the husband or wife wanted to be interviewed first. The reply would always be the wife, as expected from my knowledge of the Egyptian culture. I would then start recording and asking questions according to my interview guidelines. The first few questions are simple questions like the age and sex of the children, progressing to the open questions relating to the upbringing of children. The informants would frequently get far away from the topic and I had to ask them to get back to what I was interested in like for instance asking "Could you tell me more about how you teach your child the importance of praying?".

### 3.4.3  My Role as Researcher

The fact that I feel at home in the Egyptian culture and that I speak the Cairo dialect fluently probably made the study much easier. Furthermore, me being the mother of four made the conversations around the topic of upbringing flow easily. The questions in the guidelines for the interview were formulated as open questions related to the topic of interest. This was done to influence the informants as little as possible by my expectations to the outcome of the interviews. The use of leading questions was restricted to times when I needed to probe deeper into a topic. It will be mentioned in the discussion of the empirical results whenever I had to ask leading questions.

An important consideration, is how my social identity influences the answers I get from the informants. Since I dress as a Muslim, and speak the language, how would this affect the answers? In particular, I was worried that the Muslim parents would try to appear to be more concerned about religious considerations than they usually are. The questions were therefore formulated in a way that I expected to communicate that I did not care about how they think about the role of religion in raising children. It seems, from the response of the informants, that the Muslim parents did not feel any need to overemphasize their concern for religious sources in the raising of their children.

On the other hand, even though I speak Arabic fluently and dressed in an Egyptian style, I would still have been perceived as European. I was worried that me being a European writing a master's thesis for a European university might influence the informants in the direction of giving replies that they thought would suits western thinking. I hoped that this effect would be reduced by my dress code and by me speaking Arabic closer to the classical Arabic. Still, the informants seem to have been influenced by wanting to appear more western in their answers. The importance of this effect will be discussed in connection with the empirical results of the study and is important to keep in mind when evaluating the results.

Finally, one worry was that the wife and husband would influence each other's answers as the power balance might be skewed within the family, or that the statements of one of the spouses might cause disputes. This is the reason, as mentioned earlier, why the husband and wife of each couple were interviewed separately in an attempt to minimize this effect.

### 3.4.4 The Transcription and Translation Process

As the interviews were recorded, the interviews had to be transcribed. The transcription is a time consuming process. I placed emphasis on the pauses, voice pitch and not only the words said as I transcribed. I made notes, during the transcription, of the state of mind the statements seemed to convey. It did not make sense to transcribe to the Cairo dialect, and writing down the interviews in standard Arabic would almost equal to translating to English. Therefore I chose to translate to English as I transcribed. This implies that when I provide a "direct quote" from an interview, what is actually given is my English translation of what was said in a Cairo dialect of Arabic.

To take care of the anonymity of the informants, I also had to leave out a number of biographical details that would have made the transcribed version of the interviews recognizable to a reader with the right knowledge of the environment I studied. This was however done in a second step, once I had transcribed the whole interview. I frequently employed symbolic substitution.

## 3.5 Hermeneutics and Pre-understanding

Hermeneutics can be said to be the most important theoretical framework for understanding and carrying out knowledge production in qualitative research. Gadamer suggested understanding was interpretation and that understanding was interpretation. Furthermore he identified language acting as most important medium for understanding and a means of sharing the complexities of human experience (Gadamer, 1960). To produce knowledge we must interpret words. Interpreting and thereby understanding, depends upon the context of the communication that is being interpreted. Gadamer's work on *Truth and Method* where he develops his framework of pre-understanding, understanding and interpretation was originally concerned only with classical texts. Today, Gadamer hermeneutics, or hermeneutics in the spirit of Gadamer, is considered a suitable framework for most fields of study that deals with the full complexity of human experience.

Into any context, the researcher who interprets brings in his or her pre-understanding as well. In general one can say that your pre-understanding is central in any work that involves interpreting verbal material. In qualitative studies the researchers must interpret the written records of the interviews, and in fact, there is already quite a lot of interpreting going on at a

subconscious level already while making notes or transcribing the interviews. How the researcher understands the spoken words and accompanied body language depends on the researcher's background. Expectations to the outcome of a communicative process will also influence how the communication is received and interpreted. The hermeneutical method involves interpreting material in several steps. As you work with interpreting communication, your hypothesis for understanding it will influence your pre-understanding. As you go back to review the material, you might very well find that your interpretation has changed due to your updated view on the context and content of the material. This process is commonly referred to as the hermeneutical circle.

In my case, having partly grown up in Egypt and having spent several years in Egypt, influenced how I understood my interview subjects. I was able to let them speak freely in their mother tongue and I believe that I am rather good at understanding the social codes and body language of the culture. In fact, even though my questions were prepared in English and standard Arabic, I asked them in colloquial Egyptian Arabic to ensure that I was able to convey my questions in the way I intended. Before starting my fieldwork, I tried to investigate my own expectations to the outcome of the interviews. This made me realize that I planned to ask questions I would not normally ask people, and therefore my expectations were rather varied. I was not quite sure what to expect, except that I expected people to be concerned about religious aspects of life.

This work also partly consists of a review of previous Islamic texts relevant to the topic of raising children. In interpreting and understanding how the parents I interviewed related to Islam in questions regarding their children, I felt a clear need to have an overview of what has been written by Islamic scholars on the topic. I wanted my selection of texts to be relevant to my qualitative studies. This implied that I had to chose texts that seemed relevant to Egyptian Sunni religious traditions.

### 3.6 Methodical Aspects of the Analysis of the Empirical Results

The interviews touched upon a range of topics related to upbringing and religious thought. I chose to analyze the data according to topic, in accordance with reference (Kvale, 1996). After a topical treatment, the topics were compared and some general trends were found and discussed. The results were also viewed in the context of feminist theory.

## 3.7 Implications of the Methodical Choices

When interpreting and discussing the results from qualitative studies it is important to keep in mind the particular nature of the method. Qualitative methods do not, and cannot, aim at providing general statements. My informants are too few to provide a general understanding of the middle-class of Egypt. For general results, one must have a statistical representative basis for the study and for such a study quantitative methods are suitable. A qualitative study aims rather meaning and understanding, values that are hard to quantify.

## 3.8 An Overview of Islamic Texts Discussing the Child in Islam

In my thesis I have looked at Islamic jurisprudence and traditions to uncover how the child, child rearing and the rights of the child is viewed according to Sunni Islam in Egypt. In my treatment of Islamic texts I have tried to adhere to the hermeneutical traditions of Islamic jurisprudence. A short overview of the four commonly accepted principles of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence is given in what follows to allow the reader to appreciate this aspect of the work with this thesis.

The Arabic word Sharia can be translated as Islamic law and Sharia is by Muslims considered the road to salvation. Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) is the study of the Islamic law. The Islamic law itself is commonly viewed as something eternal, while the Fiqh is what is open to reform and may be studied in the light of society and its change over time (Vokt, 2005, pp. 80-81). To give the reader a broader understanding it is important to note what sources the Islamic law is based upon. The first, and most important, source is the Quran. Believers consider the Quran God's words and Muslims mean that God guards the words of the Quran. Next in importance in Islamic jurisprudence is the *Hadith*. The *Hadith* consists of the sayings and doings of the prophet Muḥammad that have been collected and recorded by early Islamic scholars. These two sources are both held sacred by many Muslims, while only the Quran is considered infallible. The third source in importance in Islamic jurisprudence is Consensus (Ijma). The learned discuss questions that need explanation and clarification with regards to Islamic law based upon the Quran and the *Hadith*. The collective agreement of the learned is then included as part of the jurisprudence. Consensus is given a prominent place in Islamic jurisprudence due to the reported remark by the prophet "My community will never agree in error." This saying is weak and subject to controversy, but nevertheless was important in making consensus next in importance after the sacred texts. Finally, analogical reasoning

(*Qiyas*) is applied to questions that have not been touched upon by either the Quran, the *Hadith* nor pre-existing consensus. The types of cognitive effort and methodical approaches that legal thinkers employed in jurisprudence using textual guidance, consensus, and their own powers of analogical reasoning to discern the Islamic law were termed Ijtihad in Arabic. Literally the term translated as "renewal", but is better translated as "the exercise of one's reason to interpret the law" (Tucker, 2008, pp.12-13).

Because of this tradition of working with questions related to Islamic law, in a broad understanding of the term, I myself have first related Quranic verses related to the questions this thesis touches upon, after that the sayings of the prophet from the *Hadith* and finally the Consensus on matters related to the child. As this is thesis is intended as a descriptive, rather than normative, work I have not attempted to interpret sacred Islamic sources independently. Instead, I have relied on already existing works.

## 3.9 What is Islamic Tradition?

One would not say that anything a member of a church says or does is part of Christian tradition. Likewise, not everything a Muslim does or says represents Islamic tradition. Understanding what constitutes an Islamic tradition and how traditions that are Islamic emerge in society is important to this thesis. This thesis' understanding of what makes a tradition an Islamic tradition is based on Talal Asad's article "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam " So first an Islamic practice is something that has a past, present and future in the way described by this quote from Asad's work:

> *"If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition."* (Asad, 1986, p. 14).

For something a Muslim does or says to be part of Islamic tradition it must be rooted in the history of the religion in a certain way. As Asad explains that there are several persons that can teach or explain and Islamic practice. "A practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so the traditions can be taught to Muslims  by an alim, a khatib, a Sufi shaykh, or an untutored parent (Asad, 1986, p. 15). An alim is an Islamic scholar, while a khatib is a person who delivers the sermon during the Friday and Eid

prayers. A Sufi shaykh is a Sufi who is authorized to teach others, initiate them into Sufism and guide those who aspire to become a dervish. But also parents teach traditions, meaning that anybody can teach the muslim people their traditions as far as they have knowledge on the matter.

## 3.10   Gender in Islam and Feminist Theory in the Egyptian Context

There are several well-known and highly respected scholars who have originated from Egypt. One of the well-known reformists who came from Egypt is Muḥammad  'Abduh**.** He was a reformist who addressed the question of whether it was possible to be Muslim in this modern world and he also modernized discourse on gender within the Islamic context in Egypt. His answer is that "*Islam is a religion of reason and of human nature*". In the light of this, he meant that the best way to solve problems in the context of modernization is to return to the source and to understand it with the help of human reasoning (Waines, 1995, p.226). His thinking has had a large impact upon modern Egyptian thinking. He is probably the only Islamic scholar whom there has been made a TV-series about, and his ideas can be recognized when people discuss gender in daily conversations. 'Abduh was born about 1849 in a village and grew up living a simple village life.  His parents were uneducated, which was something normal in the middle and lower classes in Egypt at that time (Adams, 1968, pp. 19-20). He argued that women and men are equal with respect to work and that Islam considers men and women of equal worth, and is probably the first in scholar in Egypt to argue for such gender equality based upon the Quran and *Hadiths* (Ahmed, 1992, p. 139).

In Egypt the term feminism was first used during the 1920's. Feminists such as Hoda Shaarawi calling for women's right to vote, take up public space and for an end to the harem. In these early days of feminism the movement had close ties with nationalist causes (Badran, 1995, pp.32-46). Journals and associations in the early days of Egyptian feminism could be sorted into two categories:  secular and Islamist. The secular movement drew on ideas from the European feminist movement, in particular the French, while the Islamist movement worked within the framework of conservative Islamic reformism. Both Islamist and secular feminists would draw on important female figures in Islam to justify women taking on public roles in society. In particular, Khadija, the prophet's first wife and the first convert to Islam, was and still is commonly used as an example for women to follow  (Badran, 1995, pp.50-68).

Nadje Al-Ali reviews the concurrent secular Women's movement of Egypt in her work *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Al-Ali, 2000). It seems, judging from her work, that there is still a schism between the secular and Islamist thought with regards to gender. Her work reveals a large diversity of women's movements in Egypt that to a greater or lesser extent argue for gender equality based upon secular sources such as the UN framework for human rights. The secular women's movement is struggling to convince itself and society that a women's movement in Egypt can be authentic and rooted in the Egyptian culture.

Nawal El Sadaawi is commonly viewed as the most influential contemporary feminists of Egypt and is considered important to the second wave of feminism in Egypt (Al Yafai, 2015). Through her work as a psychiatrist she saw many cases of illness among women that she felt is related to the male domination of society. Her experiences prompted her to write many books on the topic of women in the Islamic society where she blames patriarchy and religion for the gender challenges of the country. However, she is not necessarily viewed as the most prominent writer on feminist topics by her countrymen (Hafez, 1998). Latifa El Zayyat is celebrated as a pioneer in Arab women's writing (Davis, 1998). Nowadays, many prominent writers on feminist topics in Egypt use social media as their most important channel of communication. One prominent example is feminist and writer Mona Eltahawi.

# 4 The Child in Islam: Sources and Tradition

The primary goal of this chapter is to uncover what Islamic sources actually say about children and how they are viewed. I also discuss the rights and duties children and parents have towards each other according to Islamic theology. This chapter will also provide an introduction to the structure of Islamic law and the importance of the family in Islam. As elsewhere in the thesis, my focus is the educated middle class of Cairo.

## 4.1 The Importance of the Family in Islam

Muslims deem the family important. The family is looked upon as the best place for a child. No place is better or safer for the child to be than with their parents where they can feel the love and comfort of the family. Egyptian Muslims often claim that marrying is to complete half of the requirements of the religion. The source of this opinion seems to stem for this well-known, but not so strong *hadith:*

> *"When a man marries he has fulfilled half of the religion; so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half." (Al-Tirmidhi # 3096)*

Regardless of whether marriage is such an important part of the Islamic way or living or not, the saying does illustrate the importance placed upon marriage as an institution. The home is considered the building block of society. The home and family is where the children will learn how to be Muslims by imitating and learning from their elders. But it is also the main welfare source in the Egyptian society. Islamic writings prescribes many duties that people have towards their family and kin. It is commonly accepted that one should always consider the needs of one's own relatives before considering strangers in offering alms or other acts of kindness.

## 4.2 The Islamic Family

In my research for this thesis I found little work on the child and its rights according to Islam. Mostly, Islamic scholars discuss the child as an integral part of the Islamic family. Some sources explain this as a result of traditional view of parenthood in Islam. The desire to take care of children and look good after them is considered almost as an instinct or a natural urge in mankind. It is therefore not considered as necessary to teach people about how to treat children. When children are mentioned it is usually in works related to the family. Questions related to marriage and family is far more often mentioned in Islamic sources than questions

related to parenting. This is of course because children were the natural result of marriage in the age prior to medical contraception. The Islamic family is described and discussed in several works by Islamic scholars. In the work *Fiqh of the Muslim family*, for example, the child is mentioned specifically in one chapter (Ayyoub, 2008, pp.327-365). Here, the right of the parents to see their children is mentioned as a right of the parent's, and the father's obligation to provide, mentioned above, and was also discussed. The child and parenting are nevertheless mentioned several times in the Quran and *hadith*.

## 4.3 Parenting in the Quran

Parents are in total mentioned in four suras of the Quran, namely the verses 2:233, 31:14, 46:15 and 17:23-24. The verses 2:33, 31:34 and 46:15 describe how mothers toil and sacrifice to bring up their children. Given that there are several topics related to parenting and children that Muslims might need guidance in, the Quran is not sufficient as a religious source in these matters. The collections of Prophet Muḥammad's sayings, the *Hadith,* are considered a second, indispensable source on how to interpret and apply the words of the Quran to daily life. Further sources would be the tradition of the prophet and existing jurisprudence on a given topic.

## 4.4 The Child in the Quran

The child is mentioned specifically in the Quran in several verses. According to (2:233) the child is to cause no harm to its parents. By implication, parents should reciprocate and do no harm to their children. It is also the parent's duty to look after their child. In the same verse (2:233) the mother is advised to breastfeed the child or 2 years unless both mother and child want weaning before that period. One other mention of children is related to how inheritance should be distributed, such as in (4:11). In pre-Islamic Arabia, infanticide was probably practiced. The Quran forbids such practice (6:127, 6:140, 6:151, 17:31), in wordings such as this

> *Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them. And do not approach immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed. And do not kill the soul, which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason." (Sahih International 6:151).*

The believer is also reminded that the child is a blessing and that the believer must appreciate whatever God bestows upon him. The most frequent mention of the child, however, is the child as a blessing, a source of pride and strength, and thereby as a distraction from God (3:14, 8:28, 9:69, 18:46, 23:55, 34:55, 57:20, 64:15, 68:14). The believer is warned about being absorbed by the worldly pleasures, such as in (3:14)

*"Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return."*

Indirectly, we are told that the believer sees his children as a source of pride and strength, and therefore needs to be warned about not letting such pleasures as children distract him from practicing his faith.

The Quran also mentions the obligations of the children towards their parents. The Quran indicates that there is a special relationship between mother and child (2:233, 31:14, 46:15). The child is to be grateful towards its parents

*"And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination." (31:14)*

as well as towards its Creator. In (46:15) the child is not only told to be grateful towards his mother due to her endurance during pregnancy and nursing, but to treat his parents well. In this sense, the child has obligations and duties towards his parents. The obligations extend into adulthood and continue for as long as the parents live.

The Quran offers little practical advice on the topic of parenting, except for what is provided by verse (2:233)

*"Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]. Upon the father is the mother's provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable. No person is charged with more than his capacity. No mother should be harmed through her child, and no father through his child. And upon the [father's] heir is [a duty] like that [of the father]. And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them. And if you wish to have your children nursed by a substitute, there is no blame upon you as*

*long as you give payment according to what is acceptable. And fear Allah and know that Allah is Seeing of what you do.”*

The father is to provide for the mother of his child and his children, and to fulfill the duty of a father. Fulfilling the duty of the father is often interpreted as the father being obliged to use corporal punishment to older children who do wrong things, see for instance (Abd al Ati, 1977, p.199).

## 4.5 Children and Parenting in the Traditions of the Prophet

The prophet Muḥammad is an example to all Muslim believers and it is looked upon as the best thing to do to follow in the footsteps of the prophet. The prophet had beard so many Muslims have beard. The prophet used to pray more than the obligatory prayer and this is what believing Muslims are trying to do. When it comes to how the prophet was in his homes and with his wives and children it is recorded that he never raised his voice to his wives or children and was a kind and helping husband and father. This means that the prophet did not shout or use any kind of fierce words with his children or wives. The prophet was teaching his people that it is important to be merciful to your own children as well as children in general. This view is supported by *hadith* like the following:

> *“Abu Huraira reported that al-Aqra' b. Habis saw Allah's Apostle kissing Hasan. He said:*
> *I have ten children, but I have never kissed any one of them, whereupon Allah's Messenger said: He who does not show mercy (towards his children), no mercy would be shown to him.” Sahih Muslim 2318 a.*

There are also several examples illustrating how that it is desirable to include the child in activities of devotion such as prayer, as illustrated by this *hadith:*

> *“Narrated Abu Qatada Al-Ansari: Allah's Messenger was praying and he was carrying Umama the daughters of Zainab, the daughter of Allah's Messenger and she was the daughter of 'As bin Rabi`a bin `Abd Shams. When he prostrated, he put her down and when he stood, he carried her (on his neck).” Sahih al-Bukhari 516*

And also by *hadiths* such as what follows:

> *“An-Nu'man bin Bashir delivered a Khutbah and said:*
> *"The Messenger of Allah said: 'Treat your children fairly, treat your children fairly."”” Sunan an-Nasa'i 3687.*

The prophet is also known for letting his grandchildren play around and on top of him while he was praying. The prophet did not make a sudden or fast movement so that his grandchildren would fall down. On the contrary, he made the prayer longer and did not stand up again before the children had gone down from his back.

*"It was narrated from 'Abdullah bin Shaddad, this his father said: "The Messenger of Allah came out to us for one of the nighttime prayers, and he was carrying Hasan or Husain. The Messenger of Allah came forward and put him down, then he said the Takbir and started to pray. He prostrated during his prayer, and made the prostration lengthy." My father said: "I raised my head and saw the child on the back of the Messenger of Allah while he was prostrating so I went back to my prostration. When the Messenger of Allah finished praying, the people said: "O Messenger of Allah, you prostrated during the prayer for so long that we thought that something had happened or that you were receiving a revelation.' He said: 'No such thing happened. But my son was riding on my back and I did not like to disturb him until he had enough."" Sunan an-Nasa'i 1141*

Children are considered born with the right knowledge of religion and it is natural for a child to grow up as a Muslim. All the parent must take care of the child's natural inclination towards Islam. Still, several *hadiths* cover the importance of teaching children the way of Islam and good values. In the case of core Islamic duties, such as praying, even the use of physical abuse seems to be permitted:

*"The Messenger of Allah said: Command your children to pray when they become seven years old, and beat them for it (prayer) when they become ten years old; and arrange their beds (to sleep) separately." Sunan Abi Dawud 495.*

Teaching the young to be Muslims is not only a duty, but there are also *hadiths* indicating that parents are rewarded for doing it:

*"A woman lifted up her child and said: Messenger of Allah, would the child be credited with having performed the Hajj? Thereupon he said: Yes, and there would be a reward for you." Sahih Muslim 1336 b.*

## 4.6 The Duties of a Child

As long as a child is a child they do not have many duties to their parents except that of respecting their parents and be obedient. The child is not to raise their voice to their parents or to elder people. In this sense, Islam preaches that youngsters should show respect for the grown ups. This includes being polite and following the advice of elders. This means that children are to follow their parents and to do as they say as far as the parent's biddings do not

contradict the Islamic faith. On the other hand when the child grows up and their parents grow old they are to take care of their parents both financially and in practical terms. The role of the mother is considered the most important one in the Islamic family. When the prophet was asked what person one has the greatest duty towards, the prophet answered your mother. Then the person asked again who was next in line and the same answer "your mother". The third time the answer was mother, but the fourth was your father (Sahih al-Bukhari 5971).

## 4.7Religious Literature Used by the Informants

This is the title of a book that was brought to the wife of one of my informants by her husband. She said that she has read some of the two volume books that come in Arabic. This is a popular Arabic book about upbringing children. In Arabic it is called *Tarbiyatu al awlaad fi al-islam* and consists of 2 volumes. The author explains that there are is a lack of books on the market that talks about how to educate or upbringing children in a proper Islamic way. This book covers how to raise and educate children from birth to puberty (Ulwan, 2004, pp. 14-15). Abdullah Nasih 'Ulwan (1928-1987) was born in Damascus and studied at Al-Azhar in Cairo where he completed his MA before obtaining his PhD from Pakistan. He is one of few Muslim scholars that have written specifically about the position of the child and its education in Islam. According to Ulwan, the islamic law dictates the child's rights before the child even is conceived or born (Ulwan, 2004).

This book is divided into three parts. It rests upon the father to carry the duty of choosing a good mother for his future children. The woman is to accept a man that has good manners and is a religious person. A good mother should be able to take care of the practical aspects of family life, including raising children and take care of the house. This emphasis is on the responsibility of bringing up children. In this respect the father has to also take into consideration the moral values of a potential wife. She will carry the main responsibility of teaching children the right and wrong in the day-to-day family life (Ulwan, 2004, pp. 21-25). The other duty a father has towards his children is the act of choosing a good name for the child. A good name should bear a good meaning and sound good together with the rest of the child's names. Further, it is responsibility of the father alone to provide food and housing for the family. Islam recommends that the mother breastfeeds her children for the two first years of their life, if she is capable of breastfeeding. However, providing food remains the father's responsibility and in the case that a mother is not willing to, or unable to, breastfeed it is the

father's responsibility to find a wet nurse or provide the mother with milk to feed the child with.

Islamic jurisprudence further recommends that parents do their utmost to be good role models for their children. Parents should take the time to bring their children along for prayers and teach the children to fast during Ramadan. It is also considered important to teach children to take the responsibility of looking after parents and relatives seriously. Finally, it is also considered a duty of both parents to teach the children about Islam and Islamic values. In what follows I will elaborate upon what it is normal to consider core knowledge about Islam and Islamic values that cannot be ignored. The result of the informant reading some of this book was that she concluded with not being able to do an Islamic upbringing, because Islamic upbringing is not compatible with modern life.

## 4.8 *Fiqh Us-Sunnah* and the Child

The second is the Arabic *Fiqh Us-Sunnah* and this book was used by all my informants. To an degree that if there ever was doubt to how one should do a thing or if it was wrong to go back to fiqh al sunna to get the right answers. I have used the English version of this to books.

*Fiqh Us-Sunnah* is written by As-Sayyid Sabiq and is probably the most popular work on interpreting how to live as a Muslim in Egypt. Several informants mentioned this book as the main source of guidance to proper living. This book is what they would refer to, if anything religious, in questions regarding how to raise their children. In particular it was a popular choice when they teach their children how to practice Islam and what is lawful and unlawful.

In this book the author's interpretation of what Islamic law says, according to all of the four Sunni schools, is presented. In this way the reader has the opportunity to know what all the main Sunni schools say on a given matter. The four main schools are Hanafi, Hanbali, Malaki and Shafii. Several informants stated that disagreement among religious scholars in matters of interpretation of Sharia is a grace from God so that Muslims can live easier lives by choosing the interpretation that makes it easier for them to live as a good Muslim.

There are some differences depending on which translation you have and how many volumes it will have. I have used a copy of which is printed in Beirut, Lebanon and is four volumes. The first volume covers every part of praying and fasting. The second volume covers rituals such as fasting, funerals and wedlock. Volume three covers marriage, divorce, limits of punishments and how to punish in more general terms. The last volume covers several subjects. It starts with that Islam is a religion of peace and goes on to explain how Muslims should grant rights to non-Muslims. The volume continues with a description of *jihad* and how and when it is appropriate to do *jihad*. After this the same volume covers more than 100 different subjects such as economy, family, and law examples. These three or four volumes will cover all from Praying, Fasting, pilgrimage, visiting the sick, how to treat you parents, and so on.

## 4.9 Gender Differences in Islamic Law

Gender differences are not really ever mentioned with respect to children in Islamic sources. However, the gender differences in how Islamic law treats men and women are interesting as a background for the interviews with parents regarding how they raise boys and girls differently. In summary, the gender differences in how men and women are treated are regulations related to inheritance, divorce, compensation in case of death or injury and witnessing in court. The women will inherit half of what the men will. This rule is based upon a Quranic verse (Quran 4:11) and is by many considered a non-disputable law. In the case a woman is killed or injured she or her family will get half of what a man would. The reason for this is that it is the man that is economic responsible for the family according to Islamic law.

When it comes to divorce, it is in general required that women provide sound reasons for requesting a divorce, while men are strictly speaking free to divorce without having to state a reason. Anne Sofie Roald writes in her book *Er muslimske kvinner undertrykt*? (Roald, 2005) that there are no clear rules on who is to get the custody of the children after a divorce. There are several different rulings in custody cases providing different outcomes, so there is not only one right way to do it but many. The main law of the Islamic countries that is followed now is that the mother has the right for the children till they reach a certain age and after that the children will be given to their father. In the case the mother remarries, the father or his family or her family are to take care of the children. According to the Islamic scholar

Muḥammad Darsh it is the child's best interest that should be taken into consideration. Islamic jurisprudence opens both for the interpretation that the mother always should lose custody in case of remarriage, but also that the case should be considered as a unique case every time (Roald, 2005, pp.158-159). In Cairo, it is however common to have the families of the wife and husband meet to discuss matters in the case that anyone, wife or husband, should talk about divorce. It is seen as a common duty of relatives to try to make the couple stay together, especially if they have common children.

Finally, the woman's testimony is worth half of a man's because the female is considered to be more sentimental than men (Quran 2:282; Vogt, 2007, p. 72; Vogt, 2005, p.114). This is commonly viewed by western feminists as a misogynist point of view. In the marriage the wife has her separate economy from her husband. Her income and inheritance is hers and not of her husband rights (Vogt, 2007, p.72).

Muḥammad 'Abduh was probably the first to argue that Islam was first to recognize the full humanity of women. He referred to Quranic verses that mention that women and men have equal rewards for equal deeds. It had long been recognized that this means that women and men are equally valuable in the eyes of God. 'Abduh argued that this also implies equal worth and equality with regards to work (Ahmed, 1992, p.139).

Some goes as far as to say that family is always looked at as the most important part of the society and that the definition of what makes up the family has gone lost on the way (Wadud, 2006, p.130). The image of motherhood has gone to the stage of that is a matter of course that mothers should not be selfish but this is not we can expect from other housemates except mothers they have to do it (Wadud, 2006, p.128).

When looking at the gender in Islam it is also important to look at the family structure in the Islamic society. The informants now live in Cairo and are not surrounded by what is called the extended family and it has become a society of the nucleus family where this leads to a greater burden is placed on the mother, wife on other words on the women. Because she know has to take care of the family alone and without help from the extended family. Often she will also have to work. To help support the family financially. Of the informants Wadud interviewed ⅖ worked outside the household (Wadud, 2006, p. 141).

Wadud argues that the Islamic sharia is based on the existence of the extended network around the family that a wife can inherit and work without being asked to use this money on the family and is her husband dies it is the extended family that should take her in and care for her and her children. In the case she divorces or he decides to divorce her the extended family this time also has to care for her and the father is still intensely responsible for their children. There are many women in the Muslim countries that live their lives and raise their children far from this ideal of the Islamic law (Wadud, 2006, pp.144 -145).

## 4.10  Chapter Summary

Despite Islamic law not differentiating between women and men in too many ways, the Egyptian society places a lot of emphasis on the different nature of men and women, as previously mentioned in more general terms in Chapter 2. This also became clear in my fieldwork in Cairo, as discussed in Chapter 6.

# 5 Children's Rights and Islam

The most universal framework for understanding the rights of children is probably the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Much can also be learned about how children are viewed in the Islamic tradition from reading material related to how the CRC was established. The Convention is discussed here in the context of the Muslim world, with a focus on Egypt. The human rights work of the UN has mainly been a secular endeavor in Muslim majority countries. Some works discuss children's rights according to Islam and how it is combinable with the human rights framework of the UN (Olowu, 2008); this will be discussed below. Recently, an Islamic declaration on the rights of children has been launched as part of efforts to improve the status of the child in the Muslim world (UN General Assembly, 1989). The Islamic declaration will also be presented, discussed, and compared to the CRC. I asked my informants about their knowledge of these declarations and their relationship to them.

## 5.1 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The CRC can be described as follows:

> *"The Convention comprises 54 articles and is base of four core principles; best interests of the child, the right of life, survival and development;*
> *and respect for the views of children" (UNICEF, 2009, p. 2).*

The Convention covers all child-specific questions. The CRC defines any human being aged younger than 18 years as a child and indicates specific rights for children covering the cultural, political, civil, social, and economic needs of children. Children are also granted protection from all sorts of punishment, harm, and suffering, and are provided protection from discrimination on the basis of gender. The CRC is the culmination of international work for the specific rights of children that started with the Geneva Declaration of 1924, and the CRC entered into force in 1990. The Convention required an extended period of discussion to achieve the agreement of all parties, and its negotiation lasted ten years. After agreement was met, it took effect within one year, which was in September 1990. The Convention is now signed by 193 state parties making the Convention unique (IBCR, 2007, p. 1). Countries that ratify the Convention are bound to it by international law.

Only two countries still lack ratification of the CRC, Somalia and the USA. The large number of countries that have ratified the CRC illustrates the dedication of the world toward securing the rights of children. This is indeed considered as clear evidence that the rights of children are highly prioritized by the world (Franklin, 2002, p. 21). However, 20 years of experience with the CRC has shown that ratifying and changing a country's laws in not sufficient to ensure children's rights. There is a pronounced need for education and awareness with regards to the CRC. Such work, in combination with law changes that comply with the CRC, will help to ensure that children actually enjoy the rights declared in the CRC (UNICEF, 2009).

## 5.2 Concurrent Status of the Child in Egypt

Egypt was one of the first countries to ratify the CRC (STCS, 201, p. 92). Egypt has since made progress with respect to several aspects of children's rights. Egypt is getting closer to reaching the millennium goals of the country, and with the implementation of the new Child law in 2008, the legal position of the child was immensely strengthened. It can be mentioned that the legal age of marriage has been changed to 18 years for females. Previously, the age had been 16 for females and 18 for males, but in accordance with the CRC, the legal marriage age is now the same for both sexes. Children born outside wedlock had suffered significant legal and actual discrimination in Egypt, but are now protected from being discriminated by law after the 2008 amendments.

The new law has penalized the act of female genital mutilation (FGM) in all its forms. In 2015, a father and physician were found guilty of manslaughter after the daughter had died as a result of the FGM carried out on her (BBC Middle East, 2015). This was the first time someone was found guilty in such a case; however, as of the time of writing (spring 2016), the sentence still has not been carried out. Still, some 90% of girls in Egypt, regardless of their religious or socio-economic background, are subject to FGM, but the hope is that the new law and recent interest in enforcing it might help to change this situation.

On other aspects, there has been minimal progress. Despite ongoing campaigns to limit the use of corporal punishment of children, the 2008 law amendments did not prohibit this form of punishment. The current law gives parents, caregivers, and even the school the right to

physically discipline children as long as it can be described as 'reasonable corporal punishment.' It is very rare for anyone to be punished for violence against children. The only prohibition of corporal punishment in education is an Egyptian ministerial decree from 1992 that recommends corporal punishment in the schools be avoided. Corporal punishment occurs frequently, especially in the public schools. The authorities have not taken sufficient steps to make teachers stop using physical force and corporal punishment in their treatment of the pupils. In 2014, half of all filed cases of violence against children occurred in schools (NDTV, 2015). Even though parents and caretakers are allowed to practice corporal punishment, it is clear that its use in children's upbringing has decreased among educated Egyptians as compared with a few decades ago.

In a few cases, people have been judged for beating children severely. One example is the head of an orphanage who received a three-year sentence for heavily beating children in his orphanage (Alarabiya, 2014). Despite his argument that the children had misbehaved, a generally accepted reason for hitting children in Egypt, he was still found guilty because the beatings were found to be too extreme. The police are not allowed to use physical force when handling children (STCS, 2011, p. 94). Despite this, there are frequent reports of torture and abuse against underage detainees, as, for instance, told in this report (MEMO, 2014). The minimum age of accountability was raised to 12 years in the law amendments of 2008 (STCS, 201, p. 94). However, children as young as 7 can be tried in a child court and punished if found guilty. It seems that the child courts and child protection offices still need to be established, and it remains unclear what is actually done currently with children accused of crimes aged 7 to 12 years (STCT, 2011, p. 96).

There are other worrying considerations in Egypt with respect to children. One is the large number of children living on the streets. The estimates range from 200,000 to 2 million street children (STCS, 2011, p. 94). Many have never received identity papers and are therefore never registered as residents of the country. Another worry is child labor. A minimum labor age of 14 years was established in 1996, but seasonal work is permitted down to the age of 12 years (STCS, 2011, p. 95). Even so, much younger children carrying out work in the fields or training as mechanics are commonplace in rural areas or poor quarters of Cairo.

## 5.3 Views on the Rights Granted to Children by Egyptian Law

One of the goals of this study was to uncover the informants' knowledge and views on the rights of the child according to Egyptian law. The informants were asked "What rights does the Egyptian law give children?" during the interview. All the informants stated that they do not care to discuss the Egyptian law, as it is a law only on paper, and not implemented anywhere.

In general, my informants had little faith in Egyptian law being implemented, and therefore considered law a bit irrelevant to real life. One of the informants expressed his view on the law in Egypt in the following manner:

> *"I am a man of law and am sad to say that there are many laws that give many rights to both children and adults, but when these laws are not implemented and enforced they have no value." - couple 3 husband*

By "man of the law" he meant that he believed in the idea of civil law and that society would profit from having laws that are respected and enforced. He had also studied law. It was sad to him that law has little value in Egypt. All my informants shared the view that law in Egypt is mostly about paperwork and not related to the lives that people actually live.

When I continued probing the topic, a few admitted that they had knowledge about what the Egyptian law covered, and that it granted certain rights to children, such as the right to education and to not work, but they still said that there is, in effect, no law in Egypt.

> *"I am familiar with the rights the children have in Egypt. The children have best of rights a child can have, but this does not matter because the laws are not implemented. They are only words written on paper" - couple 3 husband*

This negative view of civil law made it difficult to discuss juridical issues and questions related to this. It also reveals the importance of giving due consideration to the customs and how people actually think about children and their position in society.

## 5.4 The CRC and Its Perception by the Informants

I asked the informants about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I started on the theme by asking the informants if they had heard about the Convention before. About half of the informants had heard of it.

None of the informants were aware of the fact that Egypt has ratified the Convention and thus effectively made it a part of the Egyptian juridical system. Subsequently, all the informants were supplied with the Arabic version of the Convention text and given time to study it. One informant reacted to learning this by saying:

*"Has Egypt ratified this document? Well it does not matter to me."* - couple 4 husband

This comment illustrated the lack of interest and faith in civil law that my informants all seemed to share.

I started by asking their opinion on articles 13, 14, and 15. These articles are related to freedom of thought, belief, and religion, respectively. When I asked the informants about what they thought about these articles, they all said they had no problem respecting children. Informants also said that they respect that their children have their own opinions. Still, the informants would point out that their children needed guidance in choosing clothing, food, after school activities, and friends, because children are not capable of making wise choices on their own. In general, giving children the freedom to express themselves through writing or orally seemed not to be considered The freedom of thought and expression seems to be a rather theoretical freedom. Only one father was conscious of the child's right to expression. He felt that the Egyptian school system renders the young too little space for creativity, and he focused on teaching his children to do creative writing and engage in arts at home.

In particular, when it comes to freedom of belief, none of the informants would let the children change their religion. This includes not letting children avoid prayer, as this is considered part of raising your children to be proper Muslims or Christians in Egypt. Further, I asked if the informants would let their children read other holy books if the child wanted to. The informants would not let their children do that, but some would let adolescents with a

firm faith do so. The reasoning was that children are too young to understand their own best interests.

> *"A child will still be a child and cannot make important decisions related to eternal life." - couple 4 husband*

One of the informants summed up nicely the dominant view of the informants on the topic. The informants said that when their children become grown up, it would be a different story if their son or daughter converted to a different religion. It would still be a tragic event, but they would not force their son or daughter to remain in their religion. Another parent expressed strong feelings against his child changing religion:

> *"When they are children I will teach them to be good Muslims. When they are adult I will never give up on getting them back to the right path." - couple 2 husband*

The informants argued that according to Egyptian law, it is lawful for adults to change religion, while it is the parent's legal duty to ensure a proper religious upbringing for the child:

> *"The Egyptian law allows this so that is not a problem because we have to respect the law. But this law is only for when they become an adult in the eyes of the law. Not for children. I can not respect that my child would become Christian or a non-believer at all. It is my role as a father to guide my children to the right path and give them an Islamic upbringing." - couple 1 husband*

I tried to determine whether it is true that you are allowed to change your religion according to the text of the Egyptian law (and not just the CRC), but I could not find this stated in clear words.  It was, however, something that people would say, and it seemed to be something all my informants believed to be true about Egyptian law. I also found it puzzling that the informants seemed to not think much of Egyptian law on the one hand, but on the other hand referred to the law and said that it must be respected.

## 5.5 Corporal Punishment

I moved on to the topic of physical violence and asked the informants what they thought about physical violence and children. At this point, the informants mostly felt done with the topic of children's rights, and I did not therefore address the specific wording of article 19 of the CRC. In general, the informants all said they considered physical violence to be bad. Then I probed further by asking more specific questions related to physical violence. When asked about the use of corporal punishment in raising children, all the mothers stated that they used corporal punishment when other means of teaching right from wrong failed, as to show the child that the limits of what is acceptable have been reached.

> *"I need to teach the children with love." - couple 3 wife*

Even though they all applied corporal punishment in parenting, they used many other strategies, as well. For instance, one mother said that she used time-out, scolding her child, removal of benefits, and other similar strategies in attempts to teach the child. However, when such measures did not bring about change in an efficient way, beating without making marks was an alternative for her. She reasoned that this is what educated people in the UK also do to discipline their children and that it should be reasonable for an educated Egyptian to do so, as well. All informants opposed the use of harsh physical force. This they would define as punishment that would physically damage children. One father was totally against corporal punishment and stated that this was a source of dispute with his wife. Not one of the informants mentioned religious reasons for or against the use of corporal punishment in parenting. They simply believed it to be necessary to teach children how to behave. They would also not refer to beating children at home for the sake of upbringing as "corporal punishment," but would simply refer to it as raising the children.

When I asked about the use of corporal punishment in schools, the response of the informants was quite different. Most of my informants stated that they were completely against corporal punishment in schools and said that this is something that was not in the best interests of the children. Beating children is common in public schools and less so in private schools. Some of the informants mentioned this as one of several reasons for choosing private schools.

> *"Corporal punishment is not allowed by the Egyptian law but still the teacher[s] are practicing it. My children get hit on their hands without them even doing anything wrong.*

*They do not want to go to school any more and cry. I go and fight with the teachers and the headmaster but I feel that they will not change their way and we do not have the money needed to send them to a private school." - couple 5 wife*

Furthermore, the informants said that corporal punishment in the school is a very harsh and inhuman way of treating the children. They all meant that punishment in the home is something different from being physically punished in front of all the other pupils. One father stated his attitude toward corporal punishment in the school in the following way:

> *"It [corporal punishment] is a crime and they do not understand what they are doing to the children." - couple 3 husband*

The humiliating part of being physically punished in school made the matter much worse, according to most of the informants. Several parents also complained about the way corporal punishment is utilized by their schools. Collective punishment is common, and this causes pain for the well-behaved as well as the disobedient pupils. One of the mothers gave the following description of a situation from her son's school:

> *"My son comes home and tells me that today he was hit at school. I know my son is quiet and not doing a lot of rude behavior, so I was surprised. Why did they hit you, I asked? He answered that there were two boys talking and not listening, so the teacher hit all the boys! What possible good can come out of something like this?" - couple 5 wife*

One informant stated that corporal punishment in school was healthy and good. In this way, the children would compete and be eager to behave well and do their best at school.

> *"Corporal punishment in school is good and make[s] the children stay focused on what they should be doing. Learning." - couple 4 husband*

This informant happened to be the informant with the lowest education of all the informants of this study, causing me to wonder whether there is a tendency for educated parents to have greater knowledge of other means of disciplining children. It might also just be a coincidence.

# 6 Religious Thought in Egypt and Parenting

To what extent do parents place emphasis on religion when it comes to decisions related to child raising? What values, or habits, do the informants consider most important to convey to their children as seen from a religious perspective. This chapter focuses on the influence of islamic sources and religious tradition on how parents in the middle class of Cairo raise their children. The 5 Muslim couples that I interviewed have children of various ages. All couples, except one, have children of both sexes. Some of the parents were in the early stage of raising children, others more experienced. The various themes covered by the interviews of the Muslim parents are summarized first. The Coptic informants are presented in a similar manner in what follows. Finally, the differences and similarities between the Coptic and Muslim parents and their view on children is discussed.  In particular, I was curious about what my informant's thoughts on important topics such as tolerance and jihad was. I nevertheless avoided asking directly about specific values, as I feared influencing my informants by my choice of topics. I settled on asking rather open questions and only rarely probing.

## 6.1 Are the Parents Facilitating Islamic Upbringing?

I asked the Muslim parents "Are you practicing an Islamic upbringing for your children". All the informants said that religion is an important part of parenting and all the informants stated that they either were practicing Islamic upbringing or that they would have liked to. One father stated his point of view on the matter as following:

> *"The reason I decided on doing an Islamic upbringing is that my religion covers every aspect of the life. " - couple 1 husband*

However, the answers to the question "Do you practice an Islamic upbringing" also revealed that there is a great variation in what is understood by Islamic upbringing among the Muslims interviewed.

Several informants understood Islamic upbringing as meaning that the child would have to be protected from all impulses except prayer, Quran recitation and religious songs. According to such a view, TV and radio, computer games and modern toys would all be wrong. Even coloring nature pictures seemed to conflict with such a view of Islamic teaching according to

one of the mothers. Some considered also sport to be in conflict with Islamic upbringing, while others thought it maybe would be permitted given the context was correct. The parents who viewed Islamic upbringing in this way, stated that they were both worried about what such a limited measure of impulses might do the child and that it would be very time consuming to implement such a lifestyle. One mother, m3 wife, stated that she felt that she did not have time to bring up her children in accordance with correct Islamic upbringing:

*"I do not have time to do a full Islamic upbringing because this will mean that I need to cut my children off from the world. Everything has to be strict and nearly not anything is permitted. I will teach my children to fast and pray and to know what is permitted and what is not, and to learn the Quran. I believe that this will be a good start for them" - couple 3 wife*

Instead, as seen from the quote, she tried to focus on at least conveying the most central principles and values of Islam. The parents holding this view on Islamic upbringing stated that they were not able to raise their children in an Islamic way. Still, they would teach their children to pray, to know the Quran, and to know what is lawful and unlawful. The value of clemency was also frequently mentioned and certainly the fear of God. One mother stated as follows:

*"The children have to learn to be afraid of God and to know that God can see them at all time. There is a scale that has on one side the good deeds and on the other side the bad things." - couple 5 wife*

By these parents, Islamic upbringing was a golden ideal belonging to a different time and society.

Others again considered an upbringing to be Islamic if it included teaching children to pray, to know the Quran and to be able to tell what is lawful and what is unlawful. The parents carrying this view of Islamic upbringing answered that they indeed brought up their offspring in an Islamic manner.

To a few, Islamic upbringing was about much more than the basics of the religion. At the same time, they did not consider a conservative view of modern communication such as TV and Internet as a necessary condition. For instance the husband in couple 3 talked about his relationship to religion in this context in the following way:

*"My religion is like the big sea and there is no specific way that is right. There is One God and the last prophet is Muḥammad. I have the freedom to choose the way that is the one that is easiest for me. The Islamic religion does not ask one to take the hard way, but the right way." - couple 3 husband*

This same informant also included a good knowledge of the Arabic language as an important aspect of an Islamic upbringing, reasoning as follows:

*"I see it the way that one of the most important aspects of giving an Islamic upbringing is to teach the children to be very good in Arabic is the only way they can understand their religion without relying on others opinion." - couple 3 husband*

In older days it was normal to send children to Quran schools after regular school and in the holidays. None of the informants said that they have sent their children to a Quranic school to memorize the Quran or had specific plans for this. There could be many reasons for why this has happened. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the schools in Egypt are strict and have exams each year from first year of primary to secondary school. Therefore, it is normal that children have private lessons in school subjects after school. The pupils are often not done with the schoolwork and private lessons before 8 - 9 pm, leaving little time for Qur'anic schools. The Muslim parents tried to teach their children Quran in the holidays and the month of Ramadan, but not in a systematic way. In comparison, the Christians of Cairo would send their children to church to learn about the Bible and the saints every week in connection with the Friday mass or on Sundays.

Whatever the parent's view on religious upbringing, they all felt that religion is important in life. For instance, one father explained that religion is important because we can learn to understand the world through religion:

*"Religion is important, we are Muslims and we need to know how the world is. " - couple 4 husband*

*"There is so much bad thing going in tv I am trying to limit my children's TV watching. There are some programs that are good and I am trying to find good TV programs." - couple 2 husband*

Lawful and unlawful is something that all the informants felt was necessary for the children to know to become good muslims. They want their children to grow up to learn what is

permitted by God and what is not. When I asked what of this values was more important than others I got the answer than lying, cheating and stealing.

> *"My children have learned from they were small what is right and wrong. I do not mean that I will only tell them this is right and this is wrong, but explain to them. When I have done this my children will not start for example smoking because they understand it is wrong and bad for their health." - couple 2 wife*

Some of the informants felt that it was important that their children should grow to be satisfied with that their parents have the possibility to give them without looking at everybody else and being in envy and that this is part of a religious upbringing. If the child learns to work to get what they need and have their goals they will come longer in their life than if they just are jealous.

> *"I teach then what is right and wrong and they have to treat people right. They need to have good behavior and they need to be looking at what they have and not what others have." - couple 4 wife*

## 6.2 The Role of the School in Upbringing

The informants were asked about what role the school of their children has in the upbringing of the children. There seemed to be a divide between those sending their children to private schools and those with children in the public schools. Informants with children attending private schools admitted the school a greater role in the upbringing of their children. One informant said that the school had been very important to her and the other parents with children in that school. The school had provided advice on how to raise the children and had taken on an active role in teaching the young moral. The private schools would have time to follow up the children also from a religious point of view.

The public school does not include manners or moral as part of its curriculum. The children are expected to be finished raised with respect to behavior when they arrive at school. Also, there is no time for teaching right from wrong at the public schools, barely time for teaching the elementary of the curriculum. Thus, the parents with children in public schools argued that the school could not contribute to the upbringing of their children.

There was also a clear divide between those with children above school age and those without. Parents with children below school age had greater expectations for the school's contribution to the upbringing of the children.

No matter their expectations towards the school's capability to contribute to their children's religious upbringing, all informants considered a general education to be important. One Muslim mother stated that education in general is important to anyone who wants to be a good Muslim saying:

> *"That fact that I am Muslim is the reason that I take my children's education very serious and something I have invested a lot of time and money in. I will explain this in more detail. Let me recite the first Quranic verse that was revealed to the prophet Muḥammad , peace be upon him:*
> ***Sura 96*** *"Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who hast created (all that exists), (1) He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood) (2) Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, (3) Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. (4)"*
>
> *The first thing God revealed to the prophet was the word read. This is a clear proof that education is very important. After you children are good in reading and writing they manage to learn more about their religion by reading on their own"* - couple 1 wife

Respect for education and knowledge and therefore the school, is therefore considered important.

One informant informed me that she feels that the educational system has done a big mistake by making the religion subject not to be graded. This makes it not as important as the other subjects. In response to this the children will not work as hard with the religion subject and will just study it the last days before the exam. When taking into consideration that we are living in a age of globalization that makes children go away from religions she said that we will have problems in society because of this.

## 6.3 The Informants and Teaching the Faith

The informants considered teaching children to be religious a shared responsibility between the family and the general society, with the main responsibility resting on the parents. In the course of my fieldwork, I sought to uncover what my informants considered the most important things about being a Muslim. Almost without exception, people would quickly mention the five pillars of practice.The pillars of faith would only be mentioned if I prompted by asking leading questions such as "Tell me about what you believe in as a Muslim now that

you have told me about how you practice your faith.". But even then, it happened that some Muslim informants repeated the pillars of practice rather than the pillars of faith. I found it intriguing that people seemed to be much more conscious of practice, as the pillars of faith are considered equally important by scholars. When I pursued this question further, I found out that the both the pillars of faith and practice are taught in school. Still, when people talk about religion it is mostly practice rather than faith that is the focus, and maybe that is the origin of the pillars of practice being closer to mind than the pillars of faith. This is in strong contrast to what my Muslim friends in Oslo would say when asked about their faith. Maybe living in Egypt so rarely challenges your faith, as a Muslim, that little thought must be given to why you believe and in what you believe. The Copts on the other hand had more a clear point to what their faith was and how they practiced it. When asking how informants teach their children to be Muslims, the first things mentioned were almost always practice.

## 6.4 What do Muslim Parents Teach Their Children?

All the informants said it is important to teach the children to pray, in disregard of whether they considered to be practicing religious upbringing or not. One informant explained that best way to teach the children to pray their daily prayers and to keep doing them is to be a good example and to remind the children every day. After some time the children will hopefully not need to be reminded to pray anymore. Another example is that the parents all teach their children to say bismillah (in the name of God) before they eat and to say alhamdulillah (thanks to God) when they have finished.

Fasting is something that all the Muslim informants are teaching their children when their age approaches adolescence. One informant explained that he taught his children to fast until the noon prayer when they were six and seven years old. That is equivalent to fasting about one fourth of the normal time, and he kept increasing the fasting period in stages until the children reached the age of ten and eleven. By then, they were able to fast whole days. The other informants seemed to have similar strategies for teaching their children to endure fasting.

## 6.5 Teaching by Example or Teaching by Saying?

The informants all had different ways and reasoning in why and how they implement their religion in upbringing their children. One the principle that most of the informants talked about was that one has to be a good example to be able to be a good parent. When it comes to

religious upbringing, being a good Muslim in the sense that you pray, fast and recite the Quran was mentioned. One of the parents, the husband in couple 2, stated that

*"I can not tell my children to pray and fast if they do not see me pray and fast."*

and this seemed to be a thought shared by all the Muslim parents. One mother, the wife in couple 3, uttered almost the exact same words:

*"I cannot tell my children to pray if I do not pray.".*

Several informants felt that being a good example also is important in teaching values. For instance, respect has to be taught by showing respect as one informant put it:

*"When one raises up children they (the parents) are to treat them with respect and teach them to respect their parents." - couple 1 husband*

but in addition he meant that the children must be explained the importance of the examples that they are to follow. This is in keeping with Islamic tradition where emphasis is placed upon leading others by being a good example. This is also how, according to the Sunnah, that the prophet himself taught his own children.

One informant also mentioned *Iman*, or faith, as an important value during the interview. The informant brought up the topic in the following way:

*"It is important for the children to learn imana and this is mentioned many times in the Quran." - couple 1 wife*

Event thought *Iman* was mentioned by one parent, nobody specified what iman implies without me probing. Many informants would mention a couple of the six pillars of faith (Section 2.9) when asked what they think it is important to teach children to believe in.


## 6.6 Improving Yourself and Improving the World Through Jihad

Traditionally, *jihad* has been an important concept for Muslims. With the advance of extremist Islamic groups that justify criminal acts as *jihad*, the term has gotten a bad reputation also in Cairo. I had myself made up some reflections on the topic before the interviews. Many Muslim scholars argue that the word jihad is misunderstood by many. The

word stands for "struggle" and "endeavor". Muslim scholars emphasize that you can only call a struggle for jihad when one fights in self-defense or to protect weak and stand against injustice. Using this definition of *jihad* there are many wars and acts of violence that will not fulfill the requirements of *jihad*. Another problem of the modern use of jihad is the question of who is to declare *jihad* and how should they defend their actions (Embree, 2008, p. 48). The greatest jihad is said to be the spiritual *jihad*, and not the physical jihad that includes war and fighting. A believing Muslim should always work on getting better and to choose the right and good options. This spiritual fight that goes on between the good and evil forces is called the greatest *jihad*. The Muslims should have feel a strong obligation to do what is right and to work hard at achieving it. It is also important to stand up against what is evil and to make sure that good is spread by being good within oneself and to do good to others as well (Mohideen, 1993, pp. 141-142).

If a Muslim witnesses injustice they should stand against it. It is their duty to be on the side of the right and not with the unjust. The Quran says that God does not give a greater burden than what a person can bear. A Muslim has to work for making his life better in this world. At the same time he must remember the life that will come after. So it is not permitted to just worship God and not work or try to make life in this world as good as possible. God likes that people work and wake up early and sleep early (Quran 25:47). Muslims should always work on improving upon their own character. This work includes getting rid of bad habits and starting good new habits in place of the old ones. God encourages, in particular, people to work hard on praying at the right time and to worship more and extra in the night. To work on making oneself better is considered the most important of all of the three types of jihad. The jihad al nafs, the word jihad stands for holy war but the word nafs for doing the right thing and protecting the pure and the Islamic belief.

As shown here, jihad is a word that carries positive connotations in Islamic tradition and it is not just related to physical violence and war. I was curious to learn what my informants thought about *jihad* and if this is a topic close to their mind when asked about Islamic values. As I assumed that anything the parents thought was very important would leap to mind when asked, I did not specifically ask about *jihad*. Not one of my Muslim informants mentioned *jihad* by themselves. The parents I interviewed, when probed, expressed reluctance towards teaching their children about *jihad*, even spiritual *jihad* (*jihad* al-nafs), because they were worried about their children becoming extremists. Their response was without exception

short and simple "No, I don't want to teach my children about *jihad*". I sensed that this was a topic they did not want to argue about, and in a few cases I pushed further only to get as reply that parents have to worry about extremism.  Since the struggle to fight evil within oneself is closely related to the word *jihad* in Islam, this worry about the close relationship between the use of the word jihad and terrorist groups, made it difficult for parents to find ways to teach their children about the value of working to improve oneself.

## 6.7 Teaching Children to Avoid Extremism

When I tried to uncover what parents thought about *jihad*, the topic of extremism kept returning and the worry that children could grow up to become extremists who carry out criminal acts in the name of religion. In the book *Teaching for Tolerance in Muslim Majority Societies* (Kaymakcan and Leirvik, 2007) it is argued that tolerance is an important value for a peaceful world. Traditionally, muslim majority societies were rather tolerant and the book explores ways in which people can be taught to show tolerance. In the preface of the book the UNESCO definition of tolerance, "respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures", is used.  The preface furthermore explains that the Arabic word *tasamuh* is the closest one comes to the meaning of tolerance in Arabic and the word "transcends the realm of political toleration and connotes personal virtues such as patience and generosity." (Leirvik, 2007, p. 9). The most important aspect of tolerance is to accept that others do things or believe in a different way than you yourself. In the Quran the differences between nations and people is to be seen as a source of richness and not as a sources of conflict:

> *"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (Quran 49:13)*

The Quran also clearly states that there is no compulsion in religion "Let there be no compulsion in religion. " (Quran 2:256). This is viewed "as a golden rule, thus enjoining religious freedom and tolerance as a *divine* principle" (Leirvik, 2007, pp. 10). The use of compulsion in religion and the lack of tolerance between cultures has led to many tragedies (Leirvik, 2007, pp. 10-11).

After the few first interviews, I realised that I needed to probe deeper into the question of how parents try to teach their children to avoid extremism. Is teaching tolerance a part of that? Talking about tolerance with Egyptians is a bit difficult. It is difficult to find a word that

really corresponds to the English "tolerance". I tried using *tasamuh* as suggested by literature (Leirvik, 2007, p. 9). This word is however more commonly used to mean forgiveness and it created some misunderstanding, as described below. Egyptians tend to use the word *mutafahum*, literally understanding, as the opposed of being extreme. I also tried to use this word.

My informants did not mention the tolerance by themselves, but forgiveness is *tasamuh* in Arabic, the same word as the one I initially tried to use about tolerance. When asking about *tasamuh*, I would get replies showing that my informants thought I meant forgiveness. I therefore also tried to probe further by asking about acceptance of differences.  In Egypt it is commonly viewed that the acts of terror that have plagued the country are the results of lack of tolerance of different ways of living and religious extremism. Most of the informants expressed hope that their children would grow up to be religious and god fearing. However, all the informants wanted to raise their children in such a way that they should not be extreme or become Islamists. Teaching tolerance, in the sense of being forgiving and accepting, was mentioned as a way of teaching children to not be extreme.

One couple said that they feel it is important that their children learn forgiveness and to have respect for the elderly. It is important that children learn to forgive and ask for forgiveness. The child needs to learn to respect other religions because this is something Islam teaches us.

> *"The Islamic religion is built on Love and mercy"* - couple 2 husband
>
> *"It is important for me that my children will learn to have mercy"* - couple 2 wife

This was by them considered as relevant to my question about how they proceeded to raise understanding children, as Cairo people would phrase the opposite of being extreme. By being understanding, one parent meant that it is good to teach children that it is hard to know the circumstances of others, and therefore one should not judge people too hard without knowing them well. Another parent mentioned that teaching children, when they are old enough to be firm believers, that people can be good even if they have beliefs that differ from your own, as a way to combat extremism.

Other means of avoiding extremism mentioned was by keeping teenagers away from bad groups of people that teach extreme ways of interpreting religion. Coptic parents also worried about extremism, and to them keeping their children away from extreme groups seemed to be

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the favored solution. The parents said they paid attention to what kind of people their children would meet with in religious contexts. When they themselves were young, parents would not have worried about religious activities as that would have been considered safe. Nowadays, they say things have changed and not all that is called religion is good anymore.

## 6.8 The Child According to the Coptic Church

The Coptic church has a rich tradition of religious texts dating back to the very beginnings of Christianity. However, little has been translated from Coptic, the language of the Church, except for what the Church itself has made available to the Coptic community (OCRS, 1993; Malaty, 1993). This discussion about how the child is viewed by the Coptic church is therefore based upon general knowledge of the Bible and my Coptic informants. In general, Coptic informants and other Copts I met during my field study in Cairo, described children as innocent and the beloved of God. Some also called children for little angels. My informants told me that children are allowed everywhere in Church and even if children laugh or make some noise, the Father will look upon that with patience. The informants all attended church and felt it was natural to include the children in all rites of the services from the very beginning of their lives. The baptism is an important rite according to my informants (and of course anyone else you would ask about Christian rites). Through the baptism, the child becomes a complete member of the church reborn in Christ and protected by the Holy Spirit.

Holy communion was the other rite that they could not live without and unlike the Catholic Church, for instance, the parents did not think there was any lower age limit to when the child could or should have their first communion after being baptised. Children could also confess to the Father of the Church, but it seemed like it was not something that the parents considered as that important for children to do. Children seemed to be considered as rather without any sin, and they would not worry about the child receiving communion without confessing first. One informant also told that it is common for young boys to help the Father during services. It seemed that most parts of Church life was open for children to take part in.

## 6.9 The Role of the Church in Teaching the Coptic Children

The public school in Egypt has little emphasis on the content of the Coptic faith and the Church plays an important role for many Coptic families in teaching their children the traditions of their faith, the liturgy and also the language. The Coptic church uses Coptic, in

combination with Arabic translations, in services. Coptic children need to learn many hymns and texts in Coptic to be able to really participate in the religious life of the Coptic community. In addition, the children need help to grasp the very essence of the Coptic faith as the qualitatively rather different from the Islamic faith that is much more visible in the Egyptian society at large. The Sunday school system of the Coptic church has been successful at ensuring that new generations of Copts learn what they need to be able to exercise their religion as can be seen from the large number of Copts in Egypt compared to other countries in the Middle East that at some point also had large Christian groups.

The informants informed me that they sent their children to Sunday school as soon as they reached the age of entering normal schooling. Sunday school is important because this is how the children get to learn more about their religion and it also represents an important opportunity to socialize with other Christian children. The church also arranged social events and sport activities.

## 6.10   What Coptic Parents Teach their Children

The Coptic parents do to a larger extent than Muslim parents rely on someone else to teach their children about the faith, namely the Church. The Coptic informants expressed a close relationship to the church, describing it as their family. However, they did also care about teaching their children to be religious.

The copts taught their children pray before meals and before they sleep. Other important aspects of religious life were teaching children all they needed to know to be able to participate in Church life and following the 10 commands. The children were naturally baptised as children. Learning the Coptic language and memorizing the Bible was also something that was important that the children would learn, but the informants meant that the Sunday school covers this part well enough.The informants mentioned however telling stories about the beloved saints and reading adapted bible stories to their children. The Copts also fast and if you follow the official calendar of fasting more than 210 days of the year are days of fasting. Copts fast by removing types of food from the diet. In modern terms, one could say that the Coptic fasting is more or less a vegan diet. Copts worry that the diet of the days of fasting contains too little proteins for growing children. Therefore, the Copts I interviewed waited with letting their children fast until they reached a certain age. They said, however, that they were careful to explain to their young the importance of fasting from the

very beginning. The parents also mentioned general things they considered important to teach their children. Following the message of the Bible was important and dressing and behaving modestly was seen as an important part of that. Fasting, for instance, was seen as an expression of modesty in food. For people to not wear too revealing clothes was considered part of modesty as well.

## 6.11   Similarities Between Coptic and Muslim Informants

Both the Muslims and the Copts were religious and felt that religion played a vital role in how they raised their children. Copts and Muslims alike felt that girls need more restrictions than boys when it comes to outings and mixing with the opposite gender. While Muslims would refer to *hadiths* to justify treating boys and girls different, the Coptic informants preferred to refer to more general cultural heritage. However, the Coptic Church also practices clear gender roles, with only men being allowed to become priests or lead congregations. The Coptic Church also maintains a clear division between males and females in the church, indicating that that the Church supports the idea of men and women not mixing in all settings. This is similar to prayers in the Mosque, where women and men would pray in separate parts of the building. However, while Coptic women clearly are expected to take part in mass, Muslim women are not required to take part in what happens in the Mosque in the same way. The Coptic Church does not allow women to be priests and mosques do not allow women to lead prayers, except in cases where all the attendants are female. However, girls and young women play an important role in the Sunday school as an institution. Quranic schools have almost always been led by men and outside the home it has mostly been a man's job to teach Quranic recitation. Despite many similarities when it comes to gender and religion, there are subtle differences between how Copts and Muslims expect men and women to participate in religious life.

Probably, there are some religious justifications for treating boys and girls different also in the Coptic church. It could be that my Coptic informants simply did not want to go into discussions about how their religion defines gender roles or had not reflected on this issue before. Muslims are used to getting questions about their relationship to gender roles, as Islam and gender is a much discussed issue in general, while Coptic religion and tradition is not much discussed at all.

## 6.13   Chapter Summary

The Muslim informants all say that they raise their children to be Muslims, but that they do not follow the full Islamic upbringing. The informants considered a proper Islamic upbringing as being at odds with social activities, sports activities and modern media usage. For instance, they thought that Internet, play cards, board games and music all contradict Islamic upbringing. This view on Islamic upbringing stems from reading books such as *Child education in Islam* (Ulwan, 2004). This illustrates how a division between simply being Muslim and practicing the religion in an Islamic way has shown up in the Egyptian society. Radical Islamic groups seem to have obtained exclusivity to the use of terms such as Islamic. While all the informants would have been seen as practicing Islamic upbringing as seen with my Norwegian eyes, they themselves felt not. To them, Islamic upbringing is synonymous with a rather conservative and literal understanding of Islam. The Copts did not suffer from such worries and stated that they felt they raised the children in a Christian manner. Raising children as Copts meant taking them to the church, making them attend Sunday school and teaching them to live as Christians. Living as a Christian both meant following the message of the Bible, but also learning to adhere to rituals such as the most important days of fasting and dressing modestly.

Despite religion being important to all my informants, traditions in more general terms, seemed equally important as religious sources for how to raise children, or in fact live life.

# 7 Gender Equality and Differences

Gender in Islam is a topic that is often mentioned, and I have included it in this thesis to determine whether the informants feel that there is a difference between the genders or not. In the Egyptian middle class, the gender roles are well defined, as discussed in Chapter 2. Girls and boys are taught to live up to the expectations for their gender from when they are rather young. In this chapter, the results from my fieldwork and interviews with parents about how and why they teach gender roles in the way they do are presented. I also tried to uncover to what extent religious sources are important as a motivation for keeping gender roles the way they are, or determining whether tradition and habit is the most important inspiration. As people living in a very religious society might not be aware of how much religion inspires them in their lives, I also included asking question about how they view secular values such as human rights when it comes to raising children.

## 7.1 Gender Perspectives and Parenting

With respect to the difference between girls and boys in the informants' eyes, there are differences, but these differences did not relate to education, and that was important to my informants to emphasize. All the informants said that there are no reasons for giving less or more support to one sex with respect to education. They stressed that it is important that both boys and girls receive the same opportunity in their studies, and the only thing that will establish a difference between the children will be their results in school. Some said that in older days, education was considered to be more important to boys, but that this is no longer the case. The women are becoming an important part of the working stock, and if not working while their children are small, then they will have a stable and sound basis to be able to help their children with their studies. One informant said that there are several women who had been educated in the time of the prophet, such as Sayyida Nafisa.

Statistics show that this is a general trend in the Egyptian society: A larger number of girls are attending secondary school today, as opposed to a few decades ago. Figures also show that families in general spend equal amounts on the education of boys and girls, and that the school attendance of girls and boys is equally high for urban areas. The figures also show that a surplus of mothers consider it more important for boys to attend university as compared

with girls. The majority, however, report that the academic talent of the child is the most important factor for university attendance (Zanaty and Way, 2000, pp. 209-212).

I did, however, notice some important gender differences with regards to how education was discussed during my field work. Boys were, in general, pushed to get a good education in order to make a living. On the other hand, girls were regularly told that they need a thorough education to find good husbands who can take care of them. Currently, many Egyptian wives contribute significantly to the income of their families as the economic situation of the middle class has slowly deteriorated. Nevertheless, the possibility of earning your own living is still not considered something a girl should think about.

When the informants talk about their daughters, or girls in general, they use words and expressions like "softer," "fragile sex," and "in need of protection". Both male and female informants explained that they think that the girls are in need of protection for several reasons. According to the informants, they are of the more sensitive sex; they are more sympathetic and use their feelings more than their heads. People often want to take advantage of the girls. The girl is of the fragile and sensitive sex, stated all of the informants. Girls need somebody to take care of them and to look after them. There was one informant who described it by comparing women to a branch from a tree that is not straight. The branch would never straighten out, and a female is like that: however hard she tries, she will be more sensitive and fragile than any man. The example was, apparently, based upon this *hadith:*

> *"Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported:*
> *Woman has been created from a rib and will in no way be straightened for you; so if you wish to benefit by her, benefit by her while crookedness remains in her. And if you attempt to straighten her, you will break her, and breaking her is divorcing her." Sahih Muslim Book 17, Hadith 79*

Mothers expressed concern about their daughters, and that they feel they have to take extra care of them. In particular, how girls dress and look as well as with whom they spend time were considerations that mothers felt a need to control. One mother expressed her worry about her daughter in the following words:

> *"There is nothing called that she should be free. She has no freedom. She is not to wear makeup outside of the house. She can wear anything as much as she wishes, but not outside. And I always need to know where she is, and who she is with." - couple 2 wife*

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Surprisingly, the same mother apparently worried that her husband would be too strict:

*"My wife is scared that I will be too strict with the girl so this might lead to that your daughter to go the wrong way." - couple 2 husband*

Many mothers also mentioned ensuring that their girls show the proper attitude in how they act and dress:

*"The girl needs to be shy and decently dressed." - couple 3 wife*

None of the informants felt any need to express similar concerns with regards to the apparel of their sons, despite Islam having several recommendations for how men should dress and behave, as well. The sons were in general viewed as having the protector role in the future and that they needed to be taught to look after their sisters; this aspect of a boy's upbringing was rather the focus of the parents. Still, only one informant stated this view in clear words:

*"I will teach my son to look after his sister." - couple 3 husband*

Girls were expected to start wearing the veil and dress in a decent style at least before they start university, as university attendance is related to having to give the girls more freedom of movement in the city and less control over those with whom they are permitted to associate. The boys, on the other hand, dress more or less the way they like. I have not seen any restrictions when it comes to how boys dress, even though my informants would say that boys also need to dress modestly.

I have witnessed two different approaches concerning how girls should dress at a young age. By 'young age', my informants seemed to consider the age range of 3 - 10 years. The first point of view is that they should wear at a young age clothing that is as short and revealing as they want so that they will have satisfied their craving for showing skin before the age of puberty. The parents thought that was the best way to ensure that their daughters would accept wearing modest clothes in keeping with the norm of decent Islamic dressing.

The second point of view is that girls have to be protected from losing their shyness and innocence. To prevent that from happening, they should not mix too much with the opposite

sex, even at a young age, and they should be dressed in decent clothes from an age of around 3 years and up. They say that if a girl gets used to wearing revealing clothes, they will not manage to dress decently once they reach puberty. These parents feared that too much freedom in clothes for young girls would make the girls feel that showing skin is natural and not something wrong.

While most mothers felt that makeup and ornaments were a natural part of being female, and in keeping with modest appearance, fathers would not necessarily agree, as illustrated by this anecdote from one of the mothers:

> *"My husband got very angry when one of the older girls had put on our 2 years old daughter nail polish without asking for permission. The reason for this is that he means it is not permissible to use nail polish and he does not want his daughter to get this bad habit." - Couple 3 wife*

While my informants seemed to worry little about the conduct of their sons, they had little trust in their daughters. Several expressed worries about what girls might do when they are out of sight, and most would try to make their sons look after their daughters. This was commonly expressed in such comments as the following:

> *"I will teach my sons to look after their sister and make sure that she does not do wrong things when she is out of the house." - couple 5 wife*

Differences in how girls and boys are viewed were also expressed in what duties in the home boys and girls have. Mothers were often proud about teaching their daughters well the skills needed to run a household:

> *"My daughters have both learned how to cook and clean and this is something they have to help out with every day.  The boys are not expected to help in the house at all but they do it sometimes without us telling them to." - couple 1 wife*

Boys helping out were also considered a good thing, but not something important to teach them. The boys were given other tasks such as going out of the house to shop or bring people home, as well as responsibility for looking after the behavior of their sisters.

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Parents would also express worries about the weight of girls. While boys would have no eating restrictions, parents expressed worries that girls would become too overweight. Maintaining an attractive figure in order to find a good groom was something people would keep mentioning to daughters in social settings I attended where food was served.

Because of the unstable situation Egypt was in at the time of the interviews, more than half of the informants felt that now the boys also needed to be taken care of like the girls. By that, they seemed to mean that it was no longer safe for boys to venture far away from home on their own. Recently, boys have also required an adult with them when they go outside. Several informants have experienced or heard of small problems in the street growing into calamities, and this affected how they looked upon their sons. Previously, the informants would allow teenage boys to follow their older sisters out, leaving the son responsible for looking after his sister. Now, neither sons nor daughters are allowed outside on their own. However, the informants still did not think that boys needed to be looked after to avoid bad conduct, like they would think girls need. The worry for boys seemed only to be related to worries about physical harm to the boys.

In general, the Coptic informants had quite similar views on gender differences, but naturally did not refer to *hadiths* to justify their view. Copts explained that their girls are not to mix too much with the other sex and that they can be friends but not more than friends. The parents had control over email and mobile phones to ensure that their girls do not "go over their limits." When probed about what freedom they would allow their girls, this was a rather typical reply:

> *"My girls go to school and get to do some errands that are close to the house, but if they want to go on other types of outings it has to be with their mother or me. Except for the last school day celebration." - couple 7 husband*

This was rather similar to what Muslim informants would answer.

Coptic girls are also expected to dress decently, but decent dress is different for Copts. Decent clothing for a Coptic teenage girl meant that the skirt should not be shorter than their knees and blouses should cover the shoulders.

*"I do not let my girls go with skirts that are above their knees and they can wear t-shirts in the summer, but the t-shirt has to have half long sleeves at least" - couple 7 wife*

While some of the Muslim informants would think this was acceptable dressing for girls still attending school, Copts would also accept this type of clothing when their daughters start their university studies.

The Coptic informants were all planning on sending their girls to secondary schools for girls only. This would make life easier, as they would not have to worry too much about interaction with boys, and they felt that this was the best way to do it. Their children could have friends from the other sex, but only within limitations and at the school.

## 7.2 Strict Mothers and Benign Fathers?

When I interviewed the Muslim informants, I noticed that the women were much stricter on what they meant is right and how things should be. For instance, the women all said that they did not permit for their sons to have friends of the opposite sex. The men, on the other hand, all said that this was acceptable for boys as long as their son behaves within the limits of what the religion specifies as permissible. The mothers are stricter with their boys than are their husbands. The mothers say that their religion does not permit for children to have friends of the opposite sex. Because of this, they do not permit their children to have friends of the opposite sex. They talk about girls and boys in the same way. If they like a girl, they are to marry her, not to walk and talk with her without having any plans of marrying her. Accordingly, the mothers see it as easy and simple that their children are to minimize contact with the opposite sex until they come to the age of marriage. The fathers, on the other hand, feel that it is more acceptable for the boys to have girlfriends, but of course there are limits because "*Some things have to wait until after marriage.*" All my informants seemed to agree that intimate relationships between men and women should not happen without being married. Here, 'intimacy' would imply almost any form of bodily contact between man and woman.

Another example is that the mothers said that if their children would change their religion, as adults, then they would have no more contact with that son or daughter or his or her family. Such a drastic change in identity would be the end of the family relationship. The men said

they would continue talking to their children and never give up on them, even in the case of conversion.

One of the Coptic couples, couple 7, had teenagers. They knew the phone numbers of all the friends of their teenagers, as well as passwords to their emails and social media accounts. They would regularly control online activity and ensure that the youngsters stayed within what they considered the limits of decent behavior. An example of this is when their children were given permission to go out with some friends on the day of the last exam to celebrate being finished. The father had the phone number of everybody going out, and they would be driven to and from the shopping mall where the teenagers were meeting.

A great worry among the Coptic informants was that their children might convert to Islam at some point in life. If this happened, they all said it would mean that they would consider their converted child as dead. One mother said she thought she first would try had to make them change their mind. But her husband had his family origin from the south of Egypt, where principles are adhered to more strictly, and for this reason she thought it would be very difficult for her and her husband to remain in contact at all with a son or daughter who had converted to Islam. Muslims did not mention this worry about conversion, despite the fact that it has happened that Muslims convert to the Coptic faith. In particular, this would happen when a Muslim falls in love with a Christian. However, it seemed that both Muslims and Copts considered it far more likely that the Copt would convert. The difference in perception is probably related to the much greater pressure that Coptic families feel as they are a religious minority in Egypt, while Muslims are the majority and their position is rarely (if ever) challenged.

When I talked to couple 6, the wife explained that she thought that girls can have some freedom, but within limits. She said that she hoped her son would be a good Christian, but not to become a fundamentalist. Radicalization of Copts is also a problem in Egypt according to my informants. This was surprising to me, as most acts of terror reported in the media in Egypt are carried out by Muslim extremists. Furthermore, the Copts have been directly targeted in attacks carried out by radicalized Muslims. But apparently, there are groups of Copts, as well, that parents worry about their children joining. This might, however, be a case of parents worrying without much reason, possibly induced by the Church actively taking steps to avoid young, angry Copts getting involved in acts of violence. In reference (Smith,

2005, pp. 58-84), the radicalization of Copts in Egypt is discussed and the book concludes that due to the strong Egyptian nationalism and teachings of non-violence of the Coptic Church, there is little reason to worry about Copts being radicalized.

When the husband was asked about what freedom a girl could have, he was very strict and explained straight away that "*We are not living in the West and I expect my children to behave as Easterners.*" By this, he implied that Western values of sexual freedom and gender equality do not have relevance to him and his family as Egyptians.

All through my interviews, I noticed that the Muslim mothers in general left much less room for interpreting their views on right and wrong. In contrast, Muslim fathers tended to formulate their answers in more general wordings.

## 7.3 Gender Roles are Changing with This Generation

The informants were asked whether they raise their own children in the same way that their own parents did, or whether they have chosen to practice parenting in a different way. More than half of the informants admitted that they adored their parents, but that times had changed. Now, it is acceptable to be close to your young ones and to have a closer relationship. Many informants said that they are not being as strict and formal as their parents had been. Both mothers and fathers expressed this view. One of the fathers explained that when his father came home, the children were completely silent and behaved at their best. He described his relationship to his father in this way:

*"It was not like we used to play around him are have a close relationship with him. He raised us like his father had raised him and this was the best way he knew of. He worked hard to get us our needs and to give us the opportunity to study and have a higher education. But I believe that I can raise my children and having a close relationship with them is an important aspect of being a father. There are so many problems that can be solved by talking and discussing the matter in a decent manner. I know that the prophet Mohammed did not raise his voice in his home and used to help in the household. So the image that a husband and a father is not a real husband or father if he does not use his strong voice all the time because he will not be looked at as a man, is a false image. We should all try more to be like our prophet."* - couple 5 husband

In this way, finding inspiration in religion and sensing that times have changed, this father felt that he needed to be a different father from his own. Other informants also expressed that they felt it would be wrong to be as strict as their own parents, but without any religious reasoning.

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*"My parents were strict and I never looked at them as my friends and this again led to me not listen to what they advised me. This is something I will try to do different from my parents." - couple 3 wife*

This recent change in gender roles is also discussed in the book *Nurturing Masculinities: Men, Food, and Family in Contemporary Egypt,* by Nefissa Naguib (2015), in which interviews with men demanding to be allowed to be the caring fathers they dream of being are presented, among other considerations (Naguib, 2015, pp. 95-120).


## 7.4 Chapter Summary

The point of view that the female sex is more fragile, sensitive, weak, emotional, and in need of protection was held by all informants in this study. It was not clear what importance religion had in justifying this point of view, except for some of the informants mentioning *hadiths* with some relevance. Not one of the informants talked about the importance of teaching respect of the other sex or making children understand that there should be respect and equal treatment of males and females. Because of the point of view that the female sex is fragile, they also have to raise girls in a more protected and strict manner. A male can go out as he likes and travel without any restrictions. He needs to know how the world works and how to manage in life, but the female only needs to learn how to take care of others and be polite in a broad sense.


The Coptic informants raise their children according to the same gender pattern as the Muslim informants and hold the same view of the female as the more fragile and less logical gender. The informants reported that it is common among their Coptic acquaintances to send girls to girls-only secondary schools, because by the time they reach this age they are too old to mix with boys outside the limits of the family and Church activities. "*At this age, the girls are too big to spend all day around boys*" was how one of the informants, the wife in couple 7, phrased it. Another of the informants, when asked how this view of girls as opposed to boys is founded in his religion, he stated repeatedly that this view of the sexes is related to the Middle East and not religion:

*"We are Middle easterners, after all. We do not live in the West." - couple 6 husband*

To him, referring to a very general cultural heritage was sufficient justification.

# 8  Main Findings and Discussion

This thesis presents several important findings. The fact that the informants wish to raise their children Islamic, but that they fear that a full Islamic upbringing will be too strict and difficult to achieve in these present days. They argued that their children need to avoid being too different from other children. The other worry was that the children would not be able to have any fun because TV, card games, internet, and so on all would be in opposition to an Islamic upbringing. When the parents have this kind of a view on Islamic upbringing, it is not strange that they all answer that they try to foster an Islamic upbringing to the greatest extent they can, without making their children's lives only to be centered around religion.

## 8.1 Important Values

Some values were mentioned by the parents several times. Most of the parents said that they want to teach their children respect for parents, God, and religion and to not be extreme.

The other interesting aspect is that none of the informants felt *jihad* or tolerance to be an important value to teach their children. It was not mentioned once by any of the informants without me pressing the question. Not *jihad al nafs* or tolerance was even when probed for mentioned directly, but forgiveness, respect, and being understanding or generous toward others was mentioned several times. All of the informants were afraid that their children would become extremists. Surprisingly enough, this was true even of the Coptic parents. This was something that they had all thought about and all the time had it in their back of their heads that this was something they need to ensure did not happen. The fear of extremism was the reason that they did not raise their children in a full Islamic upbringing, because this would lead to extremism. It also influenced where they would allow their adolescents to go to meet people in religious contexts.

## 8.2 Emphasis on Religion When Raising Children

During my interviews with the informants, I realized that they place rather little emphasis on teaching children how and what to believe. The parents, Copts and Muslims alike, were eager to tell about how they teach their children to live a religious life in practice. This would include small things you do in daily life, like thanking God for food, saying a prayer when in need, or fasting when it is required. They would also state that it is important for the children

to be able to recite the holy book of their religion. Christians were usually able to actually teach their children to memorize the Bible, due to Sunday school, while Muslims often wanted to teach their children to memorize the Quran. However, Quran schools attendance is currently low among middle class Muslims in Egypt, and my informants were no exception. They blamed private lessons and leisure activities taking up much of the children's time.

In the West, one would think that people who care more about how to practice religion as opposed to what to believe do not really care about their religion. However, it seems that faith is taken as something given or natural in Egypt. Believing in God and that religion is important are tenets rarely questioned in Egypt. It is actually even considered a legal offence to spread anti-religious information or to encourage doubt. Therefore, if you need to teach your child something, it is how to practice your religion in a proper manner. This is probably how religion has been transmitted from generation to generation in Egypt, but it is being challenged by proponents of global Islam who claim that people who let tradition guide them more than the words of the Quran are not true followers of Islam.

## 8.3 Gender Differences and Their Justification

With respect to gender, my informants seemed convinced that men and women are of a rather different nature, and that they for this reason need to be raised in different ways. Girls require protection, while boys need to learn to take on the role of the protector of the family. Boys have to grow up to provide. Girls need an education in case they want to contribute to the income of the household. The Muslim informants would all quote *hadith*s in support of treating boys and girls differently. However, the *hadith*s cited are often not considered as strong, and some of the *hadith*s they mentioned I could not find in any of the online *hadith* collections I have access to, indicating that it might rather be proverbs than actual *hadiths*. The Copts seemed to consider their way of raising boys and girls more as a cultural phenomenon, and described it as being part of their identity of being from the Middle East.

## 8.4 Children's Rights and How Society Influences the Parents

Egyptians feel that law is something created to look nice on paper, but they do not see many of the rights the law grants them carried into daily life. It is like the famous patriotic song that many Egyptians sing during bad times that says "*Do not say what did Egypt give you, but say what did I do for Egypt.*" To many, this is how life feels for the moment. Many Egyptians have problems with the law, because few laws are actually enforced by the authorities. The CRC is not different from the rest of the law. None of my informants knew that Egypt had ratified the CRC and that this Convention is legally binding for Egypt. People, whether adults nor children, cannot call for their rights without knowing what rights they have. For the CRC to benefit the children, there has to be an information campaign to ensure that the population becomes familiar with the content of the Convention. Since my informants were not very familiar with the CRC, I handed out an Arabic copy of the text of the Convention. They read it, and the only thing they disliked was the idea that children should be allowed to choose their religion. To them, faith and religion are questions too significant for children to decide upon by themselves. Otherwise, the informants mostly thought the Convention seemed reasonable and like something that would improve the lives of children had it been implemented in society.

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# Appendix A: Interview Guide

The following information will be conveyed to the informants as an introduction to the interview.

- I am studying for a master's degree in Religion and Society at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo in Norway.
- This project is seeking to explore the relationship between religious influence and the upbringing of children in Cairo.
- The results of this interview will be included in my master thesis that will be written in English and published online at the website of the University of Oslo.
- All information that might allow the reader of the master thesis to recognize you will be disguised, and your identity will be protected by anonymity.
- You may at any time choose not to answer certain questions or to quit the interview.
- I guarantee your anonymity and inform you about your right to revoke permissions at any time.

**Background Questions**

These first introductory questions are aimed at gaining an insight into the background of the informant and to establish trust. It is important to avoid questions that can scare/provoke the informant.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What is your occupation?
4. How long have you been married?
5. How many children do you have?
6. What are their age(s) and gender(s)?

**Key Questions**

Although I might have achieved a good relationship with the participant, one must be cautious in matters of religion and parenting. Therefore, the following set of questions was selected:

1. What are your thoughts about children and their upbringing?

2.  What values do you feel are important and relevant to children's upbringing?

3.  Can you tell me about how you are bringing up your children in practice?

4.  What do you think that your religion says about children and how to raise them?

5.  How important do you think religious values and guidelines are when bringing up children today?

6.  Do you feel that you practice your religion's teachings about children and children's upbringing?

7.  What was your reason for this choice?

8.  There are many different ways to raise children. Do you believe that your choice can be said to be accurate or correct according to Islamic teachings?

9.  How important do you feel that gender roles are in the Islamic upbringing and in deciding how children are educated?

10. In what ways, if any, do you think that boys and girls need to be brought up differently?

11. Can you give examples of situations where you think it is correct to treat girls and boys differently?

12. Are certain things more important for one gender than the other?

13. Is your thinking about these issues different than that of your parents?

14. Do you think that you have the same point of view as your partner, or are there some aspects on which you have a different point of view?

15. If you responded yes to the previous question, what are the differences, and how are they affecting the process of raising your children?

16. What rights does the Egyptian law give to children?

17. Do these rights differ from the rights your religion gives to children?

18. The UN has stated some minimum rights for children in the Child convention that has been signed by Egypt and a large number of countries; please see the separate paper where they are written. What do you think about these rights?

19. What is your point of view about using corporal punishment?

20. Where do you get your inspiration of how to up bring your children?

21. When you encounter a problem, how do you seek to find the answer? For example, do you contact your mosque, call your parents, consult online forums, and so on?

22. What role does the school play in raising your children?

Such sensitive issues as those discussed above will often seem stressful for the informant, and it is important not to leave them in such a state. It is therefore important to end the interview with some "harmless," more superficial questions that calm down the mood.

**Conclusion of the Interview**

When I am finished with the interview, it is important to conclude in an orderly manner. This is the time to make final comments, clarify any ambiguities, check whether the participant is left with any questions or comments related to other aspects the interview should address, etc. It is important that the informant can provide input at this stage. It is a good idea to prepare the participant for the interview coming to an end ("Now there are only two questions left").