Rural-Urban Migration and the Search for Employment: The Case of Qur’anic School Graduates from the Darfur Region, Sudan

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Abstract

Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, Jebel Marra countryside has been experiencing a scarcity of state services such as education. Job opportunities are also very scarce in the region. The scarcity relates to the fact that only two religious institutions provide employment to the graduates: namely Village Qur’anic School and Village Mosque. A few graduates may also establish their own independent work by pursuing calligraphic works, performing individual rituals and preparing sacred objects such as amulets for clients who are interested in those religious services. Hence, a number of Qur’anic school graduates migrate to cities to look for job opportunities in urban religious institutions. They usually migrate to Nile Valley regions in central Sudan where a variety of religious institutions provide employment and opportunities for further Islamic education. Although there is a possibility of finding work in those regions, Qur’anic school graduates also face obstacles. The challenges are due to the fact that the traditions of Islamic learning and socio-cultural context of religious institutions in the Nile Valley differ from those of the Darfur Region. For instance, Islamic learning in Darfur chiefly concentrates on Qur’anic memorisation, mnemonic techniques and esoteric knowledge. Nonetheless, teachers give little attention to other forms of Islamic knowledge, for example, exegesis and jurisprudence. In addition, language of communication with teachers as well as among the learners themselves is Fur. The language is also in use during the instruction of learners practicing to memorise scriptural Arabic texts. Therefore, such a perspective and methodology of learning keeps the graduates (fuqarâ) from being assimilated into the wider community of Islamic scholarship in Sudan because of the inadequacy of their exposure to a broad range of exegesis which chiefly concentrates on Islamic literature, rather than the Qur’an itself.

In the Nile Valley, however, Islamic learning institutions mainly focus on exegesis, jurisprudence and hadith (prophetic traditions). These institutions pay little attention to Qur’anic memorisation which is a major focus of Islamic education in the Darfur Region. Linguistically, these institutions use Arabic both for instruction at schools and work places. Thus, religious institutions in the Nile Valley prefer to provide employment to graduates of Qur’anic schools who speak the Arabic language and are knowledgeable in exegesis and jurisprudence but rarely in memorisation. This study, thus, proposes to investigate how Qur’anic school graduates from the Darfur Region adjust themselves to the context of urban labour as well as to patterns of life there. Such research is relevant in comprehending how graduates meet the requirements of religious institutions in the Nile Valley as well as kinds of work they have access to. Furthermore, the study seeks to map the kinds of difficulties they face while they are looking for a job and how they overcome the challenges. It is also an interest of the project to understand how the institutions in urban areas evaluate the candidates’ mastery of previously acquired knowledge; how the graduates adjust themselves to the new socio-religious and cultural environment. Thus, the study tackles the regional disparities, cultural differences, and conflicting relations between the Darfur Region and the Nile Valley contextualizing the graduates of Qur’anic schools from Darfur in western Sudan.