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# Between Conservatism and Reforms: The Dual Nature of Al-Azhar's School Curriculum

Review of the 2022-23 Al-Azhar  
Textbooks for Grades 7-12

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# CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
3. Acknowledgements
4. Introduction
11. Combating Radical Islam
18. Fighting Disbelief
20. Islamic Sects
26. Treatment of Jews and Christians
34. Gender and Issues of Sexual Orientation
37. International Relations
39. Zionism and Israel
47. Conclusion
51. Methodology
53. List of Textbooks

## Executive Summary

This report examines the curriculum taught in the al-Azhar religious seminary – a separate K-12 school system that enjoys government subsidies, which also publishes its own textbooks, teaching them alongside the textbooks of the public curriculum published by the Ministry of Education.

The Egyptian constitution states that Al-Azhar is “the main authority in theology and Islamic affairs,” and is responsible for spreading Islam, Islamic doctrine, and the Arabic Language, both in Egypt and throughout the world. Importantly, despite criticism by several al-Azhar scholars, the institute generally answered the call of President El-Sisi to revolutionize Egyptian religious education in order to limit the effects of extremism and intolerance. Although not unequivocally, this is reflected in the Al-Azhar curriculum.

The curriculum’s content spans many genres of classical Islamic literature: Qur’an commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, Islamic history and culture, grammar, and rhetoric.

This document complements our April 2023 report on the public school curriculum.<sup>1</sup> 63 textbooks across grades 7-12 were examined, from which we identified the following main points:

- While promoting adherence to traditional Islamic beliefs and texts, particular emphasis is placed on disseminating a moderate form of Islam as envisioned by the “Wasatiyya” (the middle-way). This involves the total rejection of Islamic extremism, fundamentalism, and militancy.
- Islamist movements, including *Jihadi-Salafis* and the Muslim Brotherhood, are demonized, particularly in the context of the riots following the deposition of Mohamed Morsi from the presidency.
- Moderate and non-violent interpretations of *Jihad* are deemed acceptable, i.e., *Jihad* of the soul, for the sake of Islam to prevent the corruption of the faith, or to protect other “revealed religions” (including Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism).
- Infidels and deniers of Muhammad and of the holy scriptures are prescribed Godly punishments.
- The religious curriculum is ambivalent in that, alongside moderation and a nominal promotion of peace, love and tolerance, it also harbors some intolerance towards Jews, and teaches the classic demonization of unbelievers who will be punished in Hell.
- A textbook on Islamic sects other than the Sunna considers most aspects of Shi’a as legitimate despite the occasional

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<sup>1</sup> Ofir Winter, “Generational Change: Egypt’s Quest to Reform its School Curriculum,” IMPACT-se, Apr. 2023. <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Egypt-s-Quest-to-Reform-its-Curriculum-IMPACT-se-Report-April-2023.pdf>.

critique. Twelver and Zaydi Shi'ism are considered legitimate Muslim schools of thought, but the textbook strongly rejects the Shi'i "esoteric" traditions that feature prominently among the Isma'iliyya. Other delegitimized "esoteric" sects are the Baha'i faith and the Ahmad-iyya.

- The attitude towards Jews is ambivalent. On the one hand, textbooks delegitimize Jews as "*treacherous by nature*," or teach that they and other religions who did not convert to Islam remained "*infidels*." On the other hand, Jews are regarded as People of the Book and their treaties with the Muslims, or the occasional aid supplied by Jewish individuals to Muhammad, are commended.
- There are few examples of problematic material on Christians. Although they are considered alongside Jews as bigoted, or as infidels when not converting to Islam, the attitude towards Christians is nonetheless positive overall. Being a "revealed religion," Christian believers and churches are to be protected from enemies, and the Christian sanctity of Jerusalem is acknowledged.
- Textbooks still promote traditional, restrictive ideas regarding women's equal status in society. The husband is still regarded as the "*leader of the family*," and legal guardians are permitted to marry women off against their will. While textbooks acknowledge various administrative and jurisprudential duties for women, some are deemed inappropriate as they contradict a woman's gentle nature. Nevertheless, harassment of women is decried as a punishable crime.
- Textbooks prohibit homosexual relations and "sodomy" (anal penetration) between men and women, the punishment for which is "stoning." Severe punishments are also prescribed for adulterers.
- International issues and relations are rarely addressed, but the few occasions they are mentioned reflect an anti-Western perspective. Japan and China's emergence after they had suffered decline and defeat by the USA or the West, are presented as role models for Egypt. Japan's investment in industrial capabilities is admired, while China's military capacity building is referenced, notably the manufacturing of "*a nuclear and a hydrogen bomb, and guided missiles*."
- Israel and Zionism are vilified and thoroughly rejected. The vast majority of textbooks fail to acknowledge the existence of Israel (except for once and in a negative context), referring to it as the "*Zionist entity*" or the "*usurping occupier*." Both the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt and the Abraham Accords are entirely ignored, and normalization with Israel is explicitly discouraged in the curriculum published by Al-Azhar. However, students learn about the agreement with Israel in textbooks published by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, which are used alongside the Al-Azhar curriculum. Jerusalem is portrayed solely as an Arab and Islamic city, with some Christian ties to the city acknowledged. Jerusalem is also presented as the "*eternal capital of Palestine*," to be freed from the "*impurity of the occupation*." Al-Azhar textbooks openly declare support for the Palestinian "uprising (*intifada*)" against Israel's policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians and Jerusalem.



## Acknowledgements

IMPACT-se's research of a single curriculum involves the analysis of thousands of pages of textbooks, measured against UNESCO-based standards of peace and tolerance.

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# Introduction

Alongside the public school system, Egypt is home to a separate K-12 school system operated by the country's al-Azhar religious seminary, which publishes its own school textbooks while enjoying substantial government subsidies.<sup>2</sup> The school curriculum for al-Azhar students contains different subjects of religious studies (such as Qur'an reading and interpretation, hadith, jurisprudence, composition, and more) as well as most of the textbooks taught in the public school system. As of 2023, the education system of al-Azhar from pre-compulsory school to high school included more than two million students, which comprised approximately 7.5 percent of the overall student body in Egypt. Al-Azhar receives about 30,000 foreign students studying in the various al-Azhar institutes, out of which approximately 4000 are given scholarships.<sup>3</sup>

The Egyptian constitution states that Al-Azhar is "the main authority in theology and Islamic affairs," and is responsible for spreading Islam, Islamic doctrine, and the Arabic language, both in the country and throughout the world. The Grand Imam is elected by al-Azhar's Council of Senior Scholars, and is officially appointed by the president for a life term. The president does not have the authority to dismiss him. Al-Azhar's annual budgetary allocation

from the government, which is required by the constitution to provide "sufficient funding for it to achieve its purposes,"<sup>4</sup> was estimated at almost 16 billion Egyptian pounds (1 billion USD).

Considered to be the largest Islamic seminary, with its Grand Imam among the highest jurisprudential authorities of the Sunna, al-Azhar's influence on Islamic legal scholasticism, particularly that of the Sunna, is highly significant. In addition, al-Azhar's influence extends globally through a social network, including the affiliates World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates (WAAG) in Asia, Africa and Europe, and the masses of Muslim scholars who arrive in Cairo each year to train in the seminary. Al-Azhar's influence is likewise exerted through the Academy for the Training of Imams and Preachers, founded in 2019, which has trained hundreds of scholars from Asian, African, Central American and European countries, even remotely since COVID-19. The UAE has also contributed to al-Azhar's leading position, founding several councils and offices, including

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<sup>2</sup> "Egyptian Textbooks Send Mixed Messages about Jews," ADL, Jun. 22, 2021, <https://www.adl.org/blog/egyptian-textbooks-send-mixed-messages-about-jews>. Accessed online on Sep. 18, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammed Mourtada, "How to Apply for Admission to study in Al-Azhar in Egypt," Arabic Learning, <https://www.arabiclearning.com/blog/2022/06/24/how-to-apply-to-study-in-al-azhar-in-egypt/>. Accessed online on Aug. 28, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> "Article 7. Al-Azhar," Egyptian Constitution 2014, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2014](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014). Accessed online Aug. 29, 2023.

signing an agreement in 2015 to open al-Azhar's first branch abroad in the UAE.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Azhar has enjoyed close ties with the government and bolstered many controversial policies with jurisprudential legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> Despite criticism by several scholars in al-Azhar, the institute generally answered the call of El-Sisi to revolutionize Egyptian religious education so as to curtail the effects of extremism and intolerance. Examples of lessons eschewing these ideas are presented below (see section entitled "Combatting Radical Islam").

Nevertheless, the two establishments are often caught in power struggles. Al-Azhar has rejected several policy suggestions and requests by El-Sisi, such as declaring ISIS members as infidels, subjecting Friday sermon prayers to content monitoring, applying divorce proceedings only in writing so as to decrease the divorce rate, and reforming the al-Azhar curriculum and religious discourse to be less intolerant, featuring fewer traditional texts that may fuel militant Islamist thought. In light of al-Azhar's rejection of his plans, El-Sisi even turned to Dar al-Ifta' in what is perceived as an attempt to groom an alternative religious authority more accepting of his ideas.<sup>7</sup>

Naturally, al-Azhar places a greater emphasis on Islamic education. In January 2019, the Al-Azhar Curricula Development Committee announced its introduction of new primary, secondary, and university textbooks that promote religious tolerance in the 11,000 schools under its purview. The statement read that the new texts would focus on unity between Muslims and Christians, and would stress the concept of citizenship without distinction based on religious belief.<sup>8</sup>

Religious textbooks in the government educational system are also reviewed by a committee from al-Azhar. However, while most of al-Azhar's textbooks overlap with the public education system, they are characterized by several distinct elements, particularly their unique role in combating radicalism and in the renewal of religious discourse on legal matters, sectarian issues (the characteristics of various Islamic sects), and the Sunni establishment's views on other religions.<sup>9</sup>

### **Al-Azhar's Response to Events of October 7, 2023**

In the wake of the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel, al-Azhar has taken a hitherto unwavering stance in support of the Palestinian Cause; it has consistently called for stopping the aggression against

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Barak, "Al-Azhar as a Key Player in Countering the Radical Ideology of Global *Jihad*," in Muddassir Quamar (ed.), *Politics of Change in Middle East and North Africa Since Arab Spring: A Lost Decade?*, New York: Routledge, 2023, pp. 58-60.

<sup>6</sup> Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 53-78.

<sup>7</sup> Barak, "Al-Azhar," *Politics*, 60-63.

<sup>8</sup> "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Egypt," US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/egypt/>. Accessed online on Sep. 18, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> "Schools For Skills: A New Learning Agenda for Egypt", OECD, p. 36.

Gaza, failing to mention any of the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas, let alone condemning the murder and abduction of innocent Israeli civilians. Sadly, al-Azhar even implicitly endorsed the attack, *“saluting with utmost pride the resistance (muqawama) efforts of the proud Palestinian people.”*<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the institution also justified attacks against Israeli civilians, with its latest fatwa decreeing that *“Zionist civilians (‘settlers’) on occupied land do not [at all] qualify the description of ‘civilians.’*<sup>41</sup>

The institution has played an active role in delegitimizing Israel by promoting antisemitic topos. It portrayed Israel as “a bloodthirsty wolf” relishing in “eating the flesh and drinking the blood” of women, children, and the innocent. Al-Azhar also called for boycotting international companies owned by Jews, regarding the latter as “treacherous people.”<sup>12</sup> Two leading officials in the institution, Muhammad Omar al-Qady and Abbas Shuman, have expressed their hope that Israel and Jews will perish, calling the Jews *“descendants of apes and pigs,” “killers of prophets,”* and *“enemies of humanity.”* Al-Qady also

adopted an incitive tone against the US, referring to it as the *“greatest Satan,”* and a *“mafia”* state with a *“drunk”* president.<sup>13</sup> This notwithstanding, al-Azhar has called *“Muslims, Christians and Jews with live and brave consciences [...] to support the Palestinians and oppose this barbaric aggression.”*<sup>14</sup>

When examining the institution’s role in contextualizing these events to its worldwide following, Al-Azhar’s virtual presence on Facebook, having an official page with 3.5 million followers, is a case in point.<sup>15</sup> On October 12, the organisation changed its profile and cover pictures to images bearing the Palestinian flag, and since the beginning of the war has been sharing posts by the Grand Imam al-Tayyib and other sources, and uploading “stories” on the events.



<sup>10</sup> Special Dispatch No. 10834, “Egypt’s Al-Azhar Salutes Hamas Terror Attack In Which Over 600 Israelis Were Killed, Over 100 Were Kidnapped, And Over 2,000 Were Wounded,” MEMRI, Oct. 8, 2023, <https://www.memri.org/reports/egypts-al-azhar-salutes-hamas-terror-attack-which-over-600-israelis-were-killed-over-100>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Ofir Winter and Michael Barak, “Al-Azhar’s stance: A blow to the global fight against terror - opinion”, JPOST, Nov. 8, 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-772171>. Accessed online Nov. 13, 2023. This seems like a forced attempt to disqualify any association of Hamas with the definition of terrorism.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Special Dispatch No. 10952, “Virulent Incitement By Al-Azhar: Praise For Palestinian Jihad Fighters; Israel Is Destined To Perish; U.S. Is The Greatest Satan; Jews Are Descendants Of Apes And Pigs,” MEMRI, Nov. 10, 2023, <https://www.memri.org/reports/virulent-incitement-al-azhar-praise-palestinian-jihad-fighters-israel-destined-perish-us-edn1>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Nov. 3, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg/posts/pfbid0dbkZwugkJNBxKd4wfn3tUzvGu9bT94MEHw9adLtZMe2jWs8QicUzx66fo7ZsVAnnI>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

On October 7, al-Azhar released a statement in which it decried the international *“silence about the righteous victims of Palestine.”* The statement praised the *“martyrs of noble Palestine”* who sacrificed their life to defend their nation and homeland, and their strong standing and efforts in the face of *“Zionist tyranny and terrorism”* to end the occupation.<sup>16</sup> Several days later, on October 11, al-Azhar invoked an even harsher invective, accusing Israel of employing methods of *“murder, destruction, and terrorism,” “genocide,”* and *“war crimes”* against the Palestinians, which is a disgrace for Zionism and its supporters. It also accused Western media of biased, anti-Palestinian coverage of the events. Crucially, al-Azhar condoned the Palestinians for remaining steadfast in their lands *“no matter the cost or sacrifice,”* emphasizing that *“it is better to die on that land as knights, heroes and martyrs than leaving it to be a sanctuary made permissible for the conquering colonialists.”* That is because *“leaving your lands will kill off your and our [liberation] cause, destroying it forever.”*<sup>17</sup>

In this vein, we must remember that al-Azhar is a foremost authority of Sunni jurisprudence, whose statements millions of Muslims take to heart. Thus, the stipulation of dying while fighting as being better than the other non-violent option of eviction or escape reads as clear incitement to fight Israel.

As part of its attempt to delegitimize Israel and its Western supporters, al-Azhar has also published a pamphlet through its newspaper *“Sawt al-Azhar,”* labelling the IDF attacks on Gaza as *“the Palestinian Holocaust.”*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Oct. 7, 2023. [https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg/posts/880134230137759/?paipv=0&eav=AfZAJHB-jAB\\_2161uWgESpzMxmlusup6VaRSVOu-6DSi1Bu\\_nZrQYIZFaRk10kNZgUM&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg/posts/880134230137759/?paipv=0&eav=AfZAJHB-jAB_2161uWgESpzMxmlusup6VaRSVOu-6DSi1Bu_nZrQYIZFaRk10kNZgUM&_rdr). See also Bawabat al-Azhar, *“Al-Azhar decries the world’s silence about the righteous victims of Palestine and commends the withstanding of the noble Palestinian people,”* October 7, 2023. <https://www.azhar.eg/ArticleDetails/ArtMID/10108/ArticleID/75487/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B6%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%8E%D9%8A%D9%91%D9%90%D9%8A-%D8%B5%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A>. Accessed Oct. 29, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Oct. 11, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg/posts/pfbid02xaoJeWsTjbiutCvUxEpf3EbdUExT4PGzvg6ECNAN4as935WyfiDFqk4jCMe7psvvl>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Oct. 15, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg/posts/pfbid0qgzshD2BwDMGZdsgkZUaDWJDC723yxj5CFnnRAXp34M7Gda5vhSfsp6djQs6eH89Wl>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.



In another post, al-Azhar called for Islamic and Arab nations to start developing their own military capabilities without relying on the West.<sup>19</sup>

The al-Azhar Institution has thus implemented a dual approach in its envisioned role to counter religious extremism and Islamic terrorism. This is clearly evident in the way it professes to unequivocally support Hamas – historically, the military wing

of the Muslim Brotherhood – while going as far as to dehumanize the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, a prominent agenda apparent in aspects of its curriculum. Notably, in 2020 al-Azhar issued a fatwa forbidding membership of the Muslim Brotherhood organization.<sup>20</sup>

The sentiments expressed by al-Azhar seem to reflect dominant currents of public opinion. While many Egyptians have come to loathe the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly following their short rule after the Arab Spring events,<sup>21</sup> according to a telephone survey conducted on October 9-10, 82 percent of respondents (total number unknown) justify the October 7 “attacks led by the Palestinian Factions against Israel”.<sup>22</sup> Although the extent to which Egyptians have been exposed to accurate coverage of the atrocities is debatable, it nonetheless indicates the current mindset of many Egyptians. Moreover, in a protest-phobic country such as Egypt where, as of 2013, every protest must be notified a minimum of 3 days in advance,<sup>23</sup> massive protests have been witnessed since October 13 in the area of al-Azhar in support of the Palestinians, where chants such as “we will give our lives and blood to

<sup>19</sup> Oct. 18, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialAzharEg/posts/pfbid031VrdEF-CarVqQH7H5oH9FNH1UjaMvqh1q9VMUUhpwdLk8UrMwXFv1NqZfVBrhCPil>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> The New Arab Staff, “Egypt’s Al Azhar issues fatwa forbidding Muslim Brotherhood membership in latest attack on group,” Dec. 22, 2020. <https://www.newarab.com/news/al-azhar-issues-fatwa-forbidding-muslim-brotherhood-membership>. Accessed online Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> David Pollock, “In Egypt, One-Third Still Like the Muslim Brotherhood; Half Call U.S. Ties “Important”,” Fikra Forum, Dec. 10, 2018. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/egypt-one-third-still-muslim-brotherhood-half-call-us-ties-important#:~:text=The%20most%20striking%20data%20point,%E2%80%9Cvery%20positive%E2%80%9D%20view>). Accessed Nov. 13, 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Taha, “Within its right... Survey: 82% of those who heard about the Palestinian Factions attack against Israel regard it as justified,” Al-Masry Al-Youm, Oct. 11, 2023. <https://www.almasry-alyoum.com/news/details/3003283>. Accessed on Oct. 29, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> “Full English translation of Egypt’s new protest law,” Ahram Online English, Nov. 25, 2013, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/87375.aspx>. Accessed Oct. 29, 2023.

*liberate you, Palestine*” and *“al-Aqsa,”* *“Khaybar, Khaybar, o Jews, Muhammad’s army shall return,”* and *“Israel – begone”* have been heard.<sup>24</sup>

As will be demonstrated, the contrasting tones of al-Azhar’s ideology pervade its pedagogy throughout its religious curriculum. The crucial role of education in consolidating public opinion around ideas of peace and tolerance, and rejecting violence and intolerance, is therefore abundantly clear – the need for policymakers in Egypt and the international community to influence al-Azhar to uphold its mission of promoting religious tolerance has never been more pressing.

## Report Findings

This report examines the curriculum taught in the al-Azhar religious seminary, complementing our April 2023 report on the public school curriculum.<sup>25</sup> 63 textbooks across grades 7-12 were examined, according to which we identified seven striking themes: combating radical Islam; fighting disbelief; gender issues; treatment of Jews and Christians; Zionism and Israel; Islamic sects; and international relations. The main features of these themes are expanded upon below.

As al-Azhar students also study textbooks of the public school system, this means that they are exposed to both its commendably positive contents, as well as

those problematic materials. Juxtaposing the general features of the al-Azhar curriculum with those of the general government curriculum is of some use here.

A prominent feature of the al-Azhar curriculum is the methodology and pedagogy of teaching religious material. As opposed to the public-school curriculum, where religious content and traditions were cited from early medieval sources according to the topic of the lesson, the al-Azhar textbooks are often abridged or simplified editions of important canonical works that were written by medieval authors. These include hadith compilations, Qur’an commentaries, and works on ethics, grammar, and rhetoric. In practice, the textbooks cite extensive material from these medieval works, but offer sections in which the content is interpreted, as well as sections that identify the goals or conclusions derived from different texts. Each lesson concludes with questions on the text, and one surmises from the way they are formulated that pedagogic emphasis is placed on memorizing the material, rather than expressing one’s opinion of the issues at hand.

In terms of content, the al-Azhar curriculum differs from the public school curriculum particularly in subjects under the purview of religion. As such, issues of modern politics are rarely expanded upon, as opposed to the public curriculum’s greater interest in them. Furthermore, the al-Azhar

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Arabiyya Egypt, “We will give our lives and blood to liberate you, Palestine... al-Azhar protests in support of Gaza”, YouTube, Oct. 13, 2023. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBhV\\_JIPp1Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBhV_JIPp1Y). Accessed Oct. 29, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Ofir Winter, “Generational Change: Egypt’s Quest to Reform its School Curriculum,” IMPACT-se, Apr. 2023. <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Egypt-Quest-to-Reform-its-Curriculum-IMPACT-se-Report-April-2023.pdf>.

textbooks harshly delegitimize them, in an attempt to inculcate the teachings of moderate Islam, whereas the public curriculum is silent on radical Islam trends (Salafi-Jihadism and the Muslim Brotherhood). In the vein of solidifying the hold of Sunni orthodoxy in the minds of students and eschewing the concept of heterodoxy, the al-Azhar curriculum also touches upon issues of religious heresy, notably expanding on the emergence of sects within Islam (Shi'ism and Isma'ilism) and thereout (Druze, Baha'i faith, Ahmadiyya). These subjects are not treated at all in the public school curriculum, which generally promotes tolerance and acceptance towards non-Muslims. Moreover, as opposed to the public system that generally promotes gender equality (such as promoting positive female role models), the al-Azhar curriculum rarely reflects these outlooks. Instead, traditionally restrictive notions of women's role in society are taught.

Notably, the al-Azhar curriculum's irreverent approach to Judaism is reminiscent of the public school textbooks which have yet to be reformed. Our 2023 Egypt report has shown that the reformed textbooks (grades 1-5) have gone a long way to tackle and remove most antisemitic tropes, that are still extant in Christian Education textbooks as well as textbooks from grade 6 and above. Like these textbooks, the al-Azhar textbooks still contained antisemitic notions such as the infamous "treachery of the Jews", while occasionally accepting the validity of the Jews under the category of "People of the Book".

How Israel is portrayed in the al-Azhar curriculum slightly departs from its portrayal in the pre-reform public school textbooks. Whereas Egypt's military struggles with Israel were often negatively mentioned in the public school curriculum, neither they nor the benefits of the peace agreement (which are positive additions in the reformed textbooks) are acknowledged by the al-Azhar curriculum. The main concern of the al-Azhar textbooks with Israel is delegitimizing it in light of its abundantly clear support of the Palestinian issue.

## Combating Radical Islam

While most of al-Azhar's textbooks overlap with the public education system, they are characterized by several distinct elements, the most prominent being their unique role in combating radicalism, and in the renewal of religious discourse. As early as January 2015, in a televised speech at an al-Azhar conference in Cairo, Egyptian President 'Abd al-Fattah El-Sisi called for "a religious revolution." He said: "*We need a revolution of the self, a revolution of consciousness and ethics to rebuild the Egyptian person – a person that our country will need in the near future.*"

The President's call to al-Azhar scholars came following terrorist attacks by radical Islamist organizations targeting Egyptian citizens, security officers, and the public prosecutor. The reforms in the field of education are part of an inclusive Egyptian military, political, ideological and educational strategy to achieve several main objectives: stamping out the vestiges of the Muslim Brotherhood; offering a religious alternative to the *Jihadist* ideology of ISIS and its affiliates in Egypt and the Middle East; and legitimizing various social reforms.<sup>26</sup>

Some al-Azhar scholars did not appreciate the government's attempts to subordinate the institution to its political agendas.<sup>27</sup> Yet, despite existing reservations and tensions, al-Azhar became a partner of the Egyptian state in its efforts to reform the educational system and curriculum by promoting tolerance, moderation, and a culture of dialogue. It should be noted that anti-Islamist intellectuals in Egypt have criticized the al-Azhar curriculum for harboring extreme material that might have a negative impact on youth. Crucially, al-Azhar was also the *alma mater* of infamous terrorists and extremists. Such extremists include Mohammad 'Ata (September 11 attacks) and 'Abdallah 'Azzam (founded al-Qaeda) and ISIS members.<sup>28</sup> Since 2015, al-Azhar has been actively promoting anti-radical Islamist thought, both in Egypt and around the world. The Al-Nur magazine for children aged 8-18, launched in 2015 by the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates (WAAG), promoted the tolerant and humane teachings of Islam in Arabic and other languages, and was praised by president El-Sisi. In the same year, a center for monitoring *Jihadi* propaganda was also established by Al-Azhar.<sup>29</sup> Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyib even issued a fatwa

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<sup>26</sup> Edyta Wolny-Abouelwafa, "Teaching of the Islamic Religion in Egyptian Governmental Primary Schools in Relation to the Challenges Facing the Country," *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* 2-3, pp. 233-244, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=979649>; Sarah Feuer, "New Egyptian Legislation Aims to Reduce Al-Azhar's Authority," *PolicyWatch* 3368, August 20, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-egyptian-legislation-aims-reduce-al-azhars-authority>

<sup>27</sup> Zvi Bar'el, "Quran, Not in Our School," *Haaretz* (February 28, 2021), <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/zvibarel/2021-02-28/ty-article/premium/0000017f-e033-d3a5-af7f-f2bf404f0000?lts=1663498873340>

<sup>28</sup> Michael Barak, "The Al-Azhar Institute – A Key Player in Shaping the Religious and Political Discourse in Egypt," *ICT Jihad Monitoring Group*, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Barak, "Al-Azhar," *Politics*, p. 56.

declaring it unlawful to join the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, al-Azhar published lessons about decisions and documents after the 2011 revolution, which present views that support the idea of a democratic regime based on the constitution, emphasize the importance of human liberties (freedom of religion, freedom of speech and thought, academic freedom, etc.), and curtail violence.<sup>31</sup>

A Grade 10 *Islamic Culture* textbook presents a passage on the importance of co-existence and tolerance. The paragraph below, which is taken from the text, appears in the Document of Human Fraternity signed in February 2019 by al-Azhar's Grand Imam Sheikh al-Tayyib and Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi in the UAE.

**ضرورة نشر ثقافة التسامح والتعايش:**  
إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِاللَّهِ وَبِلِقَائِهِ وَبِحِسَابِهِ، وَمَنْ مُنْتَطَلِقَ مَسْئُولِيَّتِهِمُ الدِّينِيَّةَ  
وَالْأَدَبِيَّةَ، وَعَبَّرَ هَذِهِ الْوَثِيقَةَ - يُطَالِبُونَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَقَادَةَ الْعَالَمِ وَصُنَّاعَ  
السِّيَاسَاتِ الدَّوْلِيَّةِ وَالْاِقْتِصَادِ الْعَالَمِيِّ، بِالْعَمَلِ جَدِّيًا عَلَى نَشْرِ ثِقَافَةِ  
التَّسَامُحِ وَالتَّعَايُشِ وَالسَّلَامِ، وَالتَّدْخُلِ قُوْرًا لِإِقْطَافِ سَبِيلِ الدَّمَاءِ الْبَرِيَّةِ،  
وَوَقْفِ مَا يَشْهَدُهُ الْعَالَمُ حَالِيًّا مِنْ حُرُوبٍ وَصِرَاعَاتٍ، وَتَرَاجُعِ مَنَاحِي،  
وَأَنْجِدَارِ ثِقَافِيٍّ وَأَخْلَاقِيٍّ.

*Islamic Culture, Grade 10, 2021-22, pp. 130-131.*

**The necessity of spreading the culture of tolerance and coexistence:**

The believers in Allah [...] demand from themselves, world leaders and international and world economy policymakers to endeavor to spread the culture of tolerance, coexistence, and peace, and promptly intervene to stop the bloodshed of innocent people, and current wars and conflicts, climate decline, and cultural and moral regression.

A Grade 12 textbook containing selections of Islamic teachings translated into English and taught as part of the English Language Syllabus teaches that Islam is “*the religion of love*,” urging Muslims to extend love to all creatures, “*including all and excepting (sic. i.e. excluding) none*.” Love is further described as the “mightiest weapon” to overcome evil, hatred, aggression, and more. The text thus encourages students to fight evil and hatred everywhere, spreading goodness and love instead.<sup>32</sup>

It is true that Islam is the religion of love urging Muslims to love one another for the sake of Allah (Glory be to Him). Moreover, it is Islam that urges Muslims to realize love in all the relationships extended to all creatures including all and excepting none.

Hence, love is the means and the target at the same time. Besides, It should be taken into consideration that love is the mightiest weapon through which evil, hatred, malice, spleen, grudge, envy and aggression can be successfully overcome. paving the way for love, cordiality, affability, amity and cooperation to prevail uplifting the banners “FIGHT EVIL EVERYWHERE.” “FIGHT HATRED EVERYWHERE.” “SPREAD GOOD EVERYWHERE.” “SPREAD LOVE EVERYWHERE.”

*Islamic Selections, Grade 12, Book 2, 2020-21, p. 21*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> *Reading and Writing, Grade 12, 2021-22, pp. 74-78, 83-87, 92-94.*

<sup>32</sup> A Grade 10 Hadith textbook teaches a hadith in which Muhammad recounts the words by the angel Gabriel, instructing him to treat neighbors kindly. The interpretation explains that the word “neighbor” describes any type of neighbor, be he Muslim or infidel, righteous or foe, local or foreign. Hadith, Grade 10, 2021-22, pp. 83-94. Elsewhere in the textbook, a hadith about fraternity among the believers explains that the show of fraternity includes infidels, so as to make them love Islam. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Consequently, al-Azhar's current textbooks are dedicated to the mission of denouncing terrorism, and spreading anti-radical interpretations of controversial Islamic concepts such as *Jihad*, *dar al-Islam*, *hijra*, and *takfir*. Notably, the textbook appears to be "reclaiming" these concepts, which are widely used by Jihadi-Salafis (including ISIS in Sinai), thereby removing their violent sting.

The Islamic Culture textbook for Grade 9 is devoted to refuting terrorism and distinguishing the conduct of terrorist groups from genuine Islam. For example, in one of the texts, parents warn their child Muhammad against the dangerous phenomenon of terrorism. In response to the child's question on the difference between terrorism and *Jihad*, the mother explains that "*Jihad is the defense of the soul, the family and the homeland, and a reaction to injustice and aggression,*" while terrorism is "*the spread of fear, killing of innocents, bloodshed, which is prohibited by Allah unless just, and undermining of the land.*"<sup>33</sup>

Students are also taught that the common association in the West between Islam and terrorism is false, as Islam is a religion of tolerance that fights against terror. Moreover, Islam states that "*an aggression against a single human soul is an aggression against the whole of humanity,*" and "*strives to consolidate the fundamentals of peace, stability, security.*"<sup>34</sup>

The Islamic Culture textbook for Grade 10 further develops the reinterpretation of Islamic concepts frequently used by radical Islamist movements. For example, the textbook discusses the concept of *hijra* (immigration), and renounces the calls on social media for young Muslims to leave their countries and societies, and join extremist Islamic groups.<sup>35</sup> These radical ideas are common in the religious discourse of Islamic movements such as ISIS, inviting Muslims to leave their current lives behind and embrace a new, remote life, where they can in fact be indoctrinated and motivated to commit acts of terrorism. While ISIS's hold on Sinai in Egypt has significantly dwindled since its heyday, vestiges of these groups still operate in Egypt.

However, the textbook suggests a conspiracy according to which the "misguided people" who immigrate and join groups that live in deserts and mountains are supported with armament and training by "the enemies of the Islamic world." The latter's goal is to "*promote subversion and ignite wars between Arab and Islamic countries, for them to remain weak and feeble against the enemy's dominion, plans and conspiracies against the Muslims.*"<sup>36</sup>

Another chapter in the textbook explains that some radical Muslims consult Qur'anic sources which state that the world is divided into *dar al-Islam* [the abode of Islam] and *dar al-harb* [the abode of war], on the

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<sup>33</sup> *Islamic Culture*, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>35</sup> *Islamic Culture*, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

one hand Islamic and on the other heretic. However, this is a misinterpretation.

وفي نهاية حديثنا عن هذه المسألة تجدر الإشارة إلى أن الفهم الخاطيء والتطبيع السيء للتصوص الشرعية المتعلقة بها - من قبل جماعات الغناب والتطرف - قد أضر بحالة السلم والأمن المجتمعي صررا كبيرا، وقد كانت له آثار سلبية متعدده، فقد دأقت بسببه الأمة الإسلامية بل والعالم أجمع ويلات كثيرة ومتعدده، ومن ثم كان تصحيح هذا الفهم، ومحاربة هذا الفكر من أوجب واجبات الأمة الإسلامية في العصر الحاضر.

At the end of our discussion about this issue [dividing the world into dar al-Islam and dar al-harb] it is notable that the wrong understanding and wrong implementation of related Sharia texts, mainly by violent and extremist groups, have severely damaged the state of peace and social security, and have had many negative impacts. Not only the Islamic nation, but the whole world, have tasted a many great calamities because of it, and due to this fact, it is important to correct the understanding of this issue, and it is of the greatest obligations of the Islamic nation in this current century to fight against this ideology.

ومن أهم الآثار المدمرة التي نتجت عن هذا الفهم الخاطيء لنصوص القرآن والسنة:

- السعي إلى تخريب البلاد الإسلامية وتدميرها.
- قتل المسلمين واستباحة دمايهم.
- زعزعة الأمن والاستقرار المجتمعي داخليا وخارجيا.
- إشاعة الفرقة والاختلاف وتهديد الوحدة الوطنية في المجتمع.
- فتح الأبواب أمام الاحتلال للتدخل في شئون البلاد العربية والإسلامية.
- الانفلات الأمني وانتشار الفوضى في المجتمع.
- القيام بعمليات إرهابية في البلاد الغربية.

Islamic Culture, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 31-32.

Among the most destructive impacts resulting from the wrong understanding of the Qur'an and Sunna:

- Seeking to sabotage and destroy the Islamic countries.
- The killing of Muslims, and legitimizing shedding their blood.
- Undermining of social security and stability in the country, and abroad.
- The spread of dissention and disputes, and threatening the national unity of society.
- Opening the gates for [American] occupation to enter and intervene in the affairs of the Arab Islamic countries.
- The breakdown of security, and the spread of chaos in society.
- Committing terrorist attacks in Western countries.

Another concept discussed in the textbook is *takfir*, i.e., declaring others to be heretics. Students are warned against hurrying to call someone "heretic" due to its far-reaching consequences.<sup>37</sup>

It is further emphasized that *Jihad* in the context of Islam is not a war of aggression against people, or an occupation of land and resources, but "the war which is waged only for the sake of Allah." Unlike the false western perception of *Jihad* as the spread of violence, it is actually "nothing but the [Muslim's] right to defend themselves, their faith, and their homeland." Additionally, *Jihad* does not mean that "every Muslim should carry his sword or weapon and kill others, for this is a senseless idea..." but rather should use his "heart, tongue, property, or Quran."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Islamic Culture, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp. 46-47, 48, 49. Another History and Arabic Prose textbook for Grade 10 explains how *Jihad*, self-sacrifice and martyrdom for Allah were valorized in the early days of Islam. *History and Texts of Arabic Literature*, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 85. For a sermon by the first caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, which is understood as preaching that *Jihad* is a duty for every capable person, and that a nation that abandons *Jihad* is weak and humiliated, see *Ibid*, pp. 111-115.

A Grade 10 Islamic Culture textbook discusses circumstances where *Jihad* is obligatory. One such circumstance is when the goal is to protect “all the revealed religions,” including Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, and to ensure their freedom of worship.

*You would be surprised if you were told that: Indeed. If you are astonished by this, you may also be astonished by a religion that urges its people to defend their own religion and others' religions alike, and hear Ibn-Abbas's interpretation of this verse, when he says: "By Islam and its people, Allah defends the protected peoples [Ahl adh-dhimma]."*

**ثالثاً:** وهذا هو الأعجب، أن القتال المشروع في هذه الآية هو قتال للدفاع عن الأديان السماوية بأسرها. نعم: «الأديان السماوية» وليس دين الإسلام فقط، وهذا ما يُفِيده قوله تعالى بعد ذلك مباشرة: ﴿وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفُتِنَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ لَأَكْفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ عَذَابٌ كَثِيرٌ﴾ [الحج: ٤٠].

وقد كنّا نتوقّع أن يأذن الله للمسلمين بالقتال لتأمين العبادة في المساجد فقط، ولكن وجدنا الآية لا تقتصر في ذكر سبب القتال على تأمين مساجد المسلمين، بل ذكرت دُور العبادة الأخرى لليهود والنصارى والمجوس، فهل يعني ذلك أن المسلم كما يُقاتل من أجل تأمين المساجد، عليه كذلك أن يُقاتل أيضاً لتأمين حرية العبادة في الكنائس والمعابد وغيرها؟

وقد تدهشون لو قيل لكم: نعم، وإن تعجبوا فاعجبوا لدين يدافع أبناءه للقتال من أجل الدفاع عن دينهم وعن أديان الآخرين على حد سواء، استمع إلى تفسير ابن عباس رضي الله عنه لهذه الآية، حيث يقول: «يدفع الله بدين الإسلام وبأهله عن أهل الذمّة».

*Islamic Culture, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 53.*

*Thirdly: This is the most astonishing thing, for the fighting stipulated in this verse is a fight to defend all revealed religions. Indeed – revealed religions, and not only the Islamic religion. This is what Allah is saying directly: "And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned [i.e., praised]. And Allah will surely support those who support Him [i.e., His cause]. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might." [Al-Hajj, 40]*

*We would have expected Allah to allow Muslims to fight to secure only the worship in mosques, but this verse does not only mention the reason to fight to defend the Muslims' mosques, but also mentions other sites of worship, of Jews, Christians and Magians [Zoroastrians]. Does this mean that as much as the Muslims are fighting to secure mosques, they should fight as well to secure the freedom of worship of synagogues and churches etc.?*

After refuting radical interpretations of various Islamic concepts, the textbook directly warns students to stay away from “violent terrorist groups” who have deviated from the way of Islam, and countries that fund and support them. According to the textbook, these groups “participated in the distortion of Islam's image in Egypt and abroad. Thus, it is necessary to beware of them and of listening to their propaganda, and from joining them, because they are evil, unjust, and aggressive.” The radical groups are portrayed as the antithesis of the nation state, as they “nullify the concepts of citizenship and create divisions among the people of the same nation,” which causes rifts within society.<sup>39</sup>

The curriculum’s anti-Islamist terrorist outlook is evident in a comic book-themed textbook entitled “Lions of the Homeland” (*usud al-watan*). The textbook strongly endorses patriotism, as symbolized by the Egyptian army and police force, as opposed to delegitimization, if not demonization, of the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS. The Grade 8 textbook describes members of the Muslim Brotherhood as intentionally

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 91, 93.

killing soldiers and civilians for no reason, and as instigating the 2013 Nahda and Rabaa events. This is taught as part of a story about an Egyptian officer who died after suffering an injury in battle against members of the Muslim Brotherhood during raids against the protesters in the two aforementioned squares. In the example, members of the Muslim Brotherhood are portrayed as terrorists, with deranged and hate-stricken faces, aiming to sow chaos by killing members of the Egyptian security forces; when they cannot find any security forces, they decide to kill civilians instead. The images are relatively graphic, showing civilians being burned by the fires that started from the Molotov cocktails thrown by the terrorists. Interestingly, in 2018 Sheikh al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayyib criticized the military's actions against the Muslim Brotherhood as being exceedingly violent.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the current example instead reflects support for the security forces' actions, apologetically presenting the Muslim Brotherhood as the real culprits from whose evil and malice the police and military had to protect the civilians.



[right to left, top to bottom]  
 [inscription on tombstone] the martyred colonel: Sati' al-Nu'mani.  
 [Officer:] Did you know him?  
 [Boy:] Sadly, I did not have the honor.  
 [Boy:] Did you know him?  
 [Officer:] I served alongside him, and was next to him when he was injured. Would you like to hear his story?  
 The Date is August 3, 2013, the day when we faced the events of the Nahda riots while simultaneously dispersing the armed crowds in Rabaa Square.  
 [Officer:] After the armed militants put off [our demands for evacuation], it was decided to remove that wicked tumor from the nation's body.  
 In the beginning the armed militants were warned.  
 "You may leave safely through the secured routes. Your riotous assembly will be ended shortly and we will have to resort to force."

<sup>40</sup> "Al-Azhar and El-Sisi: 4 controversial issues," [Arabic] Al-Jazeera Mubashir, Dec. 25, 2018. <https://www.aljazeeramubasher.net/news/politics/2018/12/25/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A-4-%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA>. Accessed online on Aug. 27, 2023.



[Officer]: Some decided to leave their weapons and leave through the route safely.

But others decided to stay and fight.

[Protesters]: We received orders from the leaders of the Brotherhood to not leave and to wreak havoc and kill any police forces who face us. Therefore we must heed these orders and obey!

[Officer]: The terrorists centered above Tharwat bridge and on the roofs of the Cairo University buildings.

[Terrorists]: I see no police forces.



Lions of the Homeland, Grade 8, 2019, pp. 4-6.

[Terrorists] Let's attack the civilians then and burn their houses down with them.

[Officer]: The area of Bayn al-Sarayay [neighborhood] became a war zone where some innocent civilians were under siege. There were many wounded, and whoever was spared from the fires was injured by gunfire.

[Civilians]: Save us! Help!

[Officer]: That was when the orders to move out were given.

[Orders]: To all forces— the civilians in the Bayn al-Sarayay neighborhood are being attacked by more than fifty armed terrorists.

[Officer]: We were the closest force to the area of conflict. "Are we waiting for backup?"

[Dead Officer]: "No, we will advance with the forces we have. We must make haste to save the civilians from these murderers".

[Officer]: "At the very least, you should wait here to protect the station."

[Dead Officer]: "The civilians are more important."

[Officer]: Thus we moved out with our weapons and ammunition.

## Fighting Disbelief

Another element of al-Azhar textbooks, alongside the fight against radical Islam, is the delegitimization of religious disbelief. By denouncing both radical Islam and religious disbelief, al-Azhar positions itself as a moderate, “middle-way” religious institute. According to this agenda, Islam nominally embraces other “revealed religions” (Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism) due to their revered status in the Qur’an, but also takes a firm hand against the enemies of Islam. While this notion is common in traditional Islamic thought, it has also translated to al-Azhar’s actions in the public arena in the form of mild and covert intolerance. For instance, al-Azhar’s support of the Abrahamic Family House project in the UAE – an interfaith complex housing a mosque (named after Sheikh al-Azhar al-Tayyib), church and synagogue, which derived from the framework of the Document of Human Fraternity publicly ordained by al-Azhar – was criticized by some scholars in al-Azhar. As such, the institution initially declared that it “disowns” the project, viewing it as an “*attempt to incorporate three faiths under one new name.*” While Sheikh al-Azhar al-Tayyib attended the launch ceremony in 2019, he was absent from the inauguration ceremony in February, fearing backlash from al-Azhar scholars. Al-Azhar subsequently yielded to its previous position, affirming its support for “all initiatives” of human fraternity, and explaining that Islam accepts

the building of houses of worship separate from one another.<sup>41</sup>

A Grade 10 textbook on the Qur’an commentary by the Hanafi scholar Najm al-Din al-Nasafi (d. 1142) recounts the commentary on Surah al-Kafirun (the Infidels), and concludes that the Surah teaches that Islam is the only true religion, standing in opposition to “disbelief” (*kufir*). In other words, all religions other than Islam are regarded as disbelief.

بعض ما يستفاد من السورة الكريمة:  
١- البراءة من الشرك والكفر.  
٢- اختلاف المعبود واختلاف العبادة بين المسلمين وغيرهم  
٣- الكفر كله ملة واحدة في مواجهة الإسلام؛ لأنَّ الدين الحق المقبول عند  
الله هو الإسلام، وهو توحيد الله عزَّ والإخلاص له.

*Taysir Tafsir al-Nasafi, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 172*

*Some Conclusions drawn from the Noble Surah  
[...]  
3 – Disbelief is one religious community against Islam; because the true acceptable religion to God is Islam, meaning the exclusivity of God and devotion to Him.*

The Islamic Hanafi Law textbook for Grade 7 claims that it is permissible to beat a child who avoids prayers.

<sup>41</sup> “Al-Azhar disowns ‘Abrahamic Family House’ in UAE, and then backtracks,” *Middle East Monitor*, Mar. 20, 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230320-al-azhar-disowns-abrahamic-family-house-in-uae-and-then-backtracks/>. Accessed online on Aug. 29, 2023.

ويؤمر بها الأولاد الصغار إذا بلغوا سبع سنين، ويضربون على تركها إذا بلغوا  
عشر سنين، وهو ضربٌ تعليمي، لا ضربٌ إيلائي وإيذاء، فيكون بيدي، أو نحوها  
عما لا يؤذي.

ودليل ذلك: قوله ﷺ: [مروا أولادكم بالصلاة وهم أبناء سبع سنين،  
واضربوهم عليها وهم أبناء عشر، وفرقوا بينهم في المضاجع].<sup>(1)</sup>

ويكفر جاحد الصلاة؛ لأنه أنكر أمرًا ثابتًا في الدين، وهدم ركناً من أركان  
الإسلام الخمسة.

أما تارك الصلاة تكاسلاً، فإنه يُعزَّر (يؤدَّب) حتى يصلي، وليست سلطة  
تعزيره أو تأديبه لأحد من المسلمين، بل لحاكم المسلمين.

*Hanafi Fiqh, Grade 7, 2020-21, p. 36.*

*Children over the age of 7 are commanded as well (to pray), and they should get beaten if they are over the age of 10 and they don't (pray). The beating is for educating, not for causing pain or damage, so it should be done with a hand or something similar that does not cause damage...*

Similarly, the “Maliki Fiqh” textbook for Grade 9 teaches students that anyone who vilifies the Prophet Muhammad or other prophets, or who denies the holy scriptures, shall be punished by death.

#### حُكْمُ مَنْ سَبَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ

مَنْ سَبَّ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ الْبَالِغِينَ سَيِّدَنَا مُحَمَّدًا ﷺ أَوْ عَابَهُ أَوْ أَلْحَقَ بِهِ تَقْصِيًا  
قُتِلَ حَدًّا<sup>(1)</sup> إِنْ تَابَ؛ لِأَنَّهُ حَدٌّ وَجِبَ فَلَ تَسْقُطُهُ التَّوْبَةُ.

وَإِذَا لَمْ يَتُبْ قُتِلَ كُفْرًا<sup>(2)</sup> وَيَكُونُ مَالُهُ لِبَيْتِ الْمَالِ<sup>(3)</sup>.

وَكذَلِكَ حُكْمُ مَنْ سَبَّ أَحَدَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ أَوْ أَنْكَرَ كِتَابًا مِنَ الْكُتُبِ الْمُنزَلَةِ.

*Maliki Fiqh, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 71-72.*

*The fate of he who vilifies the Messenger of God, peace be upon him*

*An adult Muslim who vilifies our lord Muhammad, peace be upon him, or dishonored him, or attributed to him a fault, is killed as a punishment set by the Qur'an [ḥadd; this means he will die as a Muslim, be buried in a Muslim cemetery, he can be inherited, etc.], even if he repents, as it is an obligatory punishment which is not canceled by repentance.*

*If he does not repent, he is killed as an infidel and his possessions will be given to the treasury.*

*This is also the fate of he who vilifies one of the prophets or denies one of the revealed books.*

## Islamic Sects

According to current estimates, the Sunna constitutes roughly 90 percent of the Egyptian population, followed by 10 percent being Christian Copts. Reports on religious minorities in Egypt estimate that about 1 percent of the population consists of Shi'a, Baha'is and Ahmadis.<sup>42</sup> The predominance of Sunni Islam in Egypt was not set in stone with the first Muslim conquests of the region from the Hijaz in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, this only occurred in 1171, when the Ayyubid Saladin conquered Egypt and abolished the Fatimid empire, which hoisted the banner of Isma'ili Shi'ism over Egypt and the Maghreb since 909. Isma'ili Shi'ism is characterized as a sect led by a living, present Imam (as opposed to the Hidden Imam of Twelver Shi'ism) promulgating "esoteric" (*batinīyya*) elements, with philosophical teachings drawn from Neoplatonism. As such, its traditions and members were often branded by Sunnis and Shi'a alike as "religious fanaticism" (*ghulu*) and "disbelief" (*ilhad*). The Fatimid Isma'ili empire was one of the prime rivals of the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), whose capital

was located in Iraq (primarily Baghdad) until 1261, when it was reinstated in Cairo.<sup>43</sup> Notably, it was in effect the Fatimids who founded Cairo, restored Egypt's status as an imperial epicenter, and established the al-Azhar mosque and scholastic complex in the years following 970 CE.<sup>44</sup>

Henceforth, under the Ottomans and to this day, Egypt is known as a bastion of Sunni religious scholasticism, particularly due to the authoritative status of al-Azhar as the leading Sunni college in the Muslim world. Since the twentieth century, al-Azhar has been involved in sectarian issues, and while it includes Shi'i texts and traditions in its university curriculum,<sup>45</sup> accusations have been made as to the discrimination and persecution of Shi'is by Egyptian religious authorities.<sup>46</sup> A famous example of the treatment of Shi'is and other sects by al-Azhar is the "Shaltoot Fatwa." The Fatwa, issued in 1959 by the Sunni scholar and former Grand Imam of al-Azhar Sheikh Mahmood Shaltoot, called for rapprochement and bridging of gaps

<sup>42</sup> "Egypt", Minority Rights Group, <https://minorityrights.org/country/egypt/>. Accessed on Aug. 21, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> On the Fatimids and Isma'ilis, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>45</sup> 'Amr Rushdi, "Al-Azhar Professor: We Teach about the Shi'i Madhhab in all its Factions," [Arabic] Al-Dostor, Apr. 28, 2022. <https://www.dostor.org/4070204#:~:text=%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%20%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%20%D8%A5%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%89,%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B0%D9%87%D8%A8%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%8C%20%D9%88%D8%A3%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%20%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8>. Accessed online on Aug. 21, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmed Hidji, "How do Egypt's official religious authorities view Shiites?," Al-Monitor, Aug. 12, 2016. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/08/egypt-divide-sunni-shiites-accusations-abuse-azhar.html#:~:text=While%20Egypt's%20Al%20Azhar%20officially,forces%20look%20the%20other%20way>. Accessed online on Aug. 21, 2023.

between various Islamic schools of thought, particularly those of Sunnis and Shi'is. The Fatwa accepted into the ranks of Islam members of the Shi'a, Alawites, and Druze, whom the Sunni orthodoxy had labelled as heretics and unbelievers for centuries.<sup>47</sup> However, with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the presidential elections of 2012, the dean of al-Azhar published a fatwa whose spirit strongly contradicted the "Shaloot Fatwa," forbidding worship according to the Shi'i tradition. Furthermore, al-Azhar's magazine publishing supervisor Mohammad 'Amara – a strong representative of al-Azhar's Salafist faction – published a book in condemnation of Shi'i teachings and practices, in which he stated that "doctrinal rapprochement [between the Sunna and Shi'a] was impossible."<sup>48</sup> This changed again in 2016, after the impeachment of Morsi from the presidency in 2013 by the Supreme Military Council, and the appointment of El-Sisi as president instead. Then, al-Azhar's Grand Imam Dr. Ahmed al-Tayyib stated in a television interview that implementation of a *takfiri* rhetoric against the Shi'a and their jurisprudence (the Jafariyya) is not acceptable, as they are considered true Muslims and their legal school was deemed legitimate.<sup>49</sup> In short, Al-Azhar's approach to Shi'ism and other non-Sunni sects thus seems to oscillate between acceptance and rejection.

The subject of Islamic sects also features in the al-Azhar school curriculum. The discourse on sects is usually informative, drawing on the medieval genre of *firaq* (sects) literature, but some discussions contain content which raises criticism of this or that sect. A Grade 11 textbook on sects (*Notebook of the Sects*) starts with an introduction, in which God is presented as the only acceptable subject of worship. The introduction then invokes the Qur'anic verse in which Muhammad instructs believers to "*follow the righteous path, not other paths that may lead you astray from God's path*" [al-An'am: 153]. The textbook explains that it was precisely that deviation from the "righteous path" that brought about the error (*dala*) of various sects. This is followed by a hadith in which Muhammad draws one line in the sand, representing the righteous path, and then other lines left and right of it, explaining that "*on each of which a devil invites people to follow it.*" The textbook, therefore, frames the discussion of the different sects as a distinction between the right path, implicitly the Sunna, and all other sects which are false and dangerous.

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<sup>47</sup> Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: the Azhar and Shi'ism between Rapprochement and Restraint*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004, p. 284ff. Said K. Aburish, Nasser: the last Arab (illustrated ed.). London: Duckworth, 2004, pp. 200–201

<sup>48</sup> Mohamed al-Araby, "Identity politics, Egypt and the Shi'a," Al-Ahram Weekly, Apr. 21, 2014. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140421092900/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/2376/21/Identity-politics,-Egypt-and-the-Shia.aspx>. Accessed online through web.archive.org on Aug. 21, 2023

<sup>49</sup> Ali Teymoori, "Fatwa of Al-Azhar's Grand Imam on Shia," Ijtihad Network. Oct. 19, 2016. <http://ijtihad-net.com/fatwa-al-azhars-grand-imam-shia/>. Accessed online on Aug. 21, 2023.

وأنه وحده سبحانه وتعالى هو المستحق للعبادة دون سواه، شكرًا له على ما أولى به عباده من نعم لا يحصيتها العد، صلى الله وسلم عليك يا رسول الله، بينت لنا طريق الله تعالى المستقيم، وحذرتنا من الانحراف والضلال، وبلغتنا قول الله تعالى:

﴿وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ذَلِكُمْ وَصَّكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾<sup>(٣)</sup>.

ولهذا كان سبب ضلال من ضل من الفرق عدولهم عن الصراط المستقيم.

وقد قال ابن مسعود رضي الله عنه: خط لنا رسول الله ﷺ خطًا وقال: [هذا سبيل الله] ثم خط خطوطًا عن يمينه وعن يساره وقال: [هذه سبل، على كل سبيل شيطان يدعو إليه]<sup>(٤)</sup>. ثم قرأ:

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 3.*

He [God] Almighty alone is worthy of worship, He and no other [...] O Prophet, you clarified for us the righteous path of God, and warned us from deviation and error, bringing us God's word:

"This is my righteous path, follow it and do not follow other paths, for they might lead you astray from His path [...]" [al-An'am 153]

Accordingly, the reason of the error of some sects was their deviation from the righteous path.

Ibn Mas'ud related: the Prophet drew a line, saying "this is God's path". Then he drew other lines to its right and left, saying: "these are paths, on each of which a devil invites people to follow it" [...]

The phenomenon of sectarianism is generally delegitimized, insofar as it portrays an anachronistic portrait of a consolidated Sunni orthodoxy from which other sects later deviated. As such, the religious ideas that are identified as conducive to or a result of sectarianism are depicted as extra-Islamic. For instance, the introduction to the Sects textbook mentions the conversion of Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians to Islam as one of the triggers for the emergence of different Islamic sects. The passage refers to these religions as "man-made," as opposed to Islam which is a heavenly religion, seemingly invoking the common belief that by the time of Islam's

emergence these religions had already been utterly falsified by their believers. Notably, however, this is not framed as a conspiracy or malicious act, but rather as an inevitable consequence.

ولما انتهى المسلمون من الفتح ودخل في الإسلام كثير من أصحاب الأديان الأخرى اليهودية والنصرانية والمجوسية وغيرها أخذت تظهر أفكار جديدة نسجها أصحاب الديانات الوضعية في ثوب دينهم الجديد.

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 5.*

When the Muslims concluded their conquests, and many Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and members of other religions converted to Islam, new ideas began to appear, which the members of the man-made religions weaved into the fabric of their new religion [i.e., Islam].

The textbook contains a rudimentary exposition of various sects, including the Shi'a along general lines, and then some Shi'i sects in particular. The information provided on the basic tenets of the Shi'a are generally accurate: it mentions the belief in the Imamate, and personal divine designation of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as Muhammad's successor (*nass*), treating with enmity whoever hates 'Ali, the prudential concept of dissimulating one's beliefs (*taqiyya*), the supreme knowledge of the imams of external and internal meanings of religion, and the belief in the Mahdi.<sup>50</sup>

In the vein of the foreign introduction of ideas into the Shi'a, the textbook notes that the belief in the apocalyptic arrival of the Mahdi messianic figure was introduced to Shi'i traditions by "the Jew Abd Allah ibn Saba." While this is a common claim in Islamic sources and scholarship, and he is considered the forerunner of Shi'i

<sup>50</sup> *Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, pp. 29-30.*

extremism (*ghulu*),<sup>51</sup> the historicity of his existence and Jewish affiliation are matters of contention, and therefore not entirely factual. The text also appends to his name the optative statement “May God curse him” (*la’anahu Allah*), which together with his epithet “the Jew” thus invites an unwelcome invective towards Jews in general as responsible for anything heterodox.<sup>52</sup>

٥- وزاد بعضهم غير ما تقدم من المبادئ فكرة أن الإمام يعلم الظاهر والباطن، وفكرة المهدي المنتظر الذي يأتي فيملا الأرض عدلاً كما مُلئت جوراً وأول من أطلقها بهذا المعنى: عبد الله بن سبأ اليهودي - لعنه الله - ولم يكن الشيعة على درجة

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 30.*

5 – Some of them [the Shi’is] went further to believe, apart from the aforementioned principles, that the Imam knows the external and internal [meanings of religion], and to believe in the awaited Mahdi, who will fill the land with justice as it was filled with injustice. The first to introduce this notion is the Jew ‘Abd Allah ibn Saba’ – may God curse him [...]

Nonetheless, despite the somewhat balanced portrayal of the Shi’a, according to which “not all Shi’is are the same, rather some are extremists and some moderate,” the textbook identifies the Shi’a as a “fertile ground” for the emergence of beliefs

that are commonly regarded as extreme (*ghulu*): belief in the resurrection of the Imams before the Day of Judgement (*raj’a*); incarnation (*hulu*); metempsychosis (*tanasukh*); anthropomorphism (*tajsim and tashbih*); and the continuation of prophethood after Muhammad (*‘adam khatm al-nubuwwa*).<sup>53</sup>

وقد كان التشيع مباءة خصبة (مأوى مهيناً) لظهور الرجعة والحلول والتناسخ والتجسيم والتشبيه وعدم ختم النبوة.

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 30.*

*Shi’ism was a fertile ground for the emergence of the [beliefs on] resurrection before the day of Judgement, incarnation, metempsychosis, anthropomorphism, and the continuation of prophethood.*

The textbook adopts different tones when describing different Shi’i sects. The Zaydiyya sect, of which vestiges have survived among the Houthis in Yemen, is referred to as “the closest sect to the Sunna,” because they “do not adhere to extreme beliefs, do not declare any of the Companions (*sahaba*) to be an infidel, and do not raise the Imams to the status of prophets or God.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>59</sup> “Abd Allāh b. Saba” (M.G.S Hodgson), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Brill Online. [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abd-allah-b-saba-SIM\\_0061?s.num=0&s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=abd+allah+ibn+saba](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abd-allah-b-saba-SIM_0061?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=abd+allah+ibn+saba). Accessed online on Aug. 21, 2023;

“Abdallāh b. Saba” (M.G.S Hodgson), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Brill Online. [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/abdallah-b-saba-COM\\_24156?s.num=4&s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=abd+allah+ibn+saba](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/abdallah-b-saba-COM_24156?s.num=4&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=abd+allah+ibn+saba). Accessed online on Aug. 21, 2023.

<sup>52</sup> A similar claim for the Jewish origin of divergent views is found in the textbook concerning the emergence of the Jabriyya or Jahmiyya theological school of thought, which believed that human actions are entirely designated by pre-destination, an allegedly “non-Islamic concept.” See *Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 25.*

<sup>53</sup> “Ghulāt (extremist Shi’īs),” (Sean W. Anthony), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Brill Online. [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ghulat-extremist-shiis-COM\\_27473?s.num=3&s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=ghulat](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ghulat-extremist-shiis-COM_27473?s.num=3&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=ghulat). Accessed online on Aug. 22, 2023.

<sup>54</sup> *Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 32-33.*

In respect of Twelver Shi'ism, or the "Imamiyya," (the majority sect prevalent in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and to a lesser extent in other countries), the textbook maintains that despite the differences with the Sunna, the Imami Shi'is are regarded as Muslims. Nonetheless, the text primarily criticizes two Imami beliefs: firstly, it generalizes that the Shi'a as a whole reject the authority and demonize the caliphs other than 'Ali, which in reality is an outlook adopted by mainly extreme and militant Shi'is.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, when explaining the concept of dissimulating one's Shi'i identity and beliefs for prudential considerations, the textbook frames the practice as an expedient to covertly gain power, by feigning allegiance to the state only later to use that power against it. Not only is this a gross generalization of the actual implementation of a theoretical idea, but it also promotes distrust towards the Imami Shi'is who live under Sunni rule.

٥- التَّيْبَةُ: ومعناها المداراة والمصانعة واتخاذ الحيلة والحذر حفاظاً على النفس والمال أو العِرض، والمقصود منها عند الشيعة النظام السري الذي يكتُمونه

﴿٣٤﴾ — الصف الثاني الثانوي

عن الناس، ويسيروا على تعاليمه في الدعوة إلى إمامهم المنتظر، وإظهار الطاعة لمن بيدهم الأمر، حتى يأمنوا بقوتهم، فيحملوا السلاح في وجه الدولة القائمة.

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, pp. 34-35.*

5 – *Taqiyya: meaning feigning friendship, flattery and acting prudently to protect oneself, property or good repute. For Shi'is, it is the secret method which they hide from others, but teach it when propagating about their anticipated Imam, while obeying the current rulers until they garner enough power to wage war against the current ruling dynasty.*

The textbook's harshest approach is reserved for what are labelled "esoteric" sects (*firaq batiniyya*), indicating the emphasis placed by these sects on esoteric and allegedly "heretical" ideas. Chiefly among those are the Isma'iliyya, whose forerunners are "*descendants of Zoroastrians*," and who "*introduced teachings to destroy religion in nine stages*." The lesson also criticizes contemporary Isma'ilis and its current leaders, such as the current Nizari Imam and "Aga Khan," Shah Karim al-Husseini, a European philanthropist. The lesson further claims that the Isma'ilis "*promote debauchery*" (*ibahat al-muharramat wa-l-maharim*), teach that "*their sect becomes more corrupt as time passes*," and that their actions cause "*great evil*." The textbook summarizes the lesson by asking students how the principles of the Isma'iliyya are used as "*a tool to destroy the Islamic religion*." Offshoots of the Isma'iliyya who are also mentioned and delegitimized are the Indian Bohras, the Druze, and the Qarmatians.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See Yonatan Negev, "Cursing the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*la'n al-ṣaḥāba*) in Pre-Modern Twelver Shi'i Religious Thought," (Doctoral Dissertation), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2022; For modern views, see Meir Litvak, *Know Thy Enemy: Evolving Attitudes towards "Others" in Modern Shi'i Thought and Practice*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> *Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 36-38.*

وقد أثبت التاريخ أن من وضعوا أساس مذهب الإسماعيلية الباطنية من أولاد المجوس وضعوا تعاليم لهدم الإسلام ودرجوها تسع درجات تبتدئ بالتشكيك في الدين كقولهم: ما معنى رمي الجمار؟ ولم كانت الصبح ركعتين والظهر أربعاً؟ وهكذا. وتنتهي بهدم الإسلام والتحلل من قيوده، وأولوا القرآن الكريم وشأنه النبي ﷺ بما يوافق هواهم فكان تحريفًا لا تأويلًا.

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 36.*

*History has shown that those who founded the Isma'ili esoteric religion from among the descendants of the Zoroastrians introduced teachings to destroy Islam in nine stages, starting with spreading doubts about religion [...] and ending with the destruction of Islam and its limitations. They interpreted the Qur'an and the hadith according to their own false opinions which, in effect, was an act of falsification, not [allegorical] interpretation.*

وزعماء الإسماعيلية يغيرون ويبدلون في المبادئ حسب أهوائهم، وأتباعهم يعتقدون أن لهم التصرف في أمور الدنيا والآخرة، وكلما امتد الزمان زاد مذهبهم فسادًا، ولحق الناس من أعمالهم شرٌ كبير.

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 37.*

*The leaders of the Isma'iliyya change The Principles of Religion as they please, and their followers believe that they have control over matters in this world and the Afterlife. As time passes, their sect becomes more corrupt, and a great evil befalls humanity as a result of their actions.*

Another esoteric Shi'ī sect is the Baha'is, or the "Babi" movement. In a passage on the Baha'i proselytization in Egypt, students are taught that Baha'i missionaries pretend to be Muslims, Christians, or Jews when they proselytize to members of these respective religions. The text states that "when [a Baha'i missionary] senses weakness from someone, he tries to make him doubt his religion," and then "he calls him to worship human beings, God forbid." Finally, the lesson accuses them of deception and hypocrisy in their treatment of Muslims.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

#### طريقتهم في الدعوة إلى مذهبهم

مخاطبة أهل كل مذهب ودين بما يوافق هواهم فتجد الداعية منهم مسلمًا ورعًا تقياً مع المسلمين، ونصرانياً مع النصارى، ويهودياً مع اليهود، يوهم أهل كل دين بأنه منهم، وأنه يريد الإصلاح وإزالة الضغائن بين أهل المذاهب والأديان. فإن أنس الضعف من أحد أخذ يشككه في دينه، وأورد عليه الشبه، وأول الآيات بما ينطبق على مزاعمه وهواه، ثم يدعوه إلى عبادة البشر والعباد بالله. هذا شأنهم في ممالك الشرق: خداع وتناق مع المسلمين، يظهرهم الإيمان ويبطنون الكفر، أما في أوروبا وأمريكا فدعوتهم جهازاً لا يخشون حساباً.

*Notebook of the Sects, Grade 11, 2018-19, p. 42.*

*Their method of proselytization to their religion Addressing any member of religion or faith as they please. We thus find the [Baha'i] proselytizer who speaks to Muslims [presenting himself as] a pious and god-fearing Muslim, or as a Christian [when speaking] to Christians, or Jew [when speaking] to Jews. He misleads them to think he is affiliated with their religion, and that he wishes to bring reform and remove the hatred between members of religions. When [a Baha'i missionary] senses weakness in someone, he tries to make him doubt his religion [...] and then he calls him to worship human beings, God forbid. That is how they operate in the countries of the East: deception and hypocrisy with Muslims, professing belief but internalizing unbelief, but in Europe and the United States of America they proselytize publicly fearing no backlash.*

The textbook furthermore dedicates a chapter to refuting the precepts of the Isma'iliyya, the Baha'i faith, and the Ahmadiyya (*Qadianiyya*). Students are taught that these groups pretend to be Muslim to convince Muslims of their false beliefs, but in fact their principles are opposed to the Qur'an and destroy the Shari'a. The textbook then goes on to refute the claims of these groups: including that the Qur'an has an esoteric secret meaning which only their leaders know; that there were prophets after Muhammad; and claims by human beings that they are God. The chapter then quotes a Qur'anic verse according to which those who falsely claim to be prophets will be humiliated when they die, teaching that the leaders of these groups deserve this punishment by God.<sup>57</sup>

## Treatment of Jews and Christians

As for Jews and Judaism, the al-Azhar textbooks carry very similar messages to those which appear in the textbooks of the general Egyptian education system. Based on Islamic references and precedents, they present hostile perceptions of Jews as evil, traitors, and enemies of the Muslims,<sup>58</sup> alongside conciliatory depictions of Judaism as a legitimate divine religion, and of Jews as legitimate partners for treaties with Muslims.<sup>59</sup> Some textbooks highlight similarities between Judaism and Islam, such as the dietary regulations of Kosher and Halal, and inheritance laws.<sup>60</sup>

In some cases, which group Christians and Jews together in the same “People of the Book” or “People of the Covenant” categories, the material is either positive or negative. For instance, Christians are grouped together with Jews in teaching that they are “*bigoted to the point where debating with them is difficult, thereupon discussion with them will lead to no result.*” However, Christians are overall treated in a positive manner by al-Azhar's textbooks and, unlike the Jews, are not singled out as subjects of delegitimization.<sup>61</sup> Delegitimization of Jews is also presented as

being at the expense of Christians, as one example states that Jews (collectively described as “*all Jews of the Arabian Peninsula*”) are generally blamed for their extremism towards Arabian Christians in an early Islamic context (see the below examples).

A Grade 9 Islamic Culture textbook teaches about “Islam’s tolerance of Christianity,” while using a Qur’anic verse that identifies Jews as “*the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers.*” The textbook illustrates a conversation between a daughter and her father, the former asking about how Islam has treated Christians with tolerance.



Islamic Culture, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 25-26

<sup>58</sup> *Shafi'i Fiqh*, Grade 7, 2020-21, p. 201; *The Principles of Religion*, Grade 9, 2020-21, p. 136. *History and Texts of Arabic Literature*, Grade 10, 2021-2022, p. 93-94, 97

<sup>59</sup> *Reading and Writing*, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 20; *The Principles of Religion*, Grade 9, 2020-21, p. 137. On the approval to give tax incomes other than the zakat to the “People of the Covenant” (*ahl al-dhimma*), Jews included, see *Hanafi Fiqh*, Grade 10, 2020-21, p. 200.

<sup>60</sup> *Hanafi Fiqh*, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 39, 81. For a text demonstrating the permit for Muslims to eat an animal slaughtered by Christians or Jews, see *Maliki Fiqh (al-Sharh al-Saghir)*, Grade 10, 2021-22, pp. 259, 261.

<sup>61</sup> *Arabic Language*, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2021-22, p. 139; *Islamic Culture*, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 25, 27. A notable example of a text conveying anti-Christian content is a lesson teaching and analyzing a 13<sup>th</sup> century poem lamenting the Christian conquest of Islamic Iberia (*al-Andalus*). Nonetheless, the text is put in a medieval context and does not imply an extension of modern anti-Christian rhetoric. See *History of Literature*, Grade 11, 2020-21, pp. 172-173.

*Islam's tolerance of Christianity, and relevant examples:*  
*Salma: Now we would like to hear and learn about how Islam treated the members of the Christian faith with tolerance, o father.*  
*Father: History has seen the most wonderful examples of Islam's tolerant treatment of members of the Christian faith, as they are the greatest friends of the believers, as God Almighty said: You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah; and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." [Al-Ma'ida, 82].*

In a lesson on national affiliation and citizenship, a Grade 8 Arabic Language textbook presents various forms of these two themes as they appear in Islamic sources. The fourth form is the promise of Muhammad to the Christian people of Najran, whereby he guaranteed their safety, the protection of their possessions, and their houses of worship.

**الصورة الرابعة: عهد الرسول ﷺ لأهل نجران**  
 وهو عهدٌ صَيَّرَ لنصارى نَجْرَانَ الأمانَ على أنفسهم، وأموالهم، وعشيرتهم، وأماكن عباداتهم، وما ورد فيه: «وإنجران وحاشيتها ذمة الله ورسوله، على دمايتهم، وأموالهم، وملتهم، وبيوتهم...»<sup>(62)</sup>

*Arabic Language, Grade 8, 2021-22, p. 139.*

*The Fourth Form: The Prophet's Promise to the People of Najran*  
*That is a promise guaranteeing for the Christians of Najran protection over their lives, their possessions, their clan, and their houses of worship, as stated: "Najran and its companions are given the covenant of God and His Messenger, for their lives, possessions, their community, and their houses of worship".*

The Grade 8 Lions of the Homeland textbook recounts stories of Egyptian officers fighting ISIS in Sinai, either alongside Christian soldiers, or to protect children after ISIS had murdered innocent Christians.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Lions of the Homeland, Grade 8, 2019, pp. 15-25, 26-38.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid, pp. 31-32, 35.*

**جرجس يتتسم وهو يهز رأسه:**  
 لن أنسى يوم استشهاد العقيد رامي حسنين قائد الكتيبة السابق وكان للبطل منسي رثاء له نشره على صفحات التواصل الاجتماعي ..

*Lions of the Homeland, Grade 8, 2019, p. 24*

*Girgis [A Christian name] smiles, shaking his head: I will never forget the day when Colonel Rami Hasaneen, the former commander of the battalion, died a martyr. The hero, Mansi, gave a eulogy for him which he published on social media pages.*

فبعد أن غادرت أنت مدينة العريش وصلتنا الأخبار المؤلمة عن التفجيرات الإرهابية.. في البداية فجر التكفيريون الكنائس ثم فجروا مسجد الروضة في بئر العبد بالقرب من العريش.. كنا نشعر بالصدمة البالغة وتلقينا هذه الأخبار بمزيج من الحزن والذهول.. في الأيام التالية لم أستطع النوم بشكل جيد ومشاعر الغضب لا تفارقني والسؤال لا يبعد عن رأسي: كيف يقتلون المصلين الآمنين في بيوت الله؟..  
 كيف هانت عليهم دماء الناس وحتى الأطفال الصغار؟..

*Lions of the Homeland, Grade 8, 2019, p. 27*

*After you had left the city of El-Arish, sad news reached us about the terrorist bombings. In the beginning, the Takfiriyun bombed churches, then the Rawdha mosque in Bir al-'Abd close to El-Arish. We were very shocked, sad and terrified to hear this news [...]*

Examples of the tolerant Islamic approach toward Jews include: a visit of the Prophet to a young Jewish servant who became ill; 'Umar's call for the Muslims to financially support a poor, old, blind Jewish man; early Islam's support for equality between Muslims and Jews in legal courts; and Muhammad's standing for a funeral procession of a Jew that passed before him.<sup>63</sup>

Notably, the textbook also teaches that Islam is tolerant towards people of all kinds, religions, colors, and ethnicities.<sup>64</sup>

**الأب:** نَعَمْ - يا حبيبي - لقد تنوّعت أجناسُ الناسِ وألْسنتُهُم وألوانُهُم كما تنوّعت دياناتهم، وما دام الأمرُ كذلك فالاختلافُ المقبولُ بينَ الناسِ باقٍ إلى يومِ القيامةِ، وهذا التعدُّدُ والتنوعُ والاختلافُ بينَ الناسِ في الأديانِ وفي اللُّغاتِ وفي اللّونِ وفي العرقِ - هو مشيئةُ اللهِ وإرادتهُ في خَلْقِهِ.

وكانت تعاليمُ الإسلامِ في معاملَةِ غيرِ المسلمينَ بمختلفِ أصنافِهِم وديانِهِم من أهلِ الكِتابِ وغيرِهِم دليلاً واضحاً، وبرهاناً ساطعاً على احترامِ الإسلامِ للأديانِ الأخرى.

*Islamic Culture, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 10-11.*

*Father: [...] People differ in terms of their gender, language, color, and religion. The situation is this way because variety between people shall remain until Judgment Day. This variance and variety between people in religion, language, color, and ethnicity is Allah's will and intention in creation.*

*Islam's teachings regarding treatment of non-Muslims of different kinds and religions, either the People of the Book or others, is clear evidence and convincing proof of Islam's respect toward other religions.*

Alongside Islam and Christianity, Judaism is customarily regarded as being among the revealed religions (al-adyan al-samawiyya). While Judaism is not explicitly specified, a Grade 9 *Islamic Culture* textbook emphasizes that the relation between Islam and the other revealed religions is one of brotherhood.

فعلاقَةُ الإسلامِ إذاً بالأديانِ الأخرى علاقةُ الأخِ بإخوته وأشقائه، ما دامَ جوهرُهُ هو جوهرُ كلِّ الرّسالاتِ، ودعوةُ رسوله هي دعوةُ كلِّ الرّسلِ؛ ولذا جعلَ القرآنُ من عناصرِ الإيمانِ: الإيمانَ بجميعِ الرّسلِ السابقينَ، وبجميعِ الكتبِ السماويةِ المنزلةِ من عندِ اللهِ على الأنبياءِ والمرسلينَ قبلَ محمّدٍ

*Islamic Culture, Grade 9, 2021-22, p. 23.*

*[...] Thus, Islam's relation to the other religions is that of a brother to his siblings. Its essence is the same as of all Missions, and the invocation of its Messenger is the same as of all Messengers. Therefore, the Quran became one of the constituents of the [the concept of] belief: faith's fundamentals: belief in all past Messengers, all revealed books which were revealed by Allah to the Prophets [...]*

In *The Principles of Religion* textbook for Grade 8, students learn about the relation between Muhammad and the Jews of Medina, and the charter that was signed between both sides. According to the textbook, it is permissible to reach to an agreement with the People of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians.<sup>65</sup>

**٣- المعاهدات بين الرسول واليهود:**  
كان اليهود يقيمون بجوار المسلمين في المدينة، وهم يهود بني قينقاع وبني النضير وبني قريظة، فكان من سياسة الرسول ﷺ وحسن تدبيره أن يتفق مع هؤلاء اليهود على التضامن والتعاون. وقد كتب الرسول ﷺ معاهدةً بينَ فيها حقوق المسلمين وواجباتهم، وحقوق اليهود وواجباتهم، وكان أساس هذه المعاهدة التعاون في السلم، والدفاع عن المدينة وقت الحرب، والتعاون التام بين الفريقين.

**الدروس المستفادة:**

- ١- أهمية المسجد في الإسلام.
- ٢- من أهم دعائم الدولة المسلمة: الأخي والتآلف بين أفرادها.
- ٣- جواز عقد المعاهدات مع أهل الكتاب.

*The Principles of Religion, Grade 8, 2021-22, p. 139.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>65</sup> For an example preaching to maintain good relationships with Jews and Christians, see *Reading and Writing*, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 20.

*Treaties between the Prophet and the Jews:*

*The Jews were settled near the Muslims in Medina. They were of Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza. The Prophet's policy was to reach an agreement with those Jews on solidarity and cooperation. So, the Messenger formulated a treaty, explaining the Muslims' rights and obligations and Jews' rights and obligations. This treaty has founded cooperation between the sides in times of peace and defending Medina in times of war, and full cooperation between both sides.*

*Lessons Learned:*

1. [...]
2. *Of the most important qualities of the Muslim state: fraternity and solidarity between its members.*
3. *The permission to sign treaties with the People of the Book.*

In the Grade 8 *Arabic Language* textbook, students learn that the purpose of the Charter of Medina was to improve relations between different groups in the city, particularly the “Muhajirun” (immigrants who migrated to Medina from Mecca with Muhammad), the “Ansar” (local inhabitants of Medina who supported the Prophet), and the Jewish tribes. This was to enable the Muslims, the Jews and all factions to confront external aggression, and to guarantee the city’s inhabitants basic human rights such as freedom of religion, equality, and justice.<sup>66</sup>

While evidently promoting the premise that Islam is superior to other religions, a Grade 9 textbook demonstrates the importance of debating with Jews and Christians in a civil manner. Nonetheless, the lesson acknowledges that some Jews and Christians are too bigoted in their opinions, and thus debating with them results in nothing.

في هذه الآية الكريمة، دعوة للمؤمنين إلى استعمال الطريقة الحسنى في مجادلته لأهل الكتاب: ﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾ أي: ولا تحاوروا، ولا تناقشوا - أيها المؤمنون - اليهود والنصارى إلا بالطريقة الحسنة، بأن ترشدوهم إلى طريق الحق بأسلوب لين كريم، كما قال تعالى: ﴿أَنْعِ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾.<sup>66</sup>

- ناقشوهم وأرشدوهم إلى الحق بالتي هي أحسن، ﴿إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾ بأن أساءوا إليكم، ولم يستعملوا الأدب معكم، فعاملوهم بالأسلوب المناسب لردعهم وزجرهم وتأديبهم.

- وقولوا لهم على سبيل التعليم والإرشاد ﴿وَأَمَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾ وهو القرآن، وأما بالذي أنزل إليكم من التوراة والإنجيل ﴿وَالنَّبَأِ وَإِنْهَكُمْ وَجِدْ﴾ أي: معبودنا ومعبودكم واحد لا شريك له في ذاته ولا في صفاته، ﴿وَيَحْنُ﴾ جميعاً معاشر المؤمنين ﴿لَمْ تُسَلِّمُوا﴾ مطيعون أمره ونهيه وعابدون له وحده.

[Partial Translation]

This noble verse [Surah Al-Ankabut 46] contains a message for the believers to take the best manner to debate with the People of the Book [...] by leading them to the path of truth in an aggregable and noble manner [...] (p. 65)

من الدروس المستفادة:

- 1- مناقشة أهل الكتاب ومحاورةهم بالطريقة الحسنة، وبالأسلوب الهادئ.
- 2- بعض أهل الكتاب متعصبون يصعب معهم الجدل، وحينئذ لا يؤدي النقاش معهم إلى نتيجة.
- 3- الإسلام يقر حرية الرأي والتعبير والاعتقاد ﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ﴾.

*The Principles of Religion, Grade 9, 2020-21, pp. 65-66.*

*Among the Lessons Learned:*

- 1 – *Debating with the People of the Book and discussing with them should be done in a civil and calm manner.*
- 2 – *Some people of the Book are bigoted to the point where debating with them is difficult, thereupon discussion with them will lead to no result.*
- 3 – *Islam embraces the freedom of opinion and belief [according to the Qur’anic verse] “there is no coercion in religion” [Surah al-Baqara, 256] (p. 66)*

The Grade 9 Islamic Culture textbook includes several positive references to Jews and Judaism. In a section that addresses the permissibility of holding commercial interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, students learn about a hadith according to which “Allah’s Messenger has

<sup>66</sup> *Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2021-22, p. 139.*



and is known as the "Charter of Medina," and vouchsafed that Muslims will live with Jews, and together will commerce, cooperate, and defend Medina against any external threat.

Allah's Messenger was of extraordinary mildness and tolerance while interacting with them, until they violated the agreement and betrayed. But whoever lives among Muslims and respects their values and societies, shall always have security and safety.

Textbooks do show a reasonable level of ambivalence towards the Jews. An example of the ambivalent treatment of Jews in textbooks is evident in a lesson on the Muslims' conflict with the Jews of Khaybar from a Grade 9 Principles of Religion textbook. Thus, the lesson explains that the conquest of Khaybar was to protect the Muslims from the "evilness" of the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa', Banu Nadhir and Banu Qurayza, who had been expelled from Medina to Khaybar where they schemed to harm the Muslims. On the other hand, the subsequent agreement between the Muslims and the defeated Jews of Khaybar demonstrates how the lesson preaches the "permission to make treaties with the People of the Book," and the "proof of Islam's tolerance and respect for the Revealed Books:"

سبب فتح خيبر:  
ازدادت نعمة اليهود على المسلمين بعد أن أخرج رسول الله ﷺ يهود بني قينقاع وبني النضير وبني قريظة من المدينة<sup>68</sup>، فلجأ بعضهم إلى يهود خيبر، وقاموا بتدبير المؤامرات لإيذاء المسلمين، فكان لابد من إخراجهم من خيبر، حتى يأمن المسلمون شرهم.

وكان من بين العنايم عدة صحائف من التوراة، فطلب اليهود ردها إليهم، فأمر النبي ﷺ بردها لهم، وهذا يدل على احترام الإسلام والمسلمين للكتب المُتَنَزَّلة، ومدى تسامحهم الذي أصبح مضرب الأمانال.

#### الدروس المستفادة من هذه الغزوة:

- 1- جواز مصالحة أهل الكتاب ومعاملتهم.
- 2- بيان سماحة الإسلام واحترامه للكتب السماوية المنزلة.
- 3- ثقة النبي ﷺ في نصر الله له.

*Principles of Religion, Grade 9, 2020-2021, pp. 136-137.*

#### *The Reason for the Conquest of Khaybar*

*The Jews' seeking of retributions against the Muslims increased after the Prophet expelled the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa' and Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza from Medina, and some found refuge with the Jews of Khaybar, and they made schemes to harm the Muslims. There was no choice but to expel them from Khaybar so as to protect the Muslims from their evilness [...]*

*The lessons learned from this battle:*

- 1 – the permission to make agreements with the People of the Book and interact with them.
- 2 – proof of Islam's tolerance and respect for the Revealed Books.

Alongside descriptions of Jews as worthy objects of cooperation with the Muslims, textbooks reveal opposing narratives. According to a Grade 8 textbook, the Jews of Medina violated their charter with the Muslims, thus exposing their unchanged, treacherous nature. Students learn that one of the lessons from the incident is that "treachery is the Jews' nature, which they cannot avoid." It is remarkable that this discourse on the treachery of the Jews, especially those of Egyptian origin, and their aid to the Zionist movement, reverberates in texts and manifests published by the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> This appears in the site Ikhwanwiki – an online Wikipedia-like repository which is updated by scholars of the Muslim Brotherhood. See Ashrad Eid and 'Abdu Mustafa Dasuqi, "The Special Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Jews," [Arabic] Ikhwanwiki, [https://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php?title=%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5\\_%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86\\_%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86#%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7\\_-\\_%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A9\\_%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D9%88%D8](https://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php?title=%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5_%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86_%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86#%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7_-_%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A9_%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D9%88%D8)

Muhammad, and when he began his mission some converted to being Muslims and others remained infidels.

### الدروس المستفادة من هذه الغزوة:

- ١- حماية الأعراض والدفاع عنها واجب شرعي.
- ٢- المسلم الحق يغار على عرض المسلمة.
- ٣- الخيانة في اليهود طبع لا يمكن تركه.

*The Principles of Religion, Grade 8, 2021-22, p. 143.*

*The lessons learned from this battle [against the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa]*

[...]

3 – treachery is the Jews’ nature, which they cannot avoid.

A Grade 10 Qur’an commentary textbook explains that according to Surah al-Bayyina: 6, Jews, Christians, and idolaters were infidels before Islam, but when Muhammad came, some became Muslims and others “remained infidels.” This implies that whoever did not convert to Islam – Jews, Christians, and others – were and still are infidels.

### بعض ما يستفاد من السورة الكريمة:

- ١- إن أهل الكتاب والمشركين لم يتركوا كفرهم حتى بعث الله نبيه محمدًا ﷺ، فلما بعث أسلم بعض وثبت على الكفر بعض.

*Taysir Tafsiir al-Nasafi, Grade 10, 2021-2022, 139-141*

*Some Conclusions drawn from the Noble Surah*

1 – The People of the Book and the Idolaters did not forgo their disbelief until God sent forth his Prophet

Additionally, it is taught that because of the Jews' betrayal, Allah has allowed the Muslims to inherit their lands and homes.<sup>69</sup> A Grade 7 textbook also criticizes the early Jewish scholars for preaching righteousness while failing to practice what they preach. As such, they are likened to “a lamp that emits light for others while burning itself.”<sup>70</sup>

### التفسير والبيان:

في قوله تعالى: ﴿أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ نَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾  
خاطب الله تبارك وتعالى علماء اليهود، وسألهم سؤال توبيخ لهم وتعجب من شأنهم؛ حيث كانوا يأمرون غيرهم بالخير وينسون أنفسهم فهم كالمصباح يضيء للناس ويحرق نفسه،

*The Principles of Religion, Grade 7, 2020-21, p. 44*

### Interpretation and Clarification

*In the words of the Almighty “Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Then will you not reason?” [Al-Baqarah 44], God addressed the Jewish scholars, asking them reproachingly and perplexedly, as they order others to act righteously and forget to do so themselves. They are like a lamp that emits light for others while burning itself.*

As a part of a chapter that expresses opposition to extremism, the textbook incorporates historical examples of extremism. One of the examples discusses “*The extremism of the Jews in the Arabian Peninsula against the Christians of Najran.*” This phrasing is problematic because it generalizes that all Jews in the region, as

[%AF\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86\\_%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85\\_%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9](#). Accessed online on Aug. 27, 2023.

<sup>69</sup> *The Principles of Religion, Grade 8, 2021-22, pp. 143, 149.*

<sup>70</sup> A Grade 10 hadith commentary textbook cites an interpretation by the medieval hadith commentator Abu I-Barakat, in which he condemns the act of circumcising a child seven days after his birth because “it is the practice of the Jews.” *Maliki Fiqh (al-Sharh al-Saghir)*, Grade 10, 2021-2022, p. 257. For explaining that those who only accept some of the Qur’an, like the Jews, will suffer from the harshest punishment on the Day of Judgement, see *Arabic Rhetoric, Grade 11, 2021-22, pp. 40-41.* See also *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 137.

opposed to specifying Jewish tribes, hold extreme views and policies vis-à-vis their Christian neighbors. The textbook then quotes Qur'anic verses that address the story of the People of the Ditch (*Ashab al-Ukhdud*), which refers to people who were thrown into a ditch and set on fire, due to their belief in God. According to one of the interpretations to which the textbook refers, they were a group of Christians in Arabia set on fire by Yusuf Dhu Nuwas, the Jewish king of the Himyarite Kingdom.<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that the textbook refers to “*the Jews in the Arabian Peninsula*,” rather than to Dhu Nuwas specifically.

are the makers of the ditch, the fire pit, filled with fuel when they sat around it, watching what they had ordered to be done to the believers" [Al-Buruj; 4-7]

Notably, al-Azhar's ambivalent position on Jews may extend beyond textbooks. Thus, on the one hand, Grand Imam al-Tayyib reportedly said that “*the Jews adopted texts that legitimize for them the annihilation of the Palestinians [...], implementing them after they had falsified them to gain influence over public and state resources.*”<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, al-Tayyib declared at the World Conference on Peace and Religion held in al-Azhar in 2017 that Islam must strive to protect not only mosques, but also churches and synagogues. He added that both Christianity and Judaism, like Islam, are “*religions of peace*,” and that one cannot argue that “*Judaism is a religion of terrorism just because of the horrors and atrocities that were committed in its name.*”<sup>73</sup>



Islamic Culture, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 39-40.

Father: If we glance through the pages of history, we will find [instances of] extremism and terrorism by contentious unbelievers, starting with the people of Noah [...]  
Allah has spoken about the extremism of the Romans against Christians, and the extremism of Jews in the Arab peninsula against the Christians of Najran: "Condemned

<sup>71</sup> Sir Fuad Hamza, “Najran”, Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society Vol. 22, No. 4 (1935), pp. 631-640.

<sup>72</sup> “Sheikh al-Azhar: the Jews falsified texts from the Torah that legitimize for them annihilating the Palestinians,” Sama News, Dec. 22, 2017, <https://samanews.ps/ar/post/322838/%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86>. Accessed online on Aug. 30, 2023.

<sup>73</sup> Ashraf ‘Abd al-Hamid, “al-Azhar: Islam has commanded us to defend churches and synagogues,” Al-Arabiya, Apr. 27, 2017, <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/egypt/2017/04/27/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B3-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF>. Accessed online on Aug. 30, 2023.

# Gender and Issues of Sexual Orientation

Another characteristic of al-Azhar textbooks is their conservatively restrictive approach to gender issues, compared with the general Egyptian education system. The general curriculum demonstrated “progressive conceptions of women’s rights”: it teaches about equality in the labor force and in managing the household, and about various role models who have contributed to the status of women in Egyptian society (such as Doria Shafik, one of the leaders of the women’s liberation movement in Egypt).<sup>74</sup> The textbooks also teach about the dangers and impropriety of female genital mutilation (*khitan*).<sup>75</sup> Even in references to women in Islamic studies, textbooks of the general system harbor progressive views. For example, a Grade 11 *Egypt and Islamic Civilization* textbook teaches about women’s positive role in Islamic society throughout history in the fields of politics, warfare, preaching Islam, and contribution to knowledge and social welfare. Many examples of influential Muslim women are given, while students are encouraged to be inspired by these role models and actively serve society themselves.<sup>76</sup>



*Egypt and Islamic Civilization*, Grade 11, 2022-23, p. 130.

3. *Women’s Status and Role in Islamic Society:* Islam elevated women’s stature and surrounded them by care and protection, being mothers, sisters, daughters, and spouses. Their value is no less than that of men, as the Messenger said: “Women are the counterpart of men.” Women have practiced different roles in Islamic society. Look at the following shape, to get to know them: Women’s Roles in Islamic Society: Relating to politics and warfare; Call to Islam and knowledge; society.

The approach reflected in the al-Azhar textbooks features discriminatory statements against women,<sup>77</sup> advocates for permission to marry underaged women, and expresses support for the application of severe punishments against adulterers and homosexuals. A Grade 11 textbook on jurisprudence even cites medieval legal texts to demonstrate the circumstances in

<sup>74</sup> Ofir Winter, “Generational Change: Egypt’s Quest to Reform its School Curriculum,” *IMPACT-se*, Apr. 2023, <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Egypt-s-Quest-to-Reform-its-Curriculum-IMPACT-se-Report-April-2023.pdf>, pp. 85-91.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-96.

<sup>76</sup> See full translation of example in *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>77</sup> The following issues from textbooks are cited directly from medieval Islamic sources: on the prohibition that women should lead the Friday prayer, see *Hanafi Fiqh*, Grade 10, 2020-21, p. 98. It is also stated that women’s prayer at home is preferable to one in public or at the mosque. *Ibid.* pp. 100, 298-300. Women should also not pray loudly during the Hajj pilgrimage. *Ibid.*, 263. On the prohibition that women cannot travel for more than three days without a male companion, see *Ibid.*, p. 238.

which a legal guardian may force a woman to marry without consent.<sup>78</sup>

The Arabic Language textbook for Grade 7 includes a section which states that men are religiously recognized as the leaders of the family.

(٢) قائد الأسرة  
وجمّل للإرجل حقّ القيادة وتوجيه الأسرة فكان تعالى: ﴿أَرْبَابٌ قَوْمُكَ عَلَى  
النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَكَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِنَّ مِنْ غَيْرِ وَإِنَّمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ﴾ [النساء: ٣٤].

*Arabic Language, Grade 7, 2020-21, p. 160.*

(2) *The leader of the family (Allah) gave men the right to lead and to guide the family, he said: "Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially" (Surat Al-Nisa', 34).*

A Grade 9 Hanafi jurisprudence textbook teaches that while women may manage some legal affairs as jurisconsults, they cannot address issues pertaining to the punishments prescribed in the Qur'an (*hudud*) or the requital in kind (*qisas*), as these two methods contradict the woman's gentle nature.

تولي المرأة القضاء  
يجوز أن تتولى المرأة القضاء في كل القضايا المتنازع فيها، ما عدا قضايا الحدود  
والقصاص؛ لأن الغالب على النساء الرقة، وقضايا الحدود والقصاص تتناقى مع  
طبيعة المرأة.

*Hanafi Fiqh, Grade 9, 2021-22, p. 67.*

*Appointing women as judges  
Women may be appointed as judges overseeing all matters of the law, except for issues concerning the punishments prescribed in the Qur'an (hudud) or the requital in kind (qisas); because gentleness overcomes women, and the issues of hudud and qisas contradict women's nature.*

The Islamic Shafi'i Law textbook for Grade 8 includes several references to gender issues that display a traditionally restrictive approach, granting men control and sway over the lives of women. Students learn that a father or grandfather are allowed to force a woman to get married, under certain conditions. It is also taught that if a man divorces a woman once or twice, he has the right to return to her without her permission.<sup>79</sup>

The "Maliki Fiqh" Grade 9 textbook discusses several gender issues. Sexual harassment is condemned due to its negative consequences, including damage to the family's reputation, and an increase in criminal acts such as raping women, harming them, and defaming them. Under certain conditions, the Islamic punishment for harassment can be as severe as the death penalty.<sup>80</sup>

Students learn that adultery is a sin, and that its punishments vary under Islam: married men or women will be punished with stoning, while unmarried men or women will be punished with a hundred lashes, as well as exile from their place of residence, and imprisonment.<sup>81</sup>

According to the textbook, homosexual relations between men are forbidden, and their punishment under Islam is death by stoning. The same punishment is also applied to men and women who engage in anal sex.

<sup>78</sup> *Shafi'i Fiqh (al-Iqna')*, Grade 11, 2021-22, pp. 202-203.

<sup>79</sup> *Shafi'i Fiqh*, Grade 8, 2020-21, pp. 65, 67-68, 80.

<sup>80</sup> *Maliki Fiqh*, Grade 9, 2021-22, pp. 74-75.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 77-78.

### اللواط

تعريفه: هو إتيان الذكور في أديبارهم .

حكمه: الحرمة ودليله قوله تعالى على لسان لوط ﷺ: ﴿أَتَأْتُونَ الذَّكَرَ﴾<sup>(١)</sup>  
مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحْوَاثِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١﴾ .

عقوبته: الرجم على الفاعل والمفعول سواء أكانا مُحْصَنِينَ أم غير مُحْصَنِينَ  
مسلمين أم كافرين .

### شروط إقامة الحد:

يشترط في إقامة الحد على الفاعل:

أن يكون بالغًا عاقلًا ولا يشترط بلوغ المفعول به في رجم الفاعل .

ويُشترط في إقامة الحد على المفعول به:

أن يكون بالغًا عاقلًا طامئًا .

ثبوت اللواط:

يثبت اللواط بما يثبت به الزنا .

وإتيان الأنثى في دبرها محرم فمن فعل ذلك عوقب عقوبة شديدة إن كانت  
زوجته وإن كانت أجنبية حُدَّ حَدُّ الزنا .

Maliki Fiqh, Grade 9, 2021-22, p. 79.

### Sodomy

Its definition: male anal intercourse

Ruling: it is forbidden, and the proof is God's words as said by Lot: "Why do you commit such indecent acts that have never been committed by anyone before?"

Punishment: stoning the active and passive participants, whether they are married or not, and whether they are Muslims or infidels.

### Conditions for carrying out the punishment:

Condition for carrying out the punishment of the active participant:

That he has reached maturity and that he is sane.  
Whether the passive participant has reached maturity or not is not a condition for stoning the active participant.

Condition for carrying out the punishment of the passive participant:

That he has reached maturity, that he is sane, and that the act was done willingly.

Proof for sodomy:

Sodomy is proven in the same way adultery is proven.

Anal intercourse with a woman is forbidden, and he who does it is punished severely if she is his wife, and if she is not his wife he is punished for adultery.

## International Relations

While al-Azhar's textbooks rarely touch upon Egypt's foreign policy and international relations beyond the issue of Palestine, one harbors an anti-Western tone, and discusses the cultural, economic, and military conduct of China and Japan as a role model for contemporary Arab states.<sup>82</sup> While there is an emphasis placed on the economic successes of these countries, primarily in Japan, the ability of China to possess a nuclear weapon is also implied to constitute a means to impose itself on the West.

The "Reading and Writing" (*Insha*, i.e., "Art of Composition") textbook for Grade 10 discusses examples of popular national resistance to occupying Western forces throughout the 20th century, including in Japan and China. Students are taught that Arab countries should derive lessons from the experience of these countries. Hence, among the goals of the lesson is understanding how to distinguish between terrorism and the right of occupied peoples to defend themselves. The other goal is to learn about and provide examples of people who have fought to regain what is theirs by right.

٦ - يفرق ما بين الإرهاب وحق الشعوب المحتلة والمعتمد عليها في الدفاع عن نفسها.  
٧ - يضرب أمثلة لشعوب كافحت لاسترداد حقها ، ويبين الدروس المستفادة من نضالها.

*Reading and Writing, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 49.*

[the student will]

6 – distinguish between terrorism and the right of people under occupation, and attack to defend themselves.

7 – give examples of peoples who have fought to regain what is theirs by right, and clarify the lessons learned from their struggle.

According to the textbook, Japan regained its international status following World War II by focusing on development, innovation, and scientific progress, and thus was able to transform itself into a global economic power that competes with the US.

(٢) منطق حكيم  
وكان منطقها أنها - وقد خسرت المغامرة العسكرية - سوف تحاول الوصول إلى القمة والقوة من طريق آخر، وهو طريق التقدم العلمي الذي علمها وقَّع القبلة الذرية عليها بعضًا من مذاقه المرّ. فانصرفوا إلى التنمية والاختراع والتقدم العلمي بحاسة مذهلة، بل إن أمريكا حين بدأت تحلل سر المعجزة اليابانية وجدت أن أبناء اليابان يعملون في الصناعة والاختراع والمنافسة وكانهم يخوضون حربًا، وقد كانت حربًا بالفعل، انتهت بعد ربع قرن من التسليم، وهي ثالثة قوة صناعية في العالم.

*Reading and Writing, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 50.*

2) Wise Logic

[Japan's] logic was, seeing as it had lost the military campaign, to attempt to reach the top and the apex of power through a different way, the way of scientific progress [...] they began to develop, invent, and progress scientifically with shocking fervor. When the USA began to analyze the secret of the Japanese miracle, they discovered that the Japanese people work in manufacturing, inventing, and competing as if they are fighting a war. And it was indeed a war, which resulted a quarter of a century after its

<sup>82</sup> This message corresponds with El-Sisi's government inclination to portray Asian countries as role models for Egypt. These countries, and particularly China, are frequently described in official Egyptian media as inspiration for developing Egypt's economy and turning it into a creative and competitive player that integrates into the global market; deals with the challenges of population growth and poverty; develops education that meets the needs of the labor force; invests in technological progress; and establishes a decentralized economic system: Ofir Winter and Doron Ella, "The Chinese Development Model: A Cure for Egyptian Woes?," INSS Insight No. 1203, August 21, 2019, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/the-chinese-development-model-a-cure-for-egyptian-woes/>.

surrender with [Japan] emerging as the world's third industrial power.

As for China, which was also facing Western military threats, students learn that it was able to impose itself on the world stage by possessing atomic and hydrogen bombs, alongside other modern sources of power.<sup>83</sup>

### (٣) طريقة الصين لفرض نفسها

أما الصين فبعد أن قامت بثورتها المعروفة، وقف العالم الغربي متحصناً بقوته البحرية والجوية المتفوقة ضدها، وحرّمها السيادة على بعض أراضيها، وهنا وجدت الصين الضخمة نفسها أمام أحد خيارين: إما أن تُقدّم على عمل عسكري غير مأمون العاقبة، وإما أن تنصرف إلى إنجازات ثورتها، وتدعيم مركزيتها، وآثرت عدم الانتحار في معركة رأها خاسرة، ثم مضت تنمي قوتها الذاتية بالطريقة التي تفرض بها نفسها على كافة الأطراف، ونجحت الصين وآية نجاحها صنع القنبلة الذرية والهيدروجينية والصواريخ الموجهة، وامتلكت كل أسباب القوة الحديثة.

Reading and Writing, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 50.

### China's Path to Self-Determination

As for China, after its famous revolution, the Western world stood against it, fortified with its preponderating marine and air capabilities, and deprived it from controlling some of its territories. The Great China found itself facing two options: either to enter a military campaign with no guaranteed results, or to deal with its revolution's accomplishments, and consolidating its centrality. It preferred not to commit suicide over a lost battle, rather going on to develop its independent power in a manner which will allow its self-determination in all fronts. China succeeded, culminating in the manufacturing of a nuclear and a hydrogen bomb, and guided missiles, and possessed all the modern means of power.

During this lesson, students are asked whether the Japanese and Chinese plans to strengthen their position as world powers are suitable for the Arabs.

٤- هل تصلح الخطة اليابانية والطريقة الصينية لقيامنا نحن العرب بثورة صناعية وثقافية واجتماعية تحقق لنا الريادة؟

Reading and Writing, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 54.

Are the Japanese plan and the Chinese plan [to achieve power and establish their position] suitable for us, the Arabs, to promote an industrial, cultural, and social revolution that will give us a leading position?

<sup>83</sup> Reading and Writing, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 50.

## Zionism and Israel

The position of al-Azhar towards Zionism, Israel, and the Palestinian Cause – vocalized primarily by the Grand Imam – has always been critical and polemic. Perhaps more than any international issue, Zionism, Israel, and its control over Jerusalem have received the strongest condemnation and the widest attention by al-Azhar since the appointment of Grand Imam al-Tayyib in 2010.<sup>84</sup> Al-Azhar's position with regards to Jerusalem was even to go so far as rejecting the validity of visiting Jerusalem under Israeli "occupation."<sup>85</sup> A similar invective levelled against Israel is demonstrated vividly in the textbooks. Israel is delegitimized as the "Zionist entity," or "usurping occupier". The curriculum fully supports the Palestinian Cause and encourages Palestinians to defend their land against Zionist forces. Any Jewish connection to the land of Israel or Jerusalem is denied, with the latter viewed as the "eternal capital of the state of Palestine."

Israel is not acknowledged in al-Azhar's textbooks by name, but rather is termed "the Zionist entity." The borders of Israel are not recognized, the capital of Jerusalem is described as an Arab city, and the Palestinians are presented as its defenders. In a similar way to textbooks in the public Egyptian education system, the al-

Azhar textbooks call for peace between Muslims and other nations; however, unlike the former, al-Azhar's textbooks do not refer to the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement.<sup>86</sup> That said, students learn about the agreement with Israel in textbooks published by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, which are used alongside the Al-Azhar curriculum. The conspicuous lack of reference to the peace agreement in the Al-Azhar curriculum is all the more striking given the fact that former Grand Imam of al-Azhar Gad al-Haqq (d. 1996), whose views are regarded as conservative, stipulated in a famous fatwa that the peace agreement is in accordance with the Shari'a, in part because it was beneficial to the Muslims.<sup>87</sup> One Morphology textbook even delegitimizes Israel in a sentence that demonstrates a linguistic phenomenon; coincidentally, the previous sentence also features a phrase that exalts the value of martyrdom. Pairing the two sentences therefore connects the two ideas, possibly promoting the concept of martyrdom in the face of Israel's deception. A strictly structural exercise in linguistics could have used any other sentences to demonstrate the morphological phenomenon without linking these two problematic notions.

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<sup>84</sup> Barak, "Al-Azhar", *Politics*, p. 63.

<sup>85</sup> "Azhar reiterates rejection of visiting Jerusalem under Israeli occupation," Egypt Today, Jan. 18, 2018, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/40453/Azhar-reiterates-rejection-of-visiting-Jerusalem-under-Israeli-occupation>. Accessed online Aug. 29, 2023.

<sup>86</sup> *Islamic Culture*, Grade 10, 2021-22, p. 54.

<sup>87</sup> Yitzhak Reiter, *War, Peace and International Relations in Contemporary Islam: Muslim Scholars on Peace-Treaty with Israel*, Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2008, pp. 85-107.

هات من الأفعال السابقة اسم تفضيل في جمل تامة:  
الإجابة:  
الشهادة أعلى مراتب الإيمان.  
إسرائيل أكثر خداعًا من غيرها.

Simple Morphology, Grade 10, 2021-2022, p. 129

Use the previous verbs to form the relative in a complete sentence.

Answers:

Martyrdom is the greatest degree of belief.

Israel is more deceiving than others.

The *Arabic Language* textbook for Grade 8 includes several references to al-Azhar's stance on the Palestinian issue, and on Jerusalem in particular. Students learn that "Muslims in all places" pray for a Palestinian victory in liberating the al-Aqsa Mosque, and say: "May Allah predestine their victory, and fulfill their wishes, so they will become protected in the first Qibla."<sup>88</sup> A Grade 9 Arabic Language textbook presents an imaginary dialogue between Jerusalem (*al-Quds*), the Murabitun (i.e., the Muslims who defend Jerusalem in *Jihad*) and the Muslim believers, in which Jerusalem beseeches them to liberate her from her suffering under the occupation's impurity, and the latter swear to do so and purify it.

٣- القدس الشريف، بني وطني، أبعجكم أسري وأتيني من وطأة الاحتلال؟!  
المرابيطون: مهلاً يا قلدة أكيادنا، أنت قيلتنا الأولى، وإليك كان المسرى، ومنك بدأ المعراج.  
المؤمنون: يا قدس، لن نفرط فيك، ولا في ذرة من ترابك، أنت في وجداننا ما حيينا، فوالله لنظهرتك كما ظهرك صلاح الدين من دنس الاحتلال، وليصلي فيك أيناؤك القوية عزيمتهم، وأنت حاضن لهم في أمان.  
القدس الشريف: بني وطني، يا مخلصون، لا تتأخروا عني؛ فقد طال الانتظار!

Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2021-22, p. 15.

3- Holy al-Quds: Sons of my homeland, do you like me captured, moaning from the oppression of the occupation?!  
The Murabitun: Be at ease, our daughter, you are our first Kiblah (direction of prayer) and you were the destination of the prophets' night journey, and from you he started the heavenly journey.

The believers: Oh, al-Quds! We will never abandon you, not even a grain of soil from you, you are in our conscience for as long as we are alive. We swear we will purify you as Saladin purified you from the impurity of the occupation, and your sons, those with a strong will, are going to pray in you and you will foster them in safety.

Holy al Quds: Sons of my homeland! You faithful ones, do not be late for me, for I have been waiting for a long time!

The Arabic Language textbook further mentions al-Azhar's call for the international community to recognize the Arab and Muslim identity of Jerusalem, and the institute's perception of Jerusalem as "the eternal capital of Palestine," while ignoring any Israeli or Jewish connection to the city.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, it is stated that all Muslims are obligated to defend Jerusalem against the "usurping occupier."

#### التدريبات

#### اقرأ ثم اجيب:

١- بات الأزهر الشريف يطالب المجتمع الدولي بتأكيد عروبة القدس، وهويتها الإسلامية وينقذ بالمرصاد لمن يعيث بهذه التوابيت، وأخذ يتهدد بهذا العبث الذي يرتكبه الكيان الصهيوني المحتل للأراضي العربية، ويناشد المجتمع الدولي لرفع القنن عن كواهل مسلمي القدس والأماكن المقدسة.

Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2021-22, p. 96.

#### Exercises

Read and then answer:

Al-Azhar continues to demand the international community to affirm the Arabic character of Jerusalem, and its Islamic identity, and stands its guard over any attempt to violate these principles. It (Al-Azhar) also condemns this violation, which is committed by the Zionist entity, the occupier of the Arab lands, and (Al-Azhar) calls on the international community to remove the injustice that lies as a burden on the neck of the Muslims of Jerusalem and the holy sites (p. 96).

<sup>88</sup> Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2021-22, p. 47.

<sup>89</sup> See also Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2021, pp. 21.

رُبوع المعمورة، ويدافع الأزهر عن قضايا المسلمين بحكمة ورؤفة، ومن بين هذه القضايا: القضية الفلسطينية التي عُقد بشأنها كثيرٌ من المؤتمرات بلغت التي عشر مؤتمرات؛ وذلك من أجل نصرتها، والتأكيد على أن القدس الشريف عاصمة فلسطين الأبدية.

*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2021-22, p. 150.*

...Al-Azhar defends the Muslims' causes with wisdom and prudence. One of these causes is: The Palestinian cause, about which a dozen conventions were held dedicated to supporting it, and affirming that holy Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Palestine.

٣- قرأت الكتاب معظمه في ليلة هادئة أجواؤها، وأعجبني في الكتاب علمه الفياض. حيث تناول الأستاذ المؤلف كل شاردة وواردة عن دولة فلسطين العربية، وقدم الأدلة والبراهين على عروبة القدس الشريف، وأنها العاصمة الأبدية لدولة فلسطين. وذكر أن الواجب على المسلمين جميعهم أن يدافعوا عنها ضد المحتل الغاصب الذي سعى فيها للفساد.

*Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2021-22, p. 21.*

[...]  
The teacher took the extensively comprehensive book about the Arab state of Palestine, and brought indications and proofs for the Arab nature of dignified Jerusalem (al-Quds), being the eternal capital of the State of Palestine, and mentioned that all the Muslims are obligated to defending it against the usurping occupier who has sown corruption therein.

Furthermore, the Grade 11 Arabic Language textbook extensively discusses the history of the Palestinian issue. A paragraph on the geographical location of Palestine claims that it lies between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, while ignoring the presence of the State of Israel.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the declaration states that the

Arab connection to Jerusalem goes back to the Jebusites in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, and thus is longer and older than the Israeli connection. The origin of the Jebusites, who were probably speakers of a Hebrew-esque dialect like the rest of the Canaanites, is unclear (Amorites, Mittanian-Hurrians, both, or none). Their Arabization, however, is clearly a modern Palestinian construct that became popular among Arabs and Muslims.<sup>91</sup>

**نالت:** إنَّ عروبة القدس أمر لا يقبل العيب أو التغيير، وهي ثابتة تاريخيًا منذ آلاف السنين، ولن تفلح محاولات الصهيونية العالمية في تزيف هذه الحقيقة أو محوها من التاريخ، أو من أذهان العرب والمسلمين وضمايرهم فعروبة القدس ضاربة في أعماقهم لأكثر من خمسين قرنًا؛ حيث بناها العرب اليبوسيون في الألف الرابع قبل الميلاد، أي قبل ظهور اليهودية التي ظهرت أول ما ظهرت مع شريعة موسى ﷺ بسبعة وعشرين قرنًا، كما أن الوجود العبراني في مدينة القدس لم يتعد ٤١٥ عامًا، على عهد داود وسليمان ﷺ في القرن العاشر قبل الميلاد وهو وجود طارئٍ عابرٍ محدود حدث بعد أن تأسست القدس العربية ومضى عليها ثلاثون قرنًا من التاريخ.

*Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 84.*

Third [article]: The Arab character of Jerusalem is an issue which is not subject to denigration or change, and an historic fact for thousands of years. The attempts by the International Zionist movement to deny or ignore this fact, and remove it from the minds of Arabs and Muslims, will never succeed. This fact dates back 50 centuries, when the Jebusites built it [Jerusalem] four thousand years before Christ, i.e. 27 centuries before the appearance of Judaism, which began with Prophet Moses (Peace be upon him). Also, the Hebrew presence in Jerusalem remained for only 415 years under the reign of the [Prophets] David and Solomon in the tenth century before Christ. It was a foreign,

<sup>90</sup> *Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 80.*

<sup>91</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 253, fn. 13. Yitzhak Reiter, *Jerusalem and Its Role in Islamic Solidarity*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 70–73. Eldad J. Pardo et. al, Reform or Radicalization: PA 2017–18 Curriculum, IMPACT-se, 2017, pp. 77–80. Meik Gerhards, "Die biblischen „Hethiter“, " *Die Welt des Orients*, Vol. 39, (2008): 145–179, especially pp. 161, 167 fn. 114, 173–74. In all likelihood, most of the dwellers of Canaan, including the various Israelite tribes, were at one point speaking varieties of Biblical Hebrew (the "Language of Canaan") Holger Gzella, "The Emergence of Hebrew," *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 2 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 852–863; Holger Gzella, "Canaanite," *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant c.8000–332 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 29–30; Koert van Bekkum, "The 'Language of Canaan': Ancient Israel's History and the Origins of Hebrew," in *Biblical Hebrew in Context*, ed. Koert van Bekkum et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 67–84.

passing, and limited presence that occurred 30 centuries after Jerusalem was established as an Arab [city].

Students also learn that there is no historical evidence for a Jewish connection to Jerusalem and its holy sites, as there are only Islamic and Christian archeological findings in the city. The example below, which denies the existence of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, is somewhat at odds with other textbooks which acknowledge the existence of religious worship in “Bayt al-Maqdis” (*The Temple or Jerusalem*), though not in what they regard as *al-Quds*.<sup>92</sup>

وتضم مدينة القدس آثارًا إسلامية ومسيحية عدة، ولا وجود فيها لأي أثر يهودي، وما يقال عن الهيكل المزعوم ووجوده في القدس فهو قول مزعوم، ودعوى مفتراة، لا سند لها تاريخيًا، وذلك لاعتبارات عدة، من بينها: الحفريات التي قام بها الصهاينة منذ ١٩٦٨ م تحت المسجد الأقصى وحوله، ولم يجدوا أي دليل يشير إلى زعمهم هذا.

Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 81.

There are many Islamic and Christian relics in Jerusalem, and there is not a single Jewish relic. The things that are said about the so-called [Jewish] Temple and its existence in Jerusalem are alleged, and are a false claim with no historical evidence. This is for many reasons, including the excavations which have been executed by the Zionists since 1968 beneath Al-Aqsa Mosque and in its surroundings, where they found no evidence to prove their false claim.

This can be compared with textbooks from the general curriculum, for instance a Grade 4 Christian Education textbook which acknowledges that King Solomon built the Temple on Mount Moriah in

<sup>92</sup> *Arabic Rhetoric*, Grade 10, 2021-2022, p. 47

<sup>93</sup> See also an example teaching about a great temple in Jerusalem which Jews would visit annually to celebrate Passover. *Christian Education*, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2022-23, p. 15. See Ofir Winter, “Generational Change: Egypt’s Quest to Reform its School Curriculum,” *IMPACT-se*, Apr. 2023, <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Egypt’s-Quest-to-Reform-its-Curriculum-IMPACT-se-Report-April-2023.pdf>, pp. 27-28.

Jerusalem. The example refers explicitly to the names “Israel” and “Urshalim” (Jerusalem, as opposed to the Islamic name “al-



Quds” or “Bayt al-Maqdis”).<sup>93</sup>

*Christian Education (national curriculum)*, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2022-23, pp. 30-31.

[Partial Translation]

*Building the Temple – Solomon the Wise*

[...] David chose a location to build the Temple – Mount Moriah in the city of Jerusalem [Urshalim]. He prepared a building plan and much gold, silver, copper, stone, wood and other necessary building materials, and instructed his son Solomon to build the Temple. [...] the building process took seven years and six months, after which Solomon held a great celebration and invited the elders of Israel and all the people.

The Reading and Writing textbook also invokes the very controversial UNESCO

resolution on “Occupied Palestine” of October 2016, which originally ignored any Jewish connection to the city of Jerusalem, focusing instead on its sanctity primarily in Islam and to a lesser extent Christianity. The document employed solely Arabic and Islamic terminology, such as “Al-Aqsa Mosque/al-Haram al-Sharif” instead of Har Ha-Bayt (Temple Mount) or “Al-Buraq Plaza” instead of “Ha-Kotel ha-Ma’aravi.”<sup>94</sup> Despite severe backlash and pressure from various countries, chiefly Israel, the final version adopted later in 2017 contains minimal acknowledgement of Judaism’s relationship with the city, mentioning the term “Har Ha-Bayt,” and in a short lukewarm recognition: “*the Old City of Jerusalem is the sacred city of the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and that each of its communities has a right to the explicit recognition of their history and relationship with the city.*”<sup>95</sup> The impact of the original draft resolution thus reverberates sharply within the al-Azhar textbook, which indeed denies any Jewish ties to Jerusalem.

وأكدت المنظمة العالمية للتراث والثقافة والعلوم (اليونسكو) في ٢٠١٦م  
أحقية المسلمين بمدينة القدس والمسجد الأقصى، ونفت المنظمة أي علاقة  
للإهود بمدينة القدس، وما فيها من مقدسات .

*Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p 81.*

*In 2016, UNESCO confirmed the Muslims' precedence over Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque and refuted any connection of Jews to Jerusalem and its holy sites.*

The historical narrative of the textbook portrays Zionism as an unjust and murderous movement. Students learn that during the period of the British Mandate, the former encouraged Zionist immigration to Palestine, expropriated Palestinian lands, and handed them to the Zionists.

Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, it is claimed that “*millions of Palestinians emigrated from their homes, while many of them were being killed in mass slaughters, and many Palestinian villages were destroyed. Since then, Palestinians have suffered injustice, oppression, siege, killing, starvation, confiscation of property, and the establishment of settlements.*” The Palestinian struggle against “*Zionists and their allies,*” which includes, among others, popular resistance, revolts, *intifadas*, protests, strikes, and conventions, is justified in the textbook as a means of protecting the Muslim identity of the al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>96</sup>

Several paragraphs in the textbook are dedicated to al-Azhar's official stance on the Palestinian issue, and particularly to its declaration following former US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize

<sup>94</sup> “UNESCO. Executive Board, 200<sup>th</sup>, 2016 – Occupied Palestine,” UNESCO, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246215>. Accessed online Aug. 28, 2023. See also “Unesco passes contentious Jerusalem resolution,” BBC News, Oct. 18, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-mid-east-37697108>. Accessed online Aug. 28, 2023.

<sup>95</sup> “UNESCO. Executive Board, 201<sup>st</sup>, 2017 – Occupied Palestine,” UNESCO, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247727?posinSet=1&queryId=6e56d9b3-d601-4e7b-a8f1-d06faa0332cc>. Accessed online on Aug. 28, 2023.

<sup>96</sup> *Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 82.*

Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017.

وفي يناير ٢٠١٨م وعلى إثر إعلان الإدارة الأمريكية في ٢٠١٧م أن القدس عاصمة<sup>(٩٧)</sup> للمحتل (الكيان الصهيوني الغاصب).  
هب الأزهر الشريف وانتفض للذود عن حياض الإسلام والمسلمين بقيادة فضيلة الإمام الأكبر الأستاذ الدكتور/ أحمد الطيب، ودعا إلى عقد مؤتمره الثاني عشر لنصرة القدس الشريف في أرض الكنانة قلب الإسلام والعروبة،

*Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 83.*

*In January 2018, following the 2017 US administration declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of the occupying "usurping Zionist entity," the esteemed al-Azhar rose and rushed to defend the domains of Islam and the Muslims, led by the honorable Grand Imam Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyib, calling to hold its twelfth conference to support Jerusalem in Egypt, the heart of Islam and Arabism.*

Students learn that, since 1948, al-Azhar has been holding conferences on Palestine and the al-Aqsa Mosque. These were used to express al-Azhar's "rejection of Zionist aggression against the holy sites, the occupation of Al-Aqsa Mosque, then its burning, and the violation of its sanctity by excavation works, tunnels and bloody massacres in its holy courtyard."<sup>97</sup> Accusing Zionists, Israel, or Jews of burning the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969 is an infamous libel which has been disproven. In reality, Australian citizen Michael Rohan was responsible for the arson, and this libel has now been removed from Qatari and

Palestinian Authority Education Ministry textbooks.<sup>98</sup>

In response to former US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, which according to the textbook was rejected by 128 states and peace-loving people around the world, al-Azhar held a conference in January 2018, and published an "International Declaration in Support of Jerusalem." According to this declaration, "Jerusalem is not just an occupied land or a national Palestinian cause, or even a national Arab cause, but much bigger than this—it is a sacred Islamic and Christian shrine and an Islamic and Christian religious cause." Moreover, it is said that Muslims and Christians "work to liberate Jerusalem from the Zionist occupation," with the aim of "affirming its sacredness, and call upon the human community to end this Zionist occupation."<sup>99</sup>

Students who read the declaration further learn that al-Azhar supports the Palestinian people's "uprising [intifada] against these unjust and arrogant decisions" vis-à-vis the Palestinians, and Israel's policies concerning Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Muslims and Christians of Jerusalem are called on to take a united stand "against these unjust decisions and policies," while their fellow Muslims and

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 83-84. The text seems to imply that Israel was responsible for the burning of Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969. This is a common false accusation found in textbooks, where in fact the culprit was an Australian named Denis Michael Rohan. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-24/denis-rohan-and-the-al-aqsa-mosque-50-years/11429332>

<sup>98</sup> See IMPACT-se reports: Review of Changes and Remaining Problematic Content in 2021-2022 Qatari Textbooks: Annual Report (Fall & Spring Editions), July 2022. <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Review-of-Changes-and-Remaining-Problematic-Content-in-2021%E2%80%932022-Qatari-Textbooks-Annual-Report.pdf>; The 2020-21 Palestinian School Curriculum Grades 1-12: Selected Examples, May 2021, [https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Reports\\_Updated-Selected-Examples\\_May-2021.pdf](https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/PA-Reports_Updated-Selected-Examples_May-2021.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> *Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 84.*

Christians in Egypt and beyond commit to support them “*until Jerusalem is liberated.*”

**سابقاً:** يؤازر المؤتمر صمود الشعب الفلسطيني الباسل، ويدعم انتفاضته في مواجهة هذه القرارات المتعطسة بحق القضية الفلسطينية، ومدينة القدس، والمسجد الأقصى المبارك، كما يحيي روح التلاحم الشعبي بين مسلمي القدس ومسيحيهم، ووقوفهم صفاً واحداً في مواجهة هذه القرارات والسياسات والممارسات الظالمة، ونحن نؤكد لهم من هذا المؤتمر أننا معهم ولن نخذلهم، حتى يتحرر القدس الشريف.

*Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 85*

7 - The council strengthens the steadfastness of the brave Palestinian people, and supports its uprising [intifada] against these unjust and arrogant decisions regarding the Palestinian cause, Jerusalem, and al-Aqsa Mosque. [The council] also salutes the spirit of communal unity between the Muslims and Christians of Jerusalem, and their standing together against these unjust decisions, policies, and actions. We emphasize to them [the Palestinians] in this council that we stand together with them and will not forsake them, until Jerusalem is liberated.

Significantly, however, Judaism is distinguished from Zionism per se. The 10<sup>th</sup> article of the declaration, as appears in the textbook, calls upon wise Jews to learn a lesson from history, according to which they have only known genuine prosperity and security under Muslim rule. This is relatively true in light of the status of Jews as a protected people in early Islam, and under the guise of Muslim tolerance towards Jews and Christians in Muslim Spain, who nonetheless suffered occasional persecution and legal inferiority.<sup>100</sup>

**عاشراً:** يبحث المؤتمر عقلاء اليهود أنفسهم للاعتبار بالتاريخ، الذي شهد على اضطهادهم في كل مكان حلوا به إلا في ظل حضارة المسلمين، وأن يعملوا على فضح الممارسات الصهيونية المخالفة لتعاليم موسى ﷺ، التي لم تدع أبداً إلى القتل، أو تهجير أصحاب الأرض، أو اغتصاب حقوق الغير، وانتهاك حرمانه، وسلب أرضه ونهب مقدساته.

*Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 86*

10 – The council urges wise Jews to learn from history, that witnessed the oppression they suffered everywhere except under the Muslim civilization. [They are urged] to expose the Zionist practices that contradict the teachings of Prophet Moses that never called for killing, displacement of land owners, usurping others’ rights, violating their sanctities, or taking their lands and looting their sacred relics.

The 12<sup>th</sup> article encourages Arab and Muslim countries to avoid normalization with Israel. It urges decision-makers in the Arab and Muslim worlds to support all recommendations set forth in the declaration, “*without taking any detrimental action to the Palestinian cause, or helping normalization with the occupying usurping entity.*”<sup>101</sup> Notably, this agenda departs somewhat from the public state curriculum, which does acknowledge the peace agreement with Israel, albeit without mentioning “*normalization.*”

It is noteworthy that the harsh invective against Zionism and Israel is also shown in practice outside the curriculum. In 2021, al-Tayyib denounced “*the Zionist terrorists’ continued targeting of innocent civilians*” in Gaza.<sup>102</sup> In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, in May 2020 the Al-Azhar Center for Combatting Extremism published a

<sup>100</sup> Mark R. Cohen, *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations*, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 28ff.

<sup>101</sup> *Reading and Writing, Grade 11, 2021-22, p. 86.*

<sup>102</sup> David Andrew Weinberg, “Hateful Sermons from Seven U.S. Allies,” Anti-Defamation League, Jun. 10, 2021, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/hateful-sermons-seven-us-allies>. Accessed online on Aug. 30, 2023.

propaganda video, narrated in Hebrew with Arabic subtitles, which accused the “Zionist entity” of taking advantage of the crisis for “*illegal gain*,” and taking over al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>103</sup> The Center seems to be actively fueling anti-Israeli sentiments with the latter video, as well as a twitter post from August 2020 which falsely pinned the responsibility for burning the al-Aqsa Mosque on “Zionist crimes.”<sup>104</sup>

In a Friday sermon by senior Azhar scholar Dr. Sheikh Ahmad ‘Umar Hashim, delivered on May 2021 during operation Guardian of the Walls (*Shomer Homot*), he referred to Israel as the “land’s anomalies,” (*shudhdhadh al-ard*) and encouraged the world to take a stance against Israel. He called on Arab leaders to support Jerusalem, explaining that “*what was taken by force shall only be regained by force*.” Particularly, he urged the Palestinians to undertake the duty of Ribat (defending Jerusalem in *Jihad*) and bolstered his call with the infamous hadith of the stones and trees, according to which before the Day of Judgement arrives, the trees and stones will tell the Muslims to kill the Jews hiding behind them.<sup>105</sup>

In April 2022, the official Facebook page of Al-Azhar al-Sharif published a video about the Zionist movement and its alleged

crimes against the Arabs and Palestinians, entitled “*the Zionist Movement – the Spreading Evil*.” The video noted that what served Zionist interests was the “*option to concoct a false narrative on the connection between the Jews, Palestine and Jerusalem*.” Furthermore, the video nonchalantly features images of orthodox Jews alongside the words “*lying, misleading, and falsifying facts, are the nature of the tyrannical occupier, and [constitute] a demonic Zionist principle*.” Featuring Jews alongside that diatribe, which is allegedly directed at Zionism and not Judaism per se, in fact falsely aligns the agendas of Jews and Zionists. Not only is this incorrect, as many orthodox Jews are anti-Zionist, but it strengthens antisemitic tropes. The video employs metaphors attributable to the devil, describing Zionist Jews as having attempted to bribe the last Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II with “*enormous amounts of money... And other economic and political temptations*.”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the video claims that in 1908, the Jews collaborated with Western countries to dethrone the sultan for rejecting their bribe, completely ignoring the role of the Young Turk revolution.

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<sup>103</sup> Al-Azhar Center for Combatting Extremism, “The Palestinian People and COVID-19 Challenges,” YouTube, May 19, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJHTQMh6xHU&t=1s>. Accessed online Aug. 29, 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Azhar Observer, Twitter, Aug. 21, 2020, [https://twitter.com/azhar\\_observer/status/1296751114055028736?t=9QGTHzNDzmfntzyNMTpoLA&s=08](https://twitter.com/azhar_observer/status/1296751114055028736?t=9QGTHzNDzmfntzyNMTpoLA&s=08). Accessed online on Aug. 29, 2023.

<sup>105</sup> Ali Gamal, “Dr. Ahmad ‘Umar Hashim stirring up the air and urges Arab leaders to support al-Quds – what was taken by force shall only be regained by force,” YouTube, May 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1vO0HPFLGI>. Accessed online on Aug. 29, 2023.

<sup>106</sup> Al-Azhar al-Sharif, “the Zionist Movement – The Spreading Evil,” Apr. 15, 2022, [https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN\\_GK0T-GK1C&v=729039764941648](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&v=729039764941648). Accessed online on Aug. 29, 2023.

## Conclusion

This report summarizes an analysis of 63 textbooks spanning grades 7-12 of the curriculum implemented at the al-Azhar schools in Egypt, an independent K-12 education system that develops its own textbooks while benefiting from government support. The curriculum encompasses a wide array of classical Islamic literary genres, including Qur'an commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, Islamic history and culture, grammar, and rhetoric. It is noteworthy that this study complements our earlier report from April 2023, which focused on the curriculum in public schools.

The methodology and pedagogy of teaching religious material in al-Azhar textbooks differs from those of the public education system. Whereas in the latter, religious material and traditions were cited from early medieval sources according to the topic of the lesson, some al-Azhar textbooks are, in effect, abridged or simplified editions of important canonical works that were written by medieval authors. In essence, it can be deduced that a greater emphasis is placed on memorizing and internalizing the material.

The al-Azhar religious curriculum is deeply concerned with promoting the moderate "Wasati" form of Islam. On the one hand, the textbooks consistently reflect traditional perspectives on divine retribution, destined for non-believers and those who reject Muhammad and the holy scriptures. On the other hand, the curriculum nonetheless promotes values of love, peace, and tolerance toward various faiths,

seeking to mitigate violence, prejudice, and aggression. Furthermore, it places a particular emphasis on disseminating a moderate interpretation of Islam, which involves a strong disavowal of Islamic extremism, radicalism, and militancy. Within this framework, the curriculum sanctions moderate and non-violent interpretations of *Jihad*, including the concept of *Jihad* of the soul. This form of *Jihad* is considered acceptable when aimed at preserving the integrity of the faith, or safeguarding other "revealed religions" such as Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.

Conversely, the curriculum adopts a critical stance, and one that verges on demonization, towards Salafi-*Jihadist* movements and the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in light of the disturbances following Mohamed Morsi's removal from the presidency in 2013. A compelling and graphic example is a textbook entitled "Lions of the Homeland," which resembles an action-hero comic book, portraying the tales of Egyptian soldiers and officers who bravely fought Islamist "terrorists" (of the Muslim Brotherhood) who murdered civilians in the Nahda and Rabaa riots. As al-Azhar initially harshly criticized the security forces for their conduct during these riots, the current narrative of the textbook demonstrates instead an inclination towards and alignment to the interests of the military and police force.

With regards to gender and issues of homosexuality, the curriculum maintains a

traditional approach which restricts the equal rights of women. Textbooks clearly favor the family's patriarch, affirming the husband's position as "leader of the family," and relegate the right to marry women off without their consent to her legal guardian. Nevertheless, textbooks acknowledge some administrative and jurisprudential roles for women, for instance as jurists capable of issuing rulings on various matters – while still excluding the stipulation of the *hudud* punishments or the ability to declare *Jihad*. The curriculum also strongly condemns the harassment of women.

Meanwhile, homosexual relationships and "sodomy" (anal sex) between individuals are prohibited, with "stoning" specified as the punishment. Severe punishments are also prescribed for adulterers.

Treatment of Christians is generally positive, including examples describing Islam's tolerance towards them, viewing them as "*the greatest friends of the [Muslim] believers.*" Christians are seldom described negatively, save for examples that position them alongside Jews as being "too bigoted" to be reasoned with, in their capacity as "the People of the Book." They are also regarded as infidels, because as the People of the Book they refused to convert to Islam despite Muhammad's mission.

In contrast, the portrayal of Jews reflects a more ambivalent perspective that is found in classical Islamic literature. As such, Jews are recognized as a legitimate group, being one of the "People of the Book," with praise for their historical

interactions with Muslims and Muhammad. However, the curriculum also demonizes Jews, labeling them as "*naturally treacherous,*" and labelling Jews who refused to convert to Islam as "*infidels.*" Furthermore, a controversial Shi'i heretic named 'Abd Allah ibn Saba' is identified as a Jew, and is explicitly cursed in a textbook. Consequently, assigning a Jewish origin to figures rejected as heretics serves to further marginalize and delegitimize both that figure, as well as the Jewish tradition as a whole.

The curriculum entirely rejects the legitimacy of Israel and Zionism, largely omitting any mention of Israel's existence (save for one negative occurrence), referring to them instead with pejoratives such as the "Zionist entity" or the "usurping occupier." Jerusalem is portrayed exclusively as an Arab and Islamic city, with minimal recognition of its Jewish connections and some acknowledgment of its Christian ties. The city is consistently presented as the "*eternal capital of Palestine,*" destined to be liberated from "the impurity of the occupation." Al-Azhar textbooks openly express support for the Palestinian "*uprising (intifada)*" against Israel's policies concerning Palestinians and Jerusalem. The textbooks also invoke the disproved libel that held Zionists responsible for burning the al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969 – a libel which has even been removed from Qatari and Palestinian Authority Education Ministry textbooks.

The curriculum also teaches about non-Sunni Islamic sects and schools of thought. Based on the *firaq* (sects) literature genre, students learn about various

religious trends that led to the emergence of acceptable movements, as well as rejected heterodoxy. Sectarianism as a whole, in the sense of departing from one path which God allegedly ordained to create different schools of thought, is seen as a threat to Sunni orthodoxy. That is to say, the multiplicity of ideas and religious trends within Islam is detrimental to its unity. Chief among such trends are the Shi'a in general, and some Shi'i sects in particular. The relevant source, a *Notebook of the Sects* textbook, adopts an informative approach that largely presents basic information about these sects, alongside occasional criticisms. Thus, while recognizing Twelver and Zaydi Shi'ism as legitimate Muslim schools of thought, the curriculum firmly rejects the validity of the Shi'i "esoteric" traditions that have contributed to the emergence of the Isma'iliyya, the Baha'i faith, and the Ahmadiyya.

Al-Azhar's textbooks generally steer clear of delving into Egypt's foreign policy and global interactions, except when this concerns the Palestinian Cause. However, one among these textbooks adopts an anti-Western stance and deliberates on the economic and military strategies of China and Japan, considering them as potential paradigms for modern Arab nations, and as role models for Egypt. While highlighting the economic achievements of these nations, the text also references China's possession of a nuclear weapon, suggesting this as a mechanism for asserting influence over Western powers.

Considering al-Azhar's oscillation between religious moderation, which it professes to represent and uphold on the one hand, and its endorsement of Hamas' religious extremism and terrorism perpetrated against Israel on October 7 on the other hand, it has become increasingly clear that now is the time for al-Azhar to cling to the side of religious moderation and tolerance, fulfilling its historic role of countering radical Islam. The explicit incitement against Israel and Jews in its curriculum and on public platforms alike constitutes an implicit delegitimization of key regional players that contribute to normalizing ties with Israel.

As one of the foremost religious authorities in Sunni Islam, al-Azhar holds an indispensable position in delegitimizing religious intolerance towards all religions and peoples, Jews and Israelis included. It could possibly even serve as a bridge between Israel and the Palestinians, leveraging its religious and jurisprudential expertise to underline the benefits of Arab-Muslim coexistence with Israel and Judaism, and presenting solutions for the Palestinian Cause.

This, however, will be difficult to achieve if al-Azhar continues to disseminate contradictory messaging, or decides to swing strongly towards Islamic radicalism. Considering its professed mission, al-Azhar must be influenced to make the obvious choice – preferring Islamic moderation over support of Hamas's Islamic radicalism. An institution which seemingly supports the abduction and killing of innocent civilians, including women, children and

the elderly, cannot possibly simultaneously exist as a legitimate authority which educates children. As such, al-Azhar's involvement in current events and politics, and how they are contextualized to the public, must be recalibrated, and thereafter translated into pedagogical actions and policies applied to the problematic aspects of its curriculum. Anything short of that will be deeply disappointing, precisely due to the great potential of the curriculum.

Egypt has already positioned itself as a key player in the moderate Sunni world, but its mission will be incomplete unless it harnesses the authoritative religious power manifest in the al-Azhar Institution. Both Egypt and the UAE have considerable leeway to influence al-Azhar, being its primary sources of funding. Thus, with the help of the international community, international religious authorities representing Judaism, Islam and Christianity, and officials of moderate Sunni Arab countries, the Egyptian government could influence al-Azhar to emphasize and expand the tolerant aspects of its curriculum, and simultaneously mitigate the inflammatory material within it, as well as its public presence.

## Methodology

IMPACT-se applies methodological standards which are based on UNESCO and UN declarations, and international recommendations and documents on education for peace and tolerance (see notes). Our methodology is designed to consider every detail within the textbooks; it does not paraphrase, rely on interpretations, or attempt to illustrate preconceived notions.

The following is an updated, condensed version of the IMPACT-se UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance in school education:

### 1 RESPECT

The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the “Other,” his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.<sup>107</sup>

### 2 INDIVIDUAL OTHER

The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the “Other” as an individual, his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated.<sup>108</sup>

### 3 NO HATE

The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.<sup>109</sup>

### 4 NO INCITEMENT

The curriculum should be free of language, content, and imagery that disseminate ideas or theories which justify or promote acts and expressions of violence, incitement to violence, hostility, harm and hatred toward other national, ethnic, racial or religious groups.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>107</sup> As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, III. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

<sup>108</sup> The goal of education for peace is the development of universally recognized values in an individual, regardless of different socio-cultural contexts. See *Ibid.*, Article 6. See also, on exchanges between youth, the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principles IV, V.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, and based on Articles III.6, IV.7 and VII.39; and on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 18.2.

<sup>110</sup> As defined in Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2106 (XX) on December 21, 1965. See also Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) on December 16, 1966.

## 5 PEACEMAKING

The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.<sup>111</sup>

## 6 UNBIASED INFORMATION

Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use equal standards to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.<sup>112</sup>

## 7 GENDER IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

The curriculum should foster equality, mutual respect, and should aim for equal representation between individuals regardless of their gender identity. It should also refrain from language, content, and imagery that depicts limiting and/or exclusionary gender roles.<sup>113</sup>

## 8 SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The curriculum should be free of language, content, and imagery that promulgates violence or discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.<sup>114</sup>

## 9 SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION:

The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Based on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 9; and on the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 5.

<sup>112</sup> Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Article V.14.

<sup>113</sup> The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination against Women and emphasizes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to gender.

<sup>114</sup> Based on Resolutions 32/2 (adopted June 30, 2016) and 17/19 (adopted July 14, 2011) of the UN Human Rights Council, and numerous UN General Assembly resolutions expressing concern and condemnation of laws and practices around the world which target individuals based on their gender identity and/or sexual orientation for discrimination, violence, and even extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions—all of which contradict the most basic principles of the UN and have no place in education.

<sup>115</sup> Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing "systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance," see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see

## List of Textbooks

The following 63 curriculum textbooks were analyzed for the research in this study. The titles both here and referenced in the text have been translated into English to aid the reader. IMPACT-se typically researches all available textbooks used in a curriculum. If new textbooks or previously unavailable books become available after a report's publication, every effort will be made to update reports to include any relevant material. We welcome any comments related to the acquisition of any omitted materials (<http://www.impact-se.org/about-us/contact-us/>).

### Grade 7

1. *Arabic Calligraphy*, Grade 7, 2021-22
2. *Arabic Language*, Grade 7, 2020-21
3. *Hanafi Fiqh*, Grade 7, 2020-21
4. *Maliki Fiqh (Taysir al-Ashmawiya)*, Grade 7, 2021-22
5. *Shafi'i Fiqh*, Grade 7, 2020-21
6. *Tajwid (Bughiata al-Talibin)*, Grade 7, 2021-22
7. *The Principles of Religion*, Grade 7, 2020-21

### Grade 8

8. *Arabic Calligraphy Workbook*, Grade 8, 2021-22
9. *Arabic Language*, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2021-22
10. *Hanafi Fiqh*, Grade 8, 2021-22
11. *Lions of the Homeland*, Grade 8, 2019

12. *Maliki Fiqh (Sharh Abi Al-Hasan)*, Grade 8, 2021-22
13. *Shafi'i Fiqh*, Grade 8, 2020-21
14. *The Principles of Religion*, Grade 8, 2021-22

### Grade 9

15. *Arabic Calligraphy Workbook*, Grade 9, 2021-22
16. *Arabic Language*, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2021-22
17. *Arabic Language*, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2021-22
18. *Hanafi Fiqh*, Grade 9, 2021-22
19. *Islamic Culture*, Grade 9, 2021-22
20. *Maliki Fiqh (Sharh Abi Al-Hasan)*, Grade 9, 2021-22
21. *Shafi'i Fiqh*, Grade 9, 2021-22
22. *The Principles of Religion*, Grade 9, 2020-21

### Grade 10

23. *Arabic Rhetoric*, Grade 10, 2021-2022
24. *Grammar (Sharh Ibn Aqeel)*, Grade 10, 2020-21
25. *Hadith (Taysir Fath al-Mubdi)*, Grade 10, 2021-22
26. *Hanafi Fiqh (al-Mukhtar)*, Grade 10, 2020-21
27. *History and Texts of Arabic Literature*, Grade 10, 2021-22
28. *Islamic Culture*, Grade 10, 2021-22
29. *Islamic Selections*, Grade 10, Book 1, 2021-22
30. *Logic*, Grade 10, 2021-22
31. *Maliki Fiqh (al-Sharh al-Saghir)*, Grade 10, 2021-22

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also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.

32. *Reading and Writing*, Grade 10, 2021-22
33. *Shafi'i Fiqh (al-Iqna')*, Grade 10, 2020-21
34. *Simple Morphology*, Grade 10, 2021-22
35. *Taysir Tafsir al-Nasafi*, Grade 10, 2021-22

#### Grade 11

36. *Arabic Rhetoric*, Grade 11, 2021-22
37. *Grammar (Sharh Ibn Aqeel)*, Grade 11, 2021-22
38. *Hadith (Taysir Fath al-Mubdi)*, Grade 11, 2021-22
39. *Hanafi Fiqh (al-Mukhtar)*, Grade 11, 2021-22
40. *History and Texts of Arabic Literature*, Grade 11, 2020-21
41. *Logic*, Grade 11, 2020-21
42. *Maliki Fiqh (al-Sharh al-Saghir)*, Grade 11, 2021-22
43. *Notebook of the Sects*, Grade 11, 2018-19
44. *Prosody and Rhyme*, Grade 11, 2020-21
45. *Reading and Writing*, Grade 11, 2021-22
46. *Shafi'i Fiqh (al-Iqna')*, Grade 11, 2021-22
47. *Simple Morphology*, Grade 11, 2021-22
48. *Tawhid*, Grade 11, 2021-22
49. *Taysir Tafsir al-Nasafi*, Grade 11, 2020-21
50. *Egypt and Islamic Civilization*, Grade 11, 2022-23 (Public school curriculum)

#### Grade 12

51. *Arabic Rhetoric*, Grade 12, 2021-22
52. *Grammar (Sharh Ibn Aqeel)*, Grade 12, 2021-22
53. *Hadith (Taysir Fath al-Mubdi)*, Grade 12, 2021-22

54. *Hanafi Fiqh (al-Mukhtar)*, Grade 12, 2020-21
55. *History and Texts of Arabic Literature*, Grade 12, 2020-21
56. *Inheritance*, Grade 12, 2020-21
57. *Islamic Selections*, Grade 12, Book 2, 2020-21
58. *Maliki Fiqh (al-Sharh al-Saghir)*, Grade 12, 2021-22
59. *Reading*, Grade 12, 2021-22
60. *Shafi'i Fiqh (al-Iqna')*, Grade 12, 2021-22
61. *Simple Morphology*, Grade 12, 2021-22
62. *Taysir Tafsir al-Nasafi*, Grade 12, 2021-22
63. *Tawhid*, Grade 12, 2018-19