



## ***Love for Islam vs. “Holy War”***

A review of the Islamic Studies textbooks in the Maldives

**MALDIVIAN  
DEMOCRACY  
NETWORK**

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## *Introduction*

This publication entails one section of the first baseline study to assess level of radicalisation in the Maldives. The assessment is a project undertaken by the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) with the assistance of the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), for the period December 2014 to March 2015. In order to identify prevalence of radical narratives in mainstream discourse, the study has reviewed school textbooks, published material, religious sermons and online Islamist activity. Additionally, public forums were held in different island communities to ascertain whether the public sees human rights and Islam as compatible or not. Interviews were also conducted with officials of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and principals of various public schools across the country. The primary aim of the project is to ascertain whether or not the official interpretation of Islam is in line with the recent project of democratisation of the Maldives that began in 2008 with the country's first multi-party elections.

The Maldives adopted Islam as the state religion in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Although said to have been introduced to the Maldives by a Moroccan traveller, Islam in the Maldives did not stay true to its origins as its teachings merged with the nation's unique culture long influenced by centuries of Buddhism and habits unique to small-island life. Everybody adhered to the five tenants of Islam without question or fuss but day-to-day life did not revolve around God. Apart from the core values of Islam taught in primary and secondary schools, there were no dedicated institutions of Islamic theology or places of learning and debating Islamic jurisprudence. This does not in any way mean people did not believe in Islam as their religion – Maldivians took it for granted they are born Muslims without feeling a constant need to prove the degree of their 'Muslimness' to each other or to visitors and observers from the outside. A person's faith was for God to know and judge, not for the world to examine and admire or criticise.

For hundreds of years, there were very little outside influences on the Maldivian faith, and much of the world's religious conflicts as well as changes in how Islam is practiced in different parts of the world remained largely unknown in the Maldives. The Maldivian road from Islam to Islamism is a long one, which is beyond the scope of this report, and has been documented in detail elsewhere<sup>1</sup> (Naseem and Mohamed 2014). In the last decade, Islam in the Maldives has undergone a 'religious revival' led by Salafists, Wahhabists and other strands of what is often described as

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<sup>1</sup> Naseem, Azra and Mohamed, Mushfique 2014, *Maldives: The Long Road from Islam to Islamism, A Short History*, Dhivehi Sitee. Accessed online at <http://www.dhivehisitee.com/religion/islamism-maldives/> on 26 February 2015

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‘fundamentalist Islam’. The spread of such ideology has been aided vastly by the availability of the Internet; this has been true to the Maldives, also, as is discussed in detail in this report.

Starting from the 1970s, for the rest of the world, the Maldives has been a luxury tourist destination void of its populace. Until recently the tourism industry was only allowed to operate on uninhabited islands leased to developers. However, given the revival of fundamentalist Islam throughout the world – spread exponentially through modern technology and globalisation – the Maldives is no longer the eternally peaceful, seemingly desolate ‘island paradise’ it once was. Decades of authoritarian rule and centralised governments have resulted in a deeply polarised community that has brought one third of its population to the greater Malé area in search of public services, jobs and higher education. Malé, the capital of the Maldives is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. Its congestion has produced inevitable societal ills such as gang culture, drug abuse, unemployment, radicalisation, political violence and a widening socio-economic gap. Political unrest, fuelled with religious rhetoric has been the norm since the Maldives began its transition into democracy. When religious revival, in the form of fundamentalist ideas and radical ideologies are brought in, a potentially explosive mix is created in which these ideas—when steered in that direction—clash dangerously with those of some of democracy’s core values: freedom, human rights, equality, and rule of law. This report explores the potential for, and the existence of, these clashes by analysing the religious ideologies currently taking hold in the Maldives and exposing how they clash or complement the country’s nascent democracy.

The Maldivian legal system is a dualist; it is an admixture of Sharia, English civil and common law. Although the Maldives was a British Protectorate, it did not inherit the British legal traditions that were inherited by other Asian colonies. Chapter II of the Constitution entails fundamental rights that are inalienable to everyone without discrimination of any form. The Maldives is has ratified the following international treaties; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – First Optional Protocol (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It is noteworthy that ICCPR, CEDAW and CRC were ratified by the Maldives with reservations pertaining to restriction of religious freedom.

This study analyses the education policy on Islam in the Maldives; the current curriculum and practices pertaining to religion and education in schools throughout the country. The report looks at the religious ideologies predominant in today’s

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Maldivian education system and compares it with the values, principles and ideals it is officially said to have embraced with the adoption of the new democratic Constitution in 2008. All Islamic Studies textbooks used in schools from grades one to twelve were analysed according to the study’s thematic concerns --- gender, racial or religious discrimination, ahistorical facts, human rights and usage of language. The basic idea behind the study is to remove all motivations for incitement of hatred towards different social groups in society. Although the Maldives is a predominantly Muslim society, it cannot be disassociated from the global community in which it belongs to, therefore the education policy should reflect the need to instil love for Islam, human rights and tolerance as required under the Constitution, instead of propagating hate in the name of religious education.

### *Defining ‘Radicalisation’*

A ‘conceptual fault-line’ between notions of radicalisation that emphasize extremist beliefs – ‘cognitive radicalisation’ - and those focusing on extremist behaviour - ‘behavioural radicalisation’ - has formed the basis for ambiguities in what is meant by ‘radicalisation’ (Neumann 2013). This ambiguity has led to differences in how radicalisation is defined, how scholars debate the term, and also in how policies are formulated to address the phenomenon. There is, however, broad agreement that ‘radicalisation’, or ‘becoming extremist’, is a process that takes place over time comprising a range of factors (Moghadam 2005, Baran 2005, McCauley and Moskalenko 2008).

What has proven contentious is defining what ‘extremism’ is. The *Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* (2007) states that it can mean either political ideas diametrically opposed to a society’s core values or it can mean the methods by which actors seek to realise their political aims. As Neumann (2013) elaborates, this means that while for some radicalisation is ‘a purely cognitive phenomenon that culminates in ‘radically’ different ideas about society and governance, others believe that it ought to be defined by the (often violent or coercive) actions in which those ideas result.’ Differences in how academics and policymakers understand and approach radicalisation are thus based on distinctions between ‘cognitive’ radicalisation on the one hand and ‘behavioural’ radicalisation i.e. ‘violent radicalisation’ on the other.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for example, view radicalisation as a purely cognitive phenomenon whereby individuals move from moderate mainstream beliefs to extremist views. This view—that adopting extremist belief systems, without necessarily resulting in violent action, amounts to radicalisation—is one shared by several US government departments. The British government, however, places more emphasis on explicitly connecting radicalisation with violent action (Neumann 2013: 875). For the latter, radicalisation is ‘the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to participate in terrorist groups’.

Is there a connection between extremist ideas and extremist action? Many analysts and policymakers agree that extremist belief systems form the precondition for the willingness to use, support and/or facilitate violence. Neumann argues that this makes instinctive sense: ‘terrorists become cognitive extremists first, and then—for whatever reason—decide to pursue their extremist aims by violent means’ (2013:876).

There are, however, many who argue that focusing on cognitive radicalisation has been counterproductive (Horgan 2001, Borum 2011). Horgan is of the view that assuming a unidirectional relationship whereby in all probability a cognitive radical

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will go on to become a terrorist is fundamentally flawed (Horgan 2001). Borum describes as false the implication that ‘radical beliefs are a proxy—or at least a precursor—for terrorism’ (Borum 2011: 8). Their suggestion is that there are no inevitable links between extremist political beliefs and violent political action, thus the two phenomena should not be studied together. Neumann describes both these arguments as ‘problematic’ (2013: 879). If the role of political beliefs and ideologies are overrated or irrelevant to understanding behavioural radicalisation, he asks, how is it possible to understand the differences in how, for example, the Irish Republican Army fought the British occupation of their homeland and how the Tibetans have fought for the same goal peacefully? How is it possible to know what commands political and ‘quietist’ Salafists to pursue their faith peacefully while ‘jihadist’ Salafists join terrorist organisations ‘[W]ithout reference to beliefs, none of these behaviours make sense’ (Neumann 2013: 880). Thus, Neumann puts forward the case that, in practice, it is impossible to separate political beliefs from political action, and that attempting to do so obstructs a holistic understanding of radicalisation; that not every ‘true believer’ is an ideologue; [...] and that any attempt at understanding individuals’ ‘action pathways’ without looking at social movements and counter-cultures from which they have emerged is bound to be shallow.

Based on the arguments above, therefore, for the purposes of this study, radicalisation is a process that includes *both* the acceptance of political ideas diametrically opposed to a society’s core values *and* the methods by which those who adopt such ideas seek to realise their political aims. That is to say, the focus of this study is not restricted to individuals in the Maldives who support violent Jihad, or have chosen to join the Jihad in foreign countries, but also the individuals who are seen to be undergoing a process of accepting beliefs that are diametrically opposed to the core values of the Maldivian society.

According to the Constitution of the Maldives (2008)<sup>2</sup>, the Maldives ‘is a sovereign, independent, democratic Republic based on the principles of Islam’ (Article 2). A non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives (Article 9.d); the religion of the State of the Maldives is Islam (Article 10.a); and no law contrary to any tenet of Islam shall be enacted in the Maldives (Article 10. b). At the same time, the Constitution also describes the Maldives as ‘a free and democratic society’ where justice will be implemented ‘in accordance with democratic norms’ where each citizen has a duty and responsibility ‘to promote democratic values and practices in a manner that is not inconsistent with any tenet of Islam’; where in interpreting the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, courts and tribunals are obliged to ‘promote the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom; and where even the security services are obliged to

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<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of the Maldives, 2008. For full text visit: <http://www.majlis.gov.mv/en/wp-content/uploads/Constitution-english.pdf> Accessed online 28 February 2015

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protect democratic institutions. Core values of the Maldivian society today can, thus, be described as ones that balance the core tenets of Islam with the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights.

Beliefs that challenge these core values and upset that fine balance can, therefore, be viewed as ‘radical’, and the process by which individuals come to adopt these beliefs can be described as ‘radicalisation’.

This section of the Project reviewed Islamic textbooks used in Maldivian schools, from grades one to twelve, in order to identify ideas that contribute to promulgation of radical worldviews. In addition, normative qualities invoked in the books are also highlighted. Each textbook has been reviewed in light of the definition of radicalisation mentioned in this report. This report was unable to measure how often and to what extent teachers tend to deviate from the syllabus when teaching. Many students claim teachers are prone to conjecture, and often provide their own views regarding certain aspects of the lessons.

Specialists who work for the Education Development Centre under the Ministry of Education develop the Islamic textbooks, like all other school textbooks. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs then approves Islamic textbooks before they are used in schools. The national curriculum for grades one to four was revised in the school year that began in January 2015, however we note that not much has changed in comparison to the previous syllabus.

All the Islamic studies textbooks under the syllabus contain four main chapters – Quranic elocution (*Tajwid*); Islamic creed (*Aqidah*) submission to Allah through worship (*Ibadah*); lessons from the Prophet’s life and ascension to paradise (*As-Sirat*); and Islamic etiquette (*Islami Akhlaq*). The textbook guarantees that once the student has completed these books, he or she would have attained Islamic education in accordance with the national syllabus.



### *Grades One to Seven: the Seeds of Hate*

The textbooks starting from Grade One to Grade Three contain the bulk of instilling love for Islam, with Islamic values that can be viewed as universal. The textbooks for these grades rarely incite hatred through xenophobic narratives, containing mostly normative values with regard to each chapter. However, from Grade Four onwards the xenophobic material gradually increases to the point where the radical outweighs the moderate.

The **Grade One** textbook highlights Islamic principles, different stories about Islamic prophets and Prophet Muhammad’s lineage. The final lesson also focuses on normative aspects of religious duty such as cleanliness, truthfulness and equity. The illustrations and colouring activities outlined would be helpful for students who are familiarizing themselves with religious literature at a young age.

The Qur’an elocution chapter in the Grade Two textbook does not entail translations of the parables that are included. No emphasis is given to interpretation of the parables that are to be recited. It is noteworthy that it is uncommon for Maldivian children to be able to understand Arabic, especially Qur’anic Arabic.

Similar to the Grade One textbook, the **Grade Two** textbook also contains normative Islamic practices with regard to cleanliness and personal hygiene. The *Ibadah* chapter ties hygiene to religious discourse to emphasise its importance in Islam. This textbook also includes Islamic values that advocate against antisocial behaviour both at home and in public. The book states, “the best Muslims love themselves and others,”<sup>3</sup> while excluding love for humanity as a whole.

Unlike the Islamic etiquette chapter on previous textbooks, the **Grade Three** textbook contains a lesson that could arguably be considered at odds with the democratized Constitution of the Maldives. The fourth Lesson on Islamic etiquette discusses “protecting the tongue.” This lesson could be construed as contrary to the democratic value of freedom of expression. It endorses being silent on “matters that are of no concern” to the speaker. It depicts “protecting the tongue” as a submissive act, where one must not be critical or overtly vocal.

The Qur’an elocution chapter from the **Grade Four** textbook onwards includes Dhivehi translation of the parables. The chapter on Zakat, under Lesson Six outlines conditions required of a person for Zakat to be mandatory. The narrative here appears to be mostly normative apart from a sentence that states Zakat also serves as a means to “relieve the jealousy in the hearts of the poor.”<sup>4</sup> On the following

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<sup>3</sup> Grade Two Islamic Studies textbook (2006), p. 120, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>4</sup> Grade Four Islamic Studies textbook (2002), p. 45, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

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page<sup>5</sup> it states that those who fulfil the previously mentioned characteristics shall be obligated to pay zakat. If such a person does not pay zakat, when under an Islamic State, it is permissible for the State to intervene in order to procure zakat. The same lesson<sup>6</sup> lists beneficiaries of zakat as the poor, orphans, those who collect and distribute zakat, new converts to Islam, slaves, the indebted, those who “commit jihad in the name of Allah” and travellers.

*As-Sirat* includes graphic lessons on how the Quresh tribe tortured Muslim Prophet Muhammad, and certain Messengers. These lessons explicitly describe torture and harassment suffered by the Prophet, Messengers and their followers. These narratives perpetuate the sense of victimhood felt by Muslims today. All the lessons tend to accentuate the differences between the West and “the Muslim world”; it discounts the mutually constitutive aspects of both. Perhaps such narratives explain why many disenfranchised youth tend to find ‘Jihad’ appealing, given the indoctrination received at such a young age. There are no critical views on how certain methods of public torture, such as flogging, stoning and execution is legitimised through Sharia; Islamic literature that shun such punishments are not included in the lessons.

Lesson Four depicts a narrative where Prophet Muhammad’s uncle Abu Talib is on his deathbed, when a Quresh tribesman asks if the animosity between Prophet Muhammad’s followers and his tribe can be resolved. In his response, the Prophet claimed that if they repeated the Islamic creed they would be able to dominate all Arab countries and the rest of the world. This depicts Islam as an empire building religion, set on world domination, and not necessarily one of peace and justice. These narratives create the room in which children could internalise the sense of social exclusion and injustice felt by Prophet Muhammad in his evangelism. The textbook states that the Treaty of *Hudhaibiyyah* “opened the door for Muslim take-over of Mecca.” Again, empire building is depicted as a key characteristic of Islam.

In the **Grade Five** textbook five armed conflicts are mentioned, of which, three are against the polytheists of Mecca and two are against the Jews who were living in Medina. In the exercise following the lesson on the expulsion of the *Banu Nadir* Jewish tribe there is one question that states, “Analyse the grievances Muslims have historically had with the Jews, and state four reasons why it is difficult to live with the Jews in peace.”<sup>7</sup> The past problems the student would be analysing are the two previous battles against the Jews mentioned in this book, the expulsion of Jewish tribes *Banu Qaynuqa* and *Banu Nadir*.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 46

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 47

<sup>7</sup> Grade Five Islamic Studies textbook (2002), p. 82, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

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This reinforces the insular anti-Semitic idea that Muslims and Jews will never be able to coexist; the only suggested solution is to either kill or drive them out. In terms of the invoked lessons from the battle, it states, “The Jews are a devious people and they do not hold any value to their promises.” Due to this narrative of one Jewish tribe reneging on a promise, all Jews are stereotyped as untrustworthy, reflecting the anti-Semitism that is now the norm in Maldives today.

The same chapter – *As-Sirat* – that elaborates on the Prophet’s life lessons under the **Grade Six** textbook entails more xenophobic material. The expansion of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula, battles, and the sermon of the Prophet at Hajj Al Wadhaa (The Farewell Sermon) are taught here. In the expulsion of *Banu Qurayza*, a Jewish tribe, the verdict of killing the able bodied men of the tribe and the enslavement of the women and children is stated as having been praised by the Prophet. The verdict was passed by the head of the *Banu Aus* tribe Saud bin Muaz,<sup>8</sup> “The Prophet praised this verdict and said that this verdict was also the verdict of Allah.” This amounts to endorsement of a massacre and mass enslavement after the defeat of an enemy. This along with the other anti-Semitic notions posited under this chapter lead to anti-Semitic feelings among Maldivians at a young age. There is no empathy shown towards the victims, and suggests that Islam is eternally at war with the Jewish people.

In the **Grade Seven** textbook, Chapter One consists of Qur’an recitation in accordance with *Tajwid*, some of which had Dhivehi translations. The rules of *Tajwid* are covered in more detail than in previous grades.

Chapter Two covers Islamic creed or *Aqidah*. The common definition of *Aqidah* given appears to be the same as the English word “faith.” The Islamic definition of *Aqidah* is given as believing in the Islamic pillars of belief without a doubt. After *Aqidah*, the next topic covers the characteristics of Allah and Allah’s existence. It is mentioned here that both non-Muslims and Muslims appeal to Allah in times of hardship. This could be deemed offensive or inaccurate to non-Muslims.

Chapter Three covers *Ibadat*, which entails basic acts of worship in Islam. Some of the supplications that are recited during prayer or otherwise are taught here. The basic acts of worship such as fasting, praying and pilgrimage are the main focus here.

Chapter Four is about the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The chapter covers the dealings he had with delegations from nearby tribes, the end of his life, his family and the life of the first four Caliphs. The life of Umar bin Abdul Aziz, Uthman bin Affan and Ali bin Abu Talib are also summarized. There is mention of a *fitnah* (civil strife) during Ali bin Abu Talib’s rule and that this *fitnah* was caused by Jews. The truth of

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<sup>8</sup> Grade Six Islamic Studies textbook, p. 90, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

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the matter is disarrayed due to the differing views put forward by the Shia and Sunni scholars. It would have been more prudent to mention that there are differing views by Shia and Sunni scholars.

Chapter Five covers Islamic etiquette. The lessons teach students the characteristics a Muslims should have along with how he or she should act in life. This gives a sense of Islam pervading every single facet of life. If Islam is projected as the answer for everything, then the resulting effect would be that most if not all the students will believe that anything which does not originate from Islam to be false. This would be the predominant thinking due to the emphasis that the textbook places on rejecting “anti-Islamic” thought or philosophies without explaining what makes an ideology essentially anti-Islamic.<sup>9</sup>

### *Grades Eight to Twelve: the War Cries*

The Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) chapter in the **Grade Eight** book teaches students the tenets of Sharia. It is taught that Sharia is derived from the Qur’an; the holy book, *Sunnah*; which embodies the Prophet’s practices, *Ijma*; the consensus of the religious community on issues and *Qiyas*; where the teachings of the Hadith are compared and contrasted with those of the Qur’an, in order to apply a known injunction to a new circumstance and create a new injunction. The degrees of the rulings of Sharia are explained. Rulings according to Sharia on cleanliness, trade, usury, and rent are also taught.

The rulings on unlawful sexual relationships (extra-marital and premarital sex) as stated in this book are as follows:<sup>10</sup>

1. The man who is married and has consummated his marriage shall be sentenced to death by stoning.
2. The man who is unmarried shall be lashed 100 times and banished for a year.
3. The slave’s punishment will be half of that of a freeman, therefore 50 lashes.

The ruling on homosexual relations between men and anal sex between a man and a woman is the same under “unlawful sexual relations” or *Zina*. Homosexual relations between women are not regarded as equivalent to unlawful sexual relations between man and woman.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, according to the textbook, punitive measures

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<sup>9</sup> Grade Seven Islamic Studies textbook (2002), p. 127, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>10</sup> Grade Nine Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 133, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>11</sup> Grade Eight Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 135-136, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

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remain discretionary to the judge.<sup>12</sup> This is the same for those who commit bestiality. The textbook does not mention how the mixed Sharia and English common law Maldivian legal system differs from certain harsh punishments prescribed in Sharia such as stoning or amputation.

Homosexuality and unlawful sexual relations are described as causing adverse effects in the society. “People committing suicide due to not being satisfied,” “child abuse,” “people will stop being modest,” and that “different diseases will be spread” are some of the adverse effects that the book cites.<sup>13</sup> The idea that homosexuality and extra/pre-marital sex can increase or cause child abuse, suicide and spread of diseases is not advisable to be taught and lacks supporting empirical data. Child sexual abuse and suicides are complex issues and cannot be said to have roots in homosexuality and adultery. The ruling on a person who steals is having his or her hand amputated. “The ruling on theft is ruling from Allah himself and should it be proved that a person committed that crime, there cannot be any pardon for the guilty.”<sup>14</sup>

The components of Chapter Six, “Islamic History and Civilisation,” are the importance of the *As-Sirat* (Prophet’s life) to learn Islam, the wisdom of revealing Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, Islamic culture and a brief biography of Imam Hanifa and Imam Malik.

The component “Islamic culture” compares Islamic and non-Islamic cultures. There is an oversimplification of other cultures as materialistic and too libertarian. Islamic culture is portrayed as being divinely inspired and built upon divine and therefore more spiritual than non-Islamic cultures.<sup>15</sup> Chapter Six explains the Islamic economic system. It is mentioned that the economic systems of today, communism, socialism and capitalism are based on the fallible human intellect. It is also stated that, as these economic systems are man-made, they are eventually destined to “fail” unlike the Islamic economy, which is built upon “divine guidance.”<sup>16</sup>

In the **Grade Nine** textbook, Chapter One, named “Knowledge of the Quran,” covers the compilation of the Qur’an and as to how the Qur’an as a holy book should be treated. Under the heading “In response to objections made about the Quran” the following passage is taught to the students:

“Of the books revealed by Allah (God), the Qur'an is the only word of God that has not been changed by humans. This is something the enemies of Islam believe. And

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 135

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 137

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 140

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 162

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 188

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they know that the only revelation that has remained unchanged is the revelation to Prophet Muhammad, the Qur’an. Because of this, Christians and Jews try to invoke doubt in the hearts of Muslims about the Quran, therefore defaming Islam.”<sup>17</sup>

This creates a mentality that sees anyone other than Muslim as enemies. The mentality is a barrier to inter-faith dialogue and peaceful coexistence with people of other faiths. The statement “This is something the enemies of Islam believe. And they know that the only revelation that has remained unchanged is the revelation to Prophet Muhammad, the Quran,” is not a statement of fact. All religions contain universal ideals, however holds its scripture as “truth.” A derogatory statement such as one that describes Christian and Jewish practices to be an attempt at defaming Islam must not be taught to students as being factual.<sup>18</sup> Students must be allowed to form their own opinions about other religions instead of forming a bedrock of hate. Allowing students to form their own opinions would create more chances for interfaith dialogue.

Chapter Two entails the Knowledge of *Hadith*, it covers the compilation of the prophetic traditions, degrees of the *Sunnah* and *Hadith*.

Chapter Three, named “Islamic creed” covers miracles, belief in prophets and prophetic calling. In the component, prophetic career, what becomes obligatory should you believe in the Prophet Muhammad is listed.<sup>19</sup> It includes “calling people to the religion of Allah (proselytising) and performing *jihad* against people that obstruct the religion.”<sup>20</sup> How the religion might be obstructed is very vaguely defined. Clearer definition as to what constitutes “obstruction to religion” is needed. As the definition of *Jihad* here is vague it can be, and has been, interpreted as violent *jihad*.

Under the heading “Some of the liars that came to be in this *Ummah*<sup>21</sup>”, the Ahmadiyya movement is described as a plot by the British to destroy the unity of Muslims, to destroy the foundations of Shari’a and to move Muslims away from Islam. It is explicitly stated here that Ahmadiyya (referred to in the book as Qadianism) is a false denomination of Islam.<sup>22</sup> If students are taught that *takfir* of this sort is permissible in Islam, this leads to a belief that extremists take advantage of. This also leaves no space for other interpretations of faith such as *Sufism* and *Shi’ism*. Rather, students will come to regard Orthodox Sunni as the only true interpretation. The religious slur “Qadiyani” is used to refer to Ahmadi Muslims. While the tem is

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<sup>17</sup> Grade Nine Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 18, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 18

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>21</sup> *Ummah* is the Arabic word used to describe the transnational Muslim community.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 58

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used in Pakistani official documents to refer to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, it is considered pejorative by the community itself, therefore “Ahmadiyya” should replace the term “Qadiyani.”

Chapter Four elaborates on Islamic Jurisprudence and covers the Islamic rulings on fasting, death, burial and marriage. “Muslim men may marry Muslim women and women of other Abrahamic religions or ‘people of the Book.’ However, this is considered *makruh*<sup>23</sup> or detestable. And this is considered even more undesirable should they be living in a non-Islamic country. However no Muslim man may marry a polytheist woman.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore it states, “Muslim women may not marry any non-Muslim man even if the man may be of the People of the Book. This ruling is supported by the Qur’an.”<sup>25</sup>

This is taught to students as a main part of the component on marriage. We highlight the gender-discrimination in this practice. “If the wife disobeys the husband, the husband must first advise her. After advisement, if the wife still disobeys, they must leave the marital bed (sleep separately) and or punish her.”<sup>26</sup> What constitutes punishment must be clearly defined here. Some clerics interpret punishment to be beating which will be considered domestic violence, which is criminalised in the Maldives and should be removed from academic literature.

The Islamic culture chapter (Chapter Five), covers the life of Imam Mohamed bin Idris and Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal, the enemies of Islam, Jews and Christians, the spread of Islamic civilisation to Europe and the problems facing Muslims of today. The component, “Enemies of Islam”,<sup>27</sup> teaches students about those who acted against Islam in the days of the Islamic Prophet. These contain the infamous Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab and other polytheists of Mecca. The “hypocrites” of the polytheists and the Jewish people are described in detail.

In the component “Jews and Christians” the spread of Judaism and Christianity are explained. Jews are portrayed as a treacherous people who work against Islam. “Some of the adversarial acts of the Jews as given in this section include:<sup>28</sup>

- Embracing Islam and apostatising to make it seem as if Islam was a weak religion;

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<sup>23</sup> In Islamic terminology, *Makruh* defines acts that are not wholly forbidden but frowned upon. Those who do not commit such acts are rewarded.

<sup>24</sup> Grade Nine Islamic textbook, (2009), pp. 94-95, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 94-95

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 96

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 119

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 118

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- Trying to kill the Prophet by poison and other means;
- Betraying the treaty with Muslims and having treacherous dealings with the polytheists of Mecca;
- Supporting those that assassinated Caliph Umar and those that bought a coup d'état against Caliph Uthman;
- Working to undermine the *Aqidah* of Muslims;
- Working to bring the downfall of the Islamic Caliphate, stealing the land of the Palestinians and working to sow discord among Muslims”

Depicting these acts to be representative of all Jewish people increases anti-Semitism.

“*Kufr* (Disbelief) is an ideology”, under this heading the textbook states, “The followers of disbelief and evil regardless of their religion or nationality are united in their work against the truth (*Haqq*). They are all of the same ideology.”<sup>29</sup> This conflates all who are non-Muslims, creating us against them dichotomies. Moreover the textbook states, “Therefore Islam’s domination of the world is very near. This is something that the Jews and Christians do not want. This is why they collaborate against Islam to this day.”<sup>30</sup> The students are taught to think of all Jews and Christians as enemies, justifying violent *Jihad* against them.<sup>31</sup>

According to the textbook, “Man-made philosophies have failed in being economically, socially, politically viable. The only philosophy that is economically, socially and politically viable is Islam.”<sup>32</sup> This is a direct refutation of anything other than exclusively Islamic philosophies or systems. It is contrasted with democracy or universal human rights.<sup>33</sup>

Under the heading “How Islam is undermined,” the book states:

“Through the futile efforts to crush Islamic civilisation and wipe the Muslims from existence (the Crusades), non-Muslims realised that Muslims could not be enslaved as long as Muslims were strong in their belief. Thus non-Muslims officially announced an ideological war against Islam. However the first steps of this ideological war were taken during the lifetime of Prophet by the Jews.”<sup>34</sup>

The ideological battle is described as non-Muslims trying to change the Muslim ideology and creed by various means and concepts. “Training and sending Muslims to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 119

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 199

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.119

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 120-121

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 119



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spread ‘Western’ ideologies. This is to brainwash Muslims and turn them away from Islamic ideology and towards Western ideology.”<sup>35</sup> Again, this reaffirms the perceived notion that Islam or Muslims are constantly under attack by the West, internalising a sense of victimhood. It might also pervade the idea that anyone who espouses Western ideologies is a ‘native informant’ or a Western agent. The narratives used here also suggest a never-ending power struggle between Islam and the other two Abrahamic religions, depicting a wartime religion.

The danger of such generalisations is that anyone who dares support any ideology that is not strictly Islamic faces the threat of being a victim of *Takfir*.<sup>36</sup> This has become common among Maldivians in recent years. “While Jews and Christians use three methods to do this (wage ideological war against Muslims), nowadays this is planned, financed and run by organizations of Zionist Jews.”<sup>37</sup> Here one of the methods used to wage this war is said to be *Orientalism*.<sup>38</sup>

The second method mentioned is Christian evangelism. It is described as an attempt to distance Muslims from Islam and Allah, slowly converting Muslims to Christianity. It is also said here that this is done covertly by international organisations, charity organisations and non-governmental organisations.<sup>39</sup> Thus empowering those who baselessly label opponents or critics as anti-Islamic.

Muslims who advocate secularism are described to be part of a Western conspiracy. “Westernised writers of Islam have been created by the West in order to spread their philosophy in Islamic communities. And there is a propaganda effort by the West to elect adherents of ‘Western ideology’ (taken to mean secularism in this context) to policymaking and governing positions in Islamic communities.”<sup>40</sup> Islamic Sharia is touted as being more apt for humans compared to democracy. It is stated that efforts to implement Islamic Sharia have been unsuccessful due to Western political intervention.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 120

<sup>36</sup> Takfirism denotes the practice where a Muslim accuses another Muslim of being an apostate. Takfiri is used when speaking of an adherent of the said practice.

<sup>37</sup> Grade Nine Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 121, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>38</sup> Orientalism is a term that is used by art historians, literary and cultural studies scholars for the imitation or depiction of aspects in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian cultures. The term became widely used after Edward Said’s book of the same name which laid down his criticism of the lens through which the West views ‘the Other.’

<sup>39</sup> Grade Nine Islamic textbook (2009), pp. 120-121, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 127

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Chapter Six; the Islamic Culture chapter covers “human rights in Islam,” and “Islam and family.” “The position of the wife and the husband has been muddled. Under the pretence of fighting for women's rights, the status of the women has been lowered.”<sup>41</sup> In effect, certain students might come to see women’s rights or feminism as a ‘Western agenda’ and a concept that should be resisted in accordance with the xenophobic material espoused under the textbook in previous chapters.

“The human rights of this time are a weapon used to further the Western agenda.”<sup>42</sup> This gives the impression universal human rights such as freedom of belief, freedom of expression must not be allowed in Muslim societies, and that such concepts are averse to Islam. It depicts Muslim communities and the West as two resistant monoliths, discounting the diversity and pluralism in such communities. “Unlike the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Islam human rights are understood in terms of [protecting] dignity, reputation and human nature. It is an active human process instead of mere ink.”<sup>43</sup> This is a direct rejection of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and contradicts international treaties the Government of the Republic of Maldives has acceded. It distinguishes human rights in Islam and Western discourse, projecting the two as differing and the later as ineffective compared to the former. This further reinforces the idea that any conceptualisation of human rights that originate from any source other than Islam should not be supported or enforced.

Chapter Seven delves into what is considered Islamic behaviour. It covers repentance, love for the creations of Allah, and resisting one’s personal desires. The concept of Al-Wala wal Baraa<sup>44</sup> (Love and hate for the sake of Allah) is used to justify executions and hate speech against non-Muslims.

Under the **Grade Ten** textbook, Chapter One consists of Qur’an recitation. After every parable, there is a list of the important points mentioned in it. The topics of *Asbaab Nuzul* (circumstances surrounding revelation of the Qur’an) and the Qur’an are covered here.

Chapter Two: Knowledge of Hadith, covers the topics of the leniency of the duties imposed upon a Muslim by Islam, the freedom of thought and encouragement of worship in the light of *hadith*. The section on leniency of a Muslim’s duties highlights the need for moderation. It emphasises that Islam instructs Muslims to balance spirituality and worldliness. A prophetic tradition is quoted to drive home the point in which he underlines that those who leave all worldly things for spirituality are not of his congregation. The push for moderation is admirable and the aforementioned

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 127

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 136

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 137

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 180

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quote also brings forth a prevalent issue of today – *Takfiri* ideology. The book states that it is forbidden upon a Muslim to declare another Muslim a *kafir* or infidel, prohibiting *Takfiri* acts.<sup>45</sup> These narratives that stress importance of moderation are highly welcome, although appears to be less frequent than orthodox and xenophobic content.

The next lesson is on freedom of thought. The lesson starts with a *hadith* by the Prophet admonishing Muslims to think for themselves and not believe others blindly. Human intelligence is described as a gift to humanity by Allah and as something that has been entrusted to humans by Allah. It is stated that this intelligence has to be used “as Allah wishes”, meaning in accordance with Islam under this context. Muslims are also told to use their intelligence in every aspect of life.

Chapter Three on the Islamic Creed teaches students the subject on belief in the Judgment Day. This lesson teaches what belief in the Judgment Day consists of, including foreshadowing of Judgment Day and the Judgment Day itself. This lesson is designed to create fear of the Day of Judgment among students.<sup>46</sup> Mainly the lesson consists of the fearful lead up to the Day of Judgment and the punishments that follow.

Chapter Four covers Islamic Jurisprudence and Lesson One is about the Hajj pilgrimage, its benefits and obligations. It is stated that one of the societal benefits of Hajj is that it nurtures the brotherhood of Muslims and that it is the largest gathering of Muslims. Similar to obligatory daily prayers practiced in mosques, the Hajj is also mentioned as a way for the Muslim community to come together as one.

Lesson Two under the chapter covers divorce and its rulings. Divorce is defined here as “the method by which the husband releases the wife from the bond of marriage.”<sup>47</sup> It is also stated that divorce is a right granted to husbands by Allah, within established limits.<sup>48</sup> It is repeatedly emphasised that divorce is the last option and it should only be used if there is no other way. Lesson Eight is about raising children. The requirements for a person to be able to look after a child are listed here. One of the requirements listed here is being a Muslim, another one is being a free man, as opposed to a slave. Shockingly, “slaves” are described as people that have to work tirelessly to fulfill their master’s needs and they do not have power over their own souls.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, they – slaves – cannot hold power over any other soul as stated in the book. This is an endorsement of slavery. In the modern world where

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<sup>45</sup> Grade Ten Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 28, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 42

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 72

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 110

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slavery has been abolished and all persons must be guaranteed their universal human rights, anything that condones slavery should no longer be taught to students.

Chapter Five covers history and culture of Islam. Lesson One teaches students about colonisation. Students are only taught about European colonisation, there is no mention of the Ottoman Empire that was widespread before the Western powers started its colonisation projects in the 16th to mid-20th century. The lesson focuses on the oppression brought upon Muslims through imperial power, for example the loss of power, Islamic culture and laws. In the conclusion to this lesson it states that while many Muslim countries continue to suffer from the effects of European colonialism, there is also an on-going ideological colonisation of Muslims. The purpose of this type of colonisation, it is said, is to gain power over Muslims by weakening their belief system and forcing Muslims away from Islam.<sup>50</sup> Lesson Two is on Islamic culture, listing positive effects of Islamic culture.

Chapter Six is about the media and Muslims. It is stated that as Western ideals of government are still evolving while Islamic ideals have reached perfection. Western leaders are said to be afraid of a time when their ideals come against Islamic ideals as Islam starts spreading in the West. Therefore, it is said, “they employ various media to spread propaganda against Islam.”<sup>51</sup> The lesson continues in the same vein and concludes by listing three techniques used by Western media against Islam.

Chapter Seven covers Islamic behaviour. This chapter consists of lessons on how to maintain brotherhood, how Muslims should treat one another, treating relatives and neighbours kindheartedly and obeying those in authority. *Al Wala wal Bara*<sup>52</sup> is emphasised in the first lesson. Scholars often interpret this as loving Muslims while hating non-Muslims. It is also used frequently by Islamists to justify the killings of innocent non-Muslims. Under the subheading, “The Importance of Electing a Leader”, the first stipulation listed is “relationship between religion and politics”. It states that electing a Muslim leader is a foremost requirement in Islam due to the fact that Islam cannot be established without an Islamic leader.<sup>53</sup> Rather than looking at qualifications for leading a government, this emphasises the precondition of being a Sunni Muslim.

The “Knowledge of *Hadith*” chapter in the **Grade Eleven** textbook explains that *Sunnah* is the interpretation of the Qur’an. It contends that Islamic legislation lacks elaboration on *Sunnah* and other matters. It stresses the importance of obeying Prophet Muhammad and declares that a person who disagrees with any of his

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 139-140

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 156

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 192

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teachings is not pious.<sup>54</sup> It is reiterated throughout the chapter how necessary it is to emulate the Prophet and his practices. As an example, the book depicts a narrative where Prophet Muhammad takes off his sandals before praying and his followers do the same. When asked, he claims that Gabriel informed him that his sandals were dirty and that is why he removed them.<sup>55</sup> This narrative infers that the reason to follow Prophet Muhammad is due to the divine insight he has, and being given the place of an exemplary follower of Allah. Islam fervently preaches against following “the creation;” i.e. humans, the focus on literally mimicking the Prophet contradict such claims. Salafism and fundamentalism recalls the era of the Prophet and claims that its practices literally follow Prophet Muhammad’s practices, claiming its version as “true” Islam. These narratives reinforce such fundamentalist claims, invoking a Golden Age of Islam and suggesting Salafi/Wahhabi ideologies comprise the true version of Islam.

Lesson Two under the *Aqidah* chapter is called “Satan’s Deceivers.” It claims there are humans who qualify as such deceivers. Characteristics of those who deceive on behalf of Satan include non-believers, sorcerers and anyone who is considered a *Munafiq*. The word *Munafiq* in Arabic translates to “hypocrite”, specifically one who outwardly practices Islam but keeps his or her disbelief secret. This definition of people who “deceive on behalf of Satan” is disturbing. In most Muslim majority countries, including the Maldives, there are strict laws against blasphemy and apostasy. This terminology enables fundamentalists to publicly shame those non-believers living under oppressive Islamist regimes. Another problem is this creates legitimate room for outright xenophobia against non-Muslim foreigners. The lesson is an unrelenting vilification of non-believers. In certain aspects the book equates non-believers to sorcerers: “In order for them to obey Satan, they eat and drink filth, they prostrate to gods other than Allah, and they worship the dead.”<sup>56</sup>

Lesson Four<sup>57</sup> is on Shiites, and contains an overwhelming amount of hate content against this sect of Islam. It differentiates between a Sunni and a Shiite and attempts to “clarify ahistorical misconceptions” about the Shi’a. In doing so, the narrative discounts the belief system’s Islamic credentials, likening it to a heresy of Islam that has its roots in Zoroastrianism and Judaism.

There is a brief paragraph about Iranian cleric Ayatollah Khomeini<sup>58</sup> who spearheaded the Islamic revolution in 1979. According to the textbook, his branch of Shia should not be attributed to Islam as his writings disparaged Prophet Muhammad’s apostles.

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<sup>54</sup> Grade Eleven Islamic Studies textbook (2009), pp. 36-37, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp. 40-41.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 66

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 74

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 79

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There is a three-page abasement of “Shia ideology” consisting of 15 points, creating animosity towards this branch of Islam by portraying Sunni Muslims as the “true” followers of Islam.<sup>59</sup>

Lesson Six is on the Isma’ilis – a branch of Shia Islam also known as “the Seveners.” The textbook claims in its introduction of Isma’ilis: “the reality of this sect is that its objective is the destruction of the Islamic faith.”<sup>60</sup> Similar to how the authenticity of the Shia ideology was questioned in the previous lesson, there are xenophobic 10 points on the Isma’ilis.<sup>61</sup> The crux of these points suggests that Isma’ilis and their denominations are “heretics”, “non-believers”, and “followers of their own desires.” The discriminatory narratives are not limited to other Abrahamic religions, the West or polytheists; this chapter shows that even Islamic sects other than Sunni Islam are categorically maligned under this curriculum.

The lesson on Qisas – the term for “retaliation in kind” under Islamic jurisprudence – discusses how the penalty must be implemented in accordance with Islamic Sharia.<sup>62</sup> It differentiates between how the practice was implemented during the age of “*Jahiliya*”<sup>63</sup> and how it was reformed after Islam was introduced in order to bring equality.<sup>64</sup> Under the conditions for implementing Qisas, it says that in certain instances killing may not be permissible, however it says “but non-believers or apostates can be killed.”<sup>65</sup> The Quranic verse cited states “As the infidels are at war (with you), wage war against the infidels too.” This verse is supported with a reference to Bukhari (a collection of Muhammad’s prophetic traditions interpreted by eponymous Persian scholar Sahih al-Bukhari). The quote reads, “Whoever changes their Islamic religion, kill them.”

The third point makes reference to a *hadith* contested by many scholars, where the Prophet claims that the death penalty cannot be implemented where a Muslim murders a non-Muslim. It states that Prophet Muhammad once said “O believers! Implementing *qisas* against murderers is mandatory; a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave.”<sup>66</sup> According to the Prophet’s justification, as supported by Islamic scholars, the blood of the victims must be equal to the offenders’ in order to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp. 79-81

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 82

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 85

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 162-177

<sup>63</sup> *Jahiliyya* is the Islamic concept of denoting the “Age of Ignorance,” the era of paganism that predates Islam. Often used to suggest “ignorance of divine guidance.”

<sup>64</sup> Grade Eleven Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 164, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 166

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp. 166-167

implement *qisas*. Islamic faith and freedom from enslavement is required to be considered an equal to a Muslim. These citations only highlight discrimination, between Muslims and non-Muslims, and between slaves and the free. It is alarming that the death penalty and out-dated discriminatory legal concepts are promoted here. It is important to note here that progressive Muslim thinkers often depict Islam as a religion that freed many slaves and for the first time in history considered slaves as equals after conversion to Islam. However, such discriminatory and racist attitudes should not be endorsed by educational literature, especially in relation to religion. We recommend removal of any narrative that even hints at slavery being normative or being acknowledged by Islam.

The chapter on Islamic jurisprudence defines *Jinayat*<sup>67</sup> in Islamic law as divided into offences that require *hadd* or *qisas* penalties. It also states against whom these penalties shall be applicable, excluding the insane and prepubescent.<sup>68</sup>

There are instances where establishing *qisas* is mandatory, according to the textbook. It outlines preconditions for people against whom penalty of *qisas* can be imposed upon, one of which requires the victim or murderer to be a Muslim. The book takes it a step further and states that “[unbelievers] are permissible to be killed,” and therefore not worthy of equality. The subheading on implementing *qisas* for bodily harm or loss of a body part suggests it can be implemented for such offences as well. Lesson Nine includes an elaboration of this topic, introducing the Islamic concept of *Diyya* where damages are paid to the victim or victim’s heirs.

Under the Islamic history chapter, there is a noteworthy lesson named “*Jihad* according to Islam” on the hotly contested meaning of *jihad* in Islam. It defines the Arabic word ‘*jihad*’ as “to endeavour greatly” or “to bravely confront enemies.” The definition deconstructs *jihad* to mean, “to eradicate the rule by men over men and establish rule of Allah.” To support these claims under Islamic literature, the textbook cites Quranic verses and *hadith* that stress the importance of ‘Holy War.’<sup>69</sup>

The book quotes prophetic traditions to suggest that under Islamic law; “*jihad* remains a mandatory religious duty until the Day of Judgement”, claiming that Muslims “hesitating” to perform this obligatory religious duty has produced bitter results in the past and it will continue to do so if left undone.<sup>70</sup> Although it states that *jihad* is not limited to engaging in armed conflicts, it nevertheless repeatedly stresses the esteem given to violent activism in the name of religion. It also distinguishes

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<sup>67</sup> *Jinayat*, when referred collectively is the Islamic equivalent of criminal law, prescribing penalties for crimes against a person.

<sup>68</sup> Grade Eleven Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 168, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, pp. 229-230

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 230

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jihadism from violently active evangelism set on slaughtering nonbelievers and destroying the environment -- “nonbelievers must be afforded freedom under an Islamic kingdom.”<sup>71</sup> The chapter elaborates that *jihad* cannot be a pre-emptive act of war but rather committed in self-defence. The book stresses that there is a varied definition of *jihad*, however, when quoting prophetic traditions or the Qur’an, most quotes glorify jihadist violent activism. One such instance is where the book quotes a *hadith* claiming that on the Day of Judgement jihadists such as the *Mujahedeen*<sup>72</sup> who have “sacrificed their life and blood in the name of Allah” would be among the distinguished, congregating on the same row as prophets and messengers.<sup>73</sup>

An entire section<sup>74</sup> is dedicated to the “fruits” of jihadism, claiming that the ultimate fruit of *jihad* is martyrdom, followed by lessons<sup>75</sup> on how Islam spread throughout the globe. Lesson Five discusses how “Islam lost its power,” adding to the sense of victimisation felt by many Muslims. These discussions fuel hatred and depict the religion as one that is set on building hegemony.

Lesson Five explains misconceptions about Islam, stating that religious scholars of other religions have disseminated disinformation about Islam, confusing believers and non-believers alike.<sup>76</sup> The first misconception it cites is that Islam was spread through “the sword,” or that it is a religion concerned with war mongering and strict adherence. In contrast the book claims that Prophet Muhammad’s evangelism was “neither strict nor imposing.” The textbook makes a xenophobic statement claiming that Muslims in Medina never made a pre-emptive strike and that it was always to “defend” the Islamic State from the “scheming non-Muslims.”<sup>77</sup>

Ironically, the book states that history shows that forcefully imposing a religion on a people would be the religion’s eventual undoing, while the Maldivian Constitution (2008) requires every Maldivian citizen to be a Muslim. It cites a Quranic verse that states, “There shall be no compulsion to embrace Islam.”<sup>78</sup> The verse is used to support the textbook’s claim that Islam spread peacefully throughout the world. The book also likens the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia to how the Maldives embraced Islam, despite historically identifiable differences. Many historical accounts show that

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 232

<sup>72</sup> *Mujahideen* is the plural version of *Mujahid*, used to refer to those that engage in violent *jihad*.

<sup>73</sup> Grade Eleven Islamic Studies textbook (2009), pp. 233-234, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, pp. 239-240

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pp. 241-259

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 283

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 284

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 285



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the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia was unique<sup>79</sup> that there was no State apparatus that imposed it on the people. However in the Maldives, Islam was historically established when a Buddhist King converted to Islam and decreed his subjects to follow suit.

The lesson briefly addresses specific misconceptions such as equality, independence, slavery, criminal justice and extremism in relation to Islam. According to the textbook, Islam accepts diversity and does not differentiate between races, nationalities, tribes, or languages; it only takes note of one’s piety. With regard to independence, the lesson refers to the epoch Islam began when the world was in the “dark ages” and people “were heavily oppressed.”<sup>80</sup> It claims that Islam brought freedom of expression, religious and economic freedom. It fails to assert that these developments – although noteworthy – are specific to an era non-reflective of today’s human rights standards. The lesson cites Quranic and prophetic traditions to prove that Islam endorsed the “freeing of slaves.”<sup>81</sup>

On extremism, the lesson clearly states that extremism is anti-Islamic. It repeatedly says that Islam is a “moderate” religion and that actions taken by certain parties in the name of Islam in fact damage the reputation of Muslims worldwide.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, it states that Islam should stay clear of such actions that may cause the international community to exclude Muslim countries.

Lesson Two under the Chapter on Islamic etiquette delves into rights afforded to non-Muslims in Islamic societies. The lesson states that non-Muslims have the freedom to practice their religion. The same Quranic verse is cited under the lesson on misconceptions of Islam to support that there should be no compulsion to follow Islam.<sup>83</sup> It states that non-Muslims should be afforded all rights and public services provided to Muslims. However, the fact that there are no places of worship for non-Muslims in the Maldives goes against interpretation of Islam in the textbook. The lesson emphasises the importance of equality among Muslims and non-Muslims with supporting Islamic literature.<sup>84</sup> It should be noted that these narratives appear to be normative but contradicts earlier chapter on *qisas* and *jinayat*, which states that only Muslims can be equals under Islamic criminal law.

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<sup>79</sup> Fealy, G. 2005. Islamisation and the Politics in Southeast Asia. In: LAHOUD NELLY, A. H. J. (ed.) Islam in World Politics. pp. 154-155 London: Routledge.

<sup>80</sup> Grade Eleven Islamic Studies textbook (2009), p. 287, Education Development Centre: Ministry of Education, Malé, Maldives.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 287

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 290

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 300

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 300-302

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Under the Islamic etiquette chapter in the **Grade Twelve** textbook lays down three main bad traits considered wrongful under Islam.<sup>85</sup> It includes, speaking unfavourably of people behind their back, spying on people and pitting two people against each other. Quranic and prophetic traditions are cited to support how such actions are frowned upon in Islam.

The Islamic Creed chapter begins with a lesson on *Israah and Mi'raj*, which according to Islamic tradition is when Prophet Muhammad took the significant journey on a steed from Mecca to Jerusalem, ascending to heaven, speaking to Allah and returning to Earth, all in one night. In an attempt to claim that this story is not merely a fable, the book claims that the tale would stand true “even if subject to a contemporary scientific analysis,” which is a highly questionable statement and does not entail such proof.<sup>86</sup>

Under the Chapter on Islamic creed or *Aqidah*, there is a lesson dedicated to people referred to as *Zindiq*,<sup>87</sup> which is an archaic term for heretics of Islam. The book notes that there is disagreement among scholars on the true definition of *Zindiq*, and was initially used to refer to followers of Manichaeism. The book claims that such people disseminate untruths that result in disharmony, likening them to atheists. The textbook claims that there have been many irreligious groups waging war against Islam, including Abbasids, orientalist, Zionists, Baha'is, communists, *Zindiq*, Ahmadism and others.<sup>88</sup> Again, the book denotes Islam as being under attack by literally every other form of organised religion, exacerbating a sense of victimhood.

Islamic jurisprudence chapter has a lesson on apostasy.<sup>89</sup> It has a chilling introduction for apostates – “Everything they have done on Earth is void, they will be in Hell for all eternity.” The book goes onto list examples of apostasy per se, blasphemy and apostasy through action.

This definition of apostasy is problematic on many levels. It curtails any criticism of dogma, and gives no space for reforming radical narratives as the accusation of apostasy can be casually thrown at anyone who dares to. As previously stated, the Maldives does not have a fully Sharia compliant legal system, it is a mixture of English common law and Islamic Sharia. Most penal laws have been codified to avoid strict interpretations like stoning, amputating and until recently the death penalty, imposition of which was resumed after a 50 year unofficial moratorium. Ideas such as guilt of “betraying Sharia” and following “other laws” has paved the way for resurgence of inhumane practices in the name of religion.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, pp. 39-43

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 76

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 86

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 87

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, pp. 102-109

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The Lesson on the position of men and women is explained under Islamic tradition and history. It says that men and women are equal in Islam and that women are given the same tasks as men, “apart from those tasks that a woman cannot undertake due to their nature,” the book states that this does not undermine women’s role in Islam.<sup>90</sup> The second section states that the West often labels Islam as a religion that is an affront to women’s rights, claiming that such notions are unfounded. It claims that Islam was the first religion that afforded rights to women, specifically in comparison to other Abrahamic religions.<sup>91</sup> On how Islamic preaching often solely addresses men, the book states that even if this is so, women are included in those callings.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 149

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 150

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 151

### *Observations*

When approaching the Islamic Studies textbooks, the rarefied language used is not extremely unhelpful for students. The translation from Arabic to Dhivehi is very literal at times thereby misleading the reader. The Quranic Arabic, and excessively Arabized Dhivehi<sup>93</sup> used make meaning of certain terminology virtually inaccessible to contemporary Dhivehi readers. Commonly used Dhivehi words can be used to explain all matters related to teaching religion as it was done in the past.

The Islamic Studies textbooks have alarming xenophobic themes, which run throughout the grades, starting as early as the Grade Five textbook. The prevalence of anti-Semitic narratives sheds light on normalization of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in present Maldivian society. Apart from the Grade Five textbook, Grades Six and Seven also contain anti-Semitic material. In the Grade Five textbook, the account of one Jewish tribe reneging on a promise is posited as being representative of all Jewish people, stereotyping Jews as “devious” people that “do not hold any value to their promises.” In the Grade Six textbook contains a disturbing endorsement of a massacre and enslavement of two Jewish tribes in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, while the Grade Seven textbook discusses “civil strife caused by Jews” during the rule of the fourth successor of the Islamic Caliphate according to Sunni Islam’s view.

The Grade Nine Islamic Studies textbook has an entire lesson that delves into the controversial, war-invoking subject called “the Enemies of Islam.” In addition to anti-Semitic content, it contains vilification of pagans and other Abrahamic religions, also found in other Islamic Studies textbooks under the national curriculum.

Narratives that represent insular dichotomies against pagans and other Abrahamic religions can be found in the textbooks for Grades Four, and Seven to Twelve.

For instance under the Grade Four textbook, there is graphic imagery invoked when speaking of torture and persecution suffered by the Prophet, Messengers and followers in Mecca at the helm of Qureshi tribesmen. The Grade Seven textbook mentions that “all that is anti-Islamic or un-Islamic” should be rejected, but does not define what makes an ideology or philosophy essentially anti-Islamic.

When other cultural, political or belief systems are discussed in the textbooks, there are instances where they are re-presented as “fallible” and inferior to “divine” Islam, contrastingly alleged to be based around “untruths.” The Grade Nine textbook contains material that goes as far as accusing Christians and Jews as colluding to “defame” Islam. Feminist or women’s rights movements are branded as ineffective

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<sup>93</sup> Ordinarily the *Thaana* (Maldivian) script and Arabic script can be used simultaneously. When Arabic loan words are used, it can be written in the Arabic script according to the Maldivian writing system.

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and working towards the detriment of female empowerment while depicting gender discriminatory ideas normative and empowering under Islam.

Evidently these sentiments do not end with self-benign notions. It is widely accompanied by – conflation of all that is non-Islamic into evildoer rhetoric, allegations of an ideological war against Muslims and conspiracies to undermine perceived Islamic hegemony. These narratives may perpetuate sense of victimhood felt by Muslims. These lessons tend to accentuate the differences between the West and ‘the Muslim world’. It discounts the mutually constitutive aspects of the Global North and ‘the Muslim world’; instead both are re-presented as monoliths engaged in an eternal power struggle. Often depicting an interpretation of Islam that suggests it is a politically charged, homogenous, wartime, empire-building religion set on world domination.

These ideas are not reflective of the official version Islam envisioned under the Maldivian Constitution (2008) that upholds inalienable human rights and international norms observed by other open democratic societies based on human dignity, equality and freedom. The Maldivian Constitution (2008) contains a bill of rights chapter that calls on citizens to “promote democratic values in a manner that is not inconsistent with any tenet of Islam” (Subparagraph (f) of Article 67). The interpretation of basic rights and freedoms contained in Chapter Two of the Constitution are subject to “values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom, and shall consider international treaties to which the Maldives is a party” (Article 68).

These ideas prevalent in the schoolbooks go against highlighting notions found in Islamic literature that promote tolerance, equality, diversity, moderation and pluralism. As per the Constitution, teaching of Islam should “instil love” for the religion. Subparagraph (c) of Article 36 of the Maldivian Constitution (2008) stipulates, “Education shall strive to inculcate obedience to Islam, instil love for Islam, foster respect for human rights, and promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all people.” However the radical material is projected as overwhelmingly normative in the textbooks. The task of instilling love for Islam with a view to respect human rights cannot be achieved by inciting hatred towards other religions, cultures or ideologies.

Although the textbooks mention the multicultural prophetic traditions in the early stages of Islam, there is plenty of material that negates these positive and universal values acknowledged in Islam. Statements that are contrary to it dwarf the content that attempts to resonate universal human values as normative Islamic tradition. The general narrative of the textbooks seem to ignite and reassert fundamentalist and radical views, that Islam is continually under attack and Muslims are systematically victimised by wide-ranging social groups. Further invigorating *Takfiri* practices whereby opponents or critics can easily be labelled anti-Islamic.

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Surprisingly xenophobic hate content is not restricted to paganism and other Abrahamic religions. All Islamic sects except Sunni Islam are projected as “heresies.” For instance the Grade Nine textbook dedicates a lesson on “deceivers” or “liars” from the Muslim world or “*Ummah*.” The Ahmadiyya movement is described as a plot by the British to destroy Islamic unity, and Muslims educated in the West, or Muslims who endorse secularism are considered co-conspirators with the West to undermine Islam. The Grade Eleven textbook claims that Shia Islam and its denominations are “heresy of Islam” that is rooted in “Zoroastrianism and Judaism.” History has shown that the birthplaces of these faiths are currently inflicted with deadly sectarian conflicts that obstruct inter-faith dialogue and coexistence. Therefore it is imperative that such discriminatory content be removed from schoolbooks that are meant to create tolerance and goodwill with regard to all members of our globalised world.

There are certain historical accounts of war; and the need to wage it in the name of religion that denote obligation and glorification of never-ending violent *jihad*. The textbooks call for “*jihad*” against those who “obstruct” Islam. *Jihad* is defined under the Islamic History chapter in the Grade Eleven textbook as “to endeavour greatly,” or “to bravely confront enemies” or working towards the “eradication of the rule of men over men establish the rule of Allah.” Although the textbook mentions the definition of *jihad* is not limited to violent-activism; it is glorified.

From Grade Eight onwards, discriminatory penalties and legal concepts that do not exist in the Maldivian legal system are introduced as being part of Islamic criminal law. The Maldives’ does not have a fully Sharia legal system, it is a mixture of English common law and Islamic Sharia. Most penal laws have been codified to avoid strict penalties like stoning, amputating and until recently the death penalty, imposition of which was resumed after a 50 year unofficial moratorium. Ideas such as guilt of “betraying Sharia” and following “other laws” has paved the way for resurgence of inhumane practices of public torture in the name of religion.

The review lists two instances where slavery is depicted as normative under Islam. Article 25 of the Maldivian Constitution (2008) states that all citizens and non-citizens cannot be subjected to slavery, servitude or forced labour. Although the textbooks contain anti-slavery sentiment found in Islamic tradition, the Grade Ten textbook’s chapter on Islamic Jurisprudence mentions that “slaves must work tirelessly to fulfil their masters’ needs,” while the Grade Eleven textbook’s lesson on the Islamic penal provision of *Qisas* entails discriminatory conditions for when the victim of a crime is a slave and or a non-believer. However, such discriminatory and racist attitudes in relation to religion should not be endorsed by educational literature in the modern world where slavery has been abolished. We recommend removal of any narrative that even hints at slavery being normative or being acknowledged by Islam.

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The textbooks cannot reconcile the Islam(s) represented, causing a trajectory towards fundamentalism as opposed to moderation as Islam's core value. Due to the prevalence of these radical ideas, the textbooks fail to primarily instil a positive official interpretation of Islam that is manifested in the Maldivian Constitution (2008).