

5 Nationalism, Belonging and Citizenship in Official Textbooks

Which narratives of imagined citizenship frame and legitimize the modes of lived citizenship of withdrawn protection and provision described in Chapters 1–4? How are relations of permissiveness and repression dealt with, and how is neoliberalism articulated in these narratives? How is national belonging constructed and justified? What sorts of national glories are celebrated and how is the route to national progress described? What place does the figure of the leader, the army and Islam take up in these narratives? How are the parameters of protection, provision and participation and legitimation constructed in official narratives? This chapter and Chapter 6 draw a picture of how citizenship and belonging are delineated and enacted in the schools. They enquire into the place of schools in the production of hegemony. They address the ways in which education is part of wider ideological struggles and transformations and a space in which negotiations and accommodation take place between different forces.

Apart from detailing the key tropes of official narratives of citizenship and belonging, this chapter stresses two key points. First, the selective insertion of Islam at the center of textbook narratives of national identity and citizenship reflects far deeper Islamization than other official discourses, say of Mubarak himself, lending legitimacy, resonance and force to the wider enabling of Islamist trends in the public sphere. A more authoritative framework had to be summoned to tell young people that permissiveness is a result of their extralegal and uncivil behavior, that prosperity can be achieved through the reform of their personal conduct, and that loyalty and defense of the nation will always be part of their religious duty. Islamist narratives in the educational sphere have been deployed in the service of the state and in the legitimization of existing citizenship realities. Second, very limited attempts are made at legitimizing the actual ideological directions and policy choices of the regime in its general neoliberal orientation. Charity and entrepreneurialism are encouraged, but only in a limited number of texts. Everyday repression and the diminished access to the law are not discussed, and the existence of political repression is obscured through the emphasis on freedom of

speech and democracy as values supposedly promoted by the regime. As opposed to the relatively clear identification of the ideological, domestic and regional enemies of the postcolonial regime (Chapter 1), Mubarak-era textbooks make some references to (Islamic) terrorism and vague foreign (Western) conspiracies. Nationalism is retained as a primary legitimizing trope and internal dissent is portrayed as stemming from enemies of the nation. The Conclusion chapter revisits the related questions around nationalism, politicization and depoliticization in light of changes since the Revolution.

Constructions of national belonging and citizenship are analyzed across a sample of secondary school textbooks that were in use throughout the late Mubarak era and early post-2011 period (see Chapter 1). The analysis focuses on four subjects that are most relevant for national identity, belonging and citizenship. National Education and Arabic Language are given detailed treatment, while examples from History and Islamic Religious Education are introduced to support the key arguments. Arabic Language and National Education – especially taken together – are the most important subjects for studying official citizenship narratives and shifts therein. Previous analyses of contemporary textbooks have also tended to focus on History and Religious Education (e.g. Starrett 1998, Toronto and Eissa 2007, MARED 2010, Attalah and Makar 2014). National Education (*Tarbiyya Wataniyya*, which can also be translated as Nationalist or Patriotic Education), taught in some grades as Citizenship Education or Civics, is, nonetheless, the subject directly tasked with conveying official narratives of citizenship to students. However, like Religious Education, it is a pass/fail subject that does not affect the student's final marks and is therefore afforded little instruction or study time. By contrast, Arabic Language is one of the subjects that receive the greatest attention from students and teachers. It is also saturated with discourses of nationalism and citizenship in assigned readings, poems, novels, essay topics in exams and grammatical exercises with recurrent themes. I show how final exam essay topics in Arabic Language have been the most politicized aspects of the curriculum, as a site where regime narratives can be updated more rapidly, without the complications of commissioning textbook authorship committees. Additionally, some components of the Arabic language curriculum – especially the Readings (*qira'a*) and Novel (*qissa*) – constitute a more engaging improvement to the information-heavy and tedious textbooks. This was notable in observing their delivery and reception in classrooms, where students could interact with meanings in the readings and with some images in the assigned poetry. Arabic Language textbooks could therefore be seen as the most critical sites of identity and

citizenship construction. I first address issues around national identity and belonging across the textbooks and then proceed to construction of citizenship, along the four parameters of protection, provision and participation rights (see Introduction).

Patriotism, Belonging and Loyalty

Like many other textbooks, a Quranic verse prefaces the 2009 textbook for *National Education for First Secondary Technical (NEFST)*:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). Surat al-Hujurat, verse 13.¹

The verse identifies the best individual and the best nation as those that are most pious. The goals of the textbook, also listed at the outset, stress promoting belonging to the nation and the *umma* (the nation, often used to refer to the global Muslim community) and the preparation of the “good productive citizen” adapted to economic competition in a changing world and labor market (*NEFST*, 8). The first four goals of the textbook are as follows:

1. Presenting the student with concepts and terms that deepen belonging and loyalty to the nation and *umma*.
2. Preparing a generation that participates in and leads economic life in a new world based on competition.
3. Preparing a good, productive, responsible citizen aware of the requirements of the labor market.
4. Training the student in practicing the values and behavior that allow his or her launching into a rapidly changing world.

This textbook provides the most consolidated and elaborate introduction to the nationalism and citizenship projects of the late Mubarak era. It arguably draws on the discourses of the so-called New Thought of the then ruling NDP, linked with the rise of Gamal Mubarak. It significantly deviates from them, however, in the explicit centrality given to Islam and personal piety. Patriotism or nationalism (*wataniya*) is defined as “belonging to and love of the nation that the human lives in.” In the introductory explanation of the nature of National Education and the justification for its study, the key idea is that the person belonging to a

¹ English translation of Holy Quran 49:13 (Ali 2001).

group naturally owes it the duty of loyalty and sacrifice at any cost. The example presented to support this claim is “the stance of President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak when he was faced with the crisis of Israel’s refusal to withdraw from the Taba strip and its claim that Taba is part of Israeli land. He stood tall to say: ‘Egypt will not give up one grain of sand, and it will also not close the doors to negotiation.’” Next, patriotism is contextualized in relation to Ancient Egypt and Islam. The text explains that *wataniya* is one of the most important “discoveries” that the Egyptian people have given humanity because “we have inherited from our Ancient Egyptian forefathers a homeland that they established thousands of years ago and is still present until our day as a testimony to the greatness and genius of the Egyptian” (*NEFST*, 15). It then states that Islam emphasized and in fact achieved equality based on “piety, good deeds and an enlightened mind,” regardless of race or ethnic origin, and was therefore a corrective to fanatical nationalism, yet it also affirmed that “belonging and loyalty to homeland and nation was a human instinct blessed by the noble Islam”:

With the spread of Islam, equality predominated and discrimination was removed, as there was no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab except based on piety, good deeds and an enlightened mind ... This is because Islam came to all people, to fulfill the humanity of the human being as a vice-regent of God on earth, and is not exclusive to one race or nationality. This Islamic instinct continued to protect our nation and our nationalism from fanaticism; and belonging and loyalty to nations and the *umma* was a human instinct blessed by noble Islam. (*NEFST*, 15)

This excerpt underlines not only how intimately national identity is linked with Islam but also the tendency of textbooks to present a superficial account of Muslim history, representing only its “golden ages” (echoing Islamist discourses) and excluding any reference to civil strife or the injustices and repressive practices of the rulers of various Muslim dynasties. Three examples are then provided to explain Egyptian nationalism and patriotic behavior. The meaning of nationalism is first constructed in terms of a rejection of foreign linguistic and cultural influences and of pride in the Arabic language. Three patterns of behavior are presented as “unacceptable” and as revealing “the weak nationalist sentiments of some youth” and a lack of pride in the Arabic language: (a) many young people wear clothing with foreign inscriptions, “even when it is made in Egypt and those who are wearing it are our Egyptian youth”; (b) we see in many Egyptian streets banners written in Arabic letters whose meaning is foreign (like Carpet City, Power Clean, High Class); and (c) the title “Mr.” has spread in schools instead of *ustaz* so that our teachers of Religious Education and the Arabic Language are

being called “mister” or “monsieur” (*NEFST*, 31). Mubarak was again presented as taking patriotic stances, as evidenced by his effort “to alleviate the Iraqi aggression on Kuwait” in 1991. There is no mention of the deployment of Egyptian troops in Iraq or any reference to the US-led war. Across this and other textbooks, praise of the leader often occurs in this format of simple messages devoid of context or detail. Figures from the pre-independence era are also celebrated. The anti-colonial nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel is presented as a symbol and embodiment of true nationalism. This is demonstrated by referring to Kamel establishing a nationalist newspaper to express his patriotic stance. There is no mention of popular agency or the mass mobilization and civil disobedience that were integral to the anti-colonial nationalist struggle.

Mustafa Kamel *jaahad* [has struggled/undertook jihad] for the independence of Egypt and its liberty domestically and internationally and exposed the faults of colonialism using the Dinshaway incident until Lord Cromer was forced to resign. He also established the *Livva’* Newspaper and the Nationalist Party to spread awareness and fire up the nationalist sentiment of citizens against British occupation. Mustafa Kamel’s jihad/struggle was not a matter of mere slogans or speeches but of constant movement, communication and messages overflowing with patriotism and expressing the feelings of an Egypt in revolt. Mustafa Kamil was not a seeker of fame or power, but a nationalist symbol concerned only with his nation’s affairs, regardless of the expense and sacrifice in effort and money. (*NEFST*, 32)

Here, there is a gesture of Islamizing the largely secular pro-independence movement through using the terminology of jihad. This is critically coupled with a sanitization of the struggle for independence by ignoring the elements of protest, civil disobedience and strike action that were in fact critical to that struggle. The exclusion of protest from the history of national independence is paralleled by the portrayal, in an Arabic Language reading in *ALTSTIAS*, of the nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul. The assigned reading piece is a speech where he confirms that he will now proceed with negotiations with the British regarding independence and that “all that remains is for each of us to return to his work,” and to believe that he is contributing with his work “a treasure to the nation’s treasures” and “a power to its powers.” This was the same discourse employed to demobilize protest after Mubarak was deposed in 2011. Good Egyptians and “honorable citizens” were expected to disengage from protest, “go back to work,” and let “the wheel of production turn.”

Apart from these explicit constructions of nationalism, Arabic Language textbooks in particular provide implicit constructions of nationhood and belonging. The textbooks contain numerous readings

and pieces of poetry on the duty to protect and serve the nation. The readings focused on Quranic texts, the discourses of early Muslims, the discourses of twentieth-century writers on early Muslims, texts on nationalist (pre-1952 or the 1973 war) themes, or social themes such as friendship and smoking.² In addition to the Readings section, poetry selections included pieces reflecting on the universe and nature, love of the nation, humor, friendship and manhood. The themes of national devotion and sacrifice are reflected in readings like a poem by the celebrated poet Ahmad Shawqi from the colonial era and a sermon by a pre-Islamic poet urging his tribe to fight the enemy (because dying with dignity is better than a life of humiliation [*thul*]). The centrality of Islam is reflected in the explicit, desired sense of national identity and citizenship, as well as in the frequent use of religious content, readings and exercise questions. For example, under the heading “With faith and science we protect youth and build Egypt,” an excerpt from a poem by a poet named Umar ‘Asal declares the following:

And Egypt whose banner youth raise high
the day of victory was achieved and the clouds cleared
It wants the youth of the Nile a blessed generation
and through religion and piety elevated. (*ALTSTIAS*)

Assigned literary pieces also included a central piece of Muslim heritage: the speech of the first caliph Abu Bakr upon assuming the caliphate after the death of the Prophet, which emphasizes political consultation with the people and the equal rights of the rich and poor.³ In general, Quranic and religious themes represented 10–25 percent of the examples provided for literary analysis or grammar. This percentage was higher in the external study guides actually used by students, reaching 50–100 percent

² As an example of textbook readings and their themes, the titles of the readings in the textbook for Arabic Language for Third Secondary Technical for Industrial and Agricultural Specializations for 2009/2010 were: *Justice; Islamic Civilization: The Impact of Arab Culture in Europe; Population and Environmental Issues: The Hidden Enemy; The Age of Scientific Achievements: Can We Catch Up with It?; Sportsmanship and How We Can Promote It; Social and Literary Figures: The Liberator of Women – Qasim Amin; Sinai; Smoking and Addiction; Currency: A Means Not an End; Humor Is Therapy; Fine Arts and the Position of Islam on Them; An Article* by Muhammad Abdu; *A Portrait of a Poor Girl; Article* by nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul; *Friendship; Manhood* by Ahmad Amin, an Islamic Azhari writer; and *A Poem* by Umar ‘Asal.

³ The text reads: “I have been given the authority over you, and I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right. Sincere regard for truth is loyalty and disregard for truth is treachery. The weak among you shall be strong with me until I have secured his rights, if God will; and the strong among you shall be weak with me until I have wrested from him the rights of others, if God will. Obey me so long as I obey God and His Messenger. But if I disobey God and His Messenger, ye owe me no obedience. Rise for your prayer, God have mercy upon you.”

of examples in some sections. According to one study of official textbooks in the different educational stages, direct or derived religious material amounts to 30 percent of Arabic textbooks in general education (Khalil 2009).

***Wa Islamah* and the Centrality of Islamist Nationalism**

Apart from these short readings, the mandated novel for general secondary Arabic throughout the Mubarak era, *Wa Islamah*, crystallizes the key themes of Islamist nationalism as conveyed to students. In fact, due to its length and engaging style, this novel can be considered the most extensive and elaborate nationalist narrative to which Egyptian students are exposed in secondary school, and essentially throughout their formal education. Authored by Ali Ahmad Bakathir, who has been called “the pioneer of Islamic/Islamist Literature” [*ra'id al-ruwaya al-Islamiya*], the novel seems to have been introduced into the curriculum as early as 1945, although it was removed after the 1952 Revolution; and the author, despite his links with the Muslim Brotherhood, was reportedly spared persecution by the Nasserite regime because of the prestige and influence of the novel (Hamid 2010). *Wa Islamah* is also part of the curriculum of other Arab countries and was produced as a major feature film, which continues to be frequently broadcast on Egyptian television. Regardless of the historical accuracy of the novel, it revolves around the struggle against and defeat of the invading Crusaders and Mogul Empire. Its key premise is that the ultimate expression of Islamic and nationalist identity is the defense of the nation against the foreign forces that are repeatedly attempting to subdue it. It emphasizes the importance of personal morality based on the Islamist idea that “abandoning Islam” leads to foreign occupation and subsequent misery and humiliation. In its emphasis on the role of the religious authorities in relation to the war effort, it also lends great importance to their fatwas as the legitimate guidance for the ruler and community.

Wa Islamah highlights the importance of obedience to the good ruler who wages jihad and the patriotism of Egyptians. It portrays Egyptians as docile people with massive inert power that manifests itself when there is a need to defend the nation from its external enemies. As one teacher put it while explaining the incidents in one chapter,

Qutuz called for *jihad*, and this is the character of Egyptians ... the Egyptian personality is moderate in its reactions ... When *jihad* was announced, people refrained from vice and sins, they refrained from alcohol consumption, houses of worship filled up ... this is a trait in Egyptians from ancient times and still exists until now. The true caliber of Egyptians shows itself in trying times.

Like most historical narratives in the textbooks, it is not primarily concerned with the conditions of ordinary people, justice, poverty or inequality. For example, it does not discuss the burden of the war effort or the huge taxes levied on citizens. Instead, Egyptians are portrayed as willingly and honorably sacrificing for the nation. When the Mumluk princes refuse to continue funding the war effort, the ruler decides to take these funds by force. He then collects more money from every able Egyptian household and sends preachers across the country to emphasize the duty and virtue of supporting the (defensive) jihad effort. The ruler, Qutuz, is presented as heroic and exemplary, and the Egyptian people are praised for their sacrifices.

The climactic scene of the novel underscores its key message and explains its name. The long-lost love of the lead character, the warrior Qutuz, is injured in battle. Qutuz runs to her and cries out, "O my beloved, O my dear," but she urges him to continue fighting and says, "Do not say 'O my beloved', say *wa Islamah* [O my Islam]." Defense of the (Muslim) nation, Islam and "Jihad"—the name of the beloved of Qutuz – are all merged into a heroic narrative centered on a military leader and the struggle against external enemies. As one teacher commented in explaining the final scene and its key phrase, "so this sentence, if you understand it correctly, means: do not put personal interests above the interests of the nation." The novel crystallizes the selective manner in which Islam is constructed and stripped of emancipatory and oppositional potential. The jihad to which the novel refers, and promotes throughout, is the jihad against the aggression of a foreign "other," not against the vices of the self or local tyrants, and not the struggle to establish a better or just society.

Across the different educational stages, the Arabic Language curriculum presents a thoroughly selective, sanitized, simplistic and depoliticized image of Egyptian, Arab and Muslim literature, intellectual heritage and history. Apart from *Wa Islamah*, the other long novel that students are exposed to in the preparatory stage is *Uqba bin Nafi'*, a story about the Islamic military leader who conquered North Africa. Such detailed, immersive narratives are not afforded more secular themes, not even the lives and work of pre-1952 nationalist figures, which are dealt with in short reading passages. In fact, Egyptian students do not study the major works of Egyptian or Arabic Literature in any systematic manner. They study one novel by the Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (but not in the secondary stage). This is his *Kifah Tiba*, a fiction imagined in ancient Egypt that also describes wars against a foreign power that was ruling the country. They do not study his celebrated *Cairo Trilogy*, for

example, in which the anti-colonial Egyptian nationalist struggle is a key theme and nuanced social criticism is central to the drama. They also study one book (*The Days Al-Ayyam*) about the childhood and life of the major intellectual figure Taha Hussein. They do not, of course, study his effectively banned major work *The Great Upheaval/ Al-Fitna Al-Kubra*, which dissects the critical events surrounding the Muslim civil wars that created the Sunni–Shia divide and fundamentally shaped the course of Muslim history, dynasties and jurisprudence.

History textbooks also present a simplistic and narrow vision of human history, where other cultures and their contributions are largely ignored, and Muslim history is voided of its richness and complexity. The 2009 *History for the General Secondary Certificate*, for example, not only places the origin of all virtue, civilization and innovation in Islam (and sometimes Ancient Egypt) but also depoliticizes and obscures difference, hierarchy, ideology, division and struggle in the history of Egypt and Islam. The result is that students are left with an idealized picture of Muslim history and know little about the violence and injustice that plagued different Muslim caliphates. History textbooks devote very little attention to the domestic practices of the Muslim empires, the evolution of Muslim legal thought, practice and institutions, or the conflicts between different Muslim political forces. They focus instead on the struggles of Muslim empires against other empires. Islam is portrayed as the source of justice, equality, freedom, fraternity, tolerance and democracy. This contributes to a view of Muslim history as one of unity, power and piety, reinforcing the central “Islamist creed” that Islam is “the solution” that has historically led and should lead, if followed correctly, to “power”: national independence, dominance and prosperity (see Sobhy 2007, 2009).

Furthermore, as witnessed in different classrooms, the curriculum as taught in the schools in the different years is even more deeply embedded in a “mainstream Islamist” (Sobhy 2009) sensibility. For example, the following Arabic Language passage for grammar practice given by a teacher in a second secondary general classroom puts forward the key Islamist premise that links personal religious adherence with national and global security, prosperity and progress:

Humanity will not be able to enjoy safety and stability except if it returns to the heavenly messages, to their refined values, free from personal interests and extremism, at which point every citizen feels that he is responsible before God, so he performs his work with sincerity and honesty, watching his Lord, delivering the dues of his nation, and this security predominates, and love spreads among the children of the nation, and they reach heights of progress and prosperity.

Similarly, this passage for grammar practice from one of the most popular external textbooks (*Al-Mu'alim: Arabic Language for Second Secondary General*, 2009–2010, 296) states:

The world is about to explode with weapons in the hands of powerful states. People are starting to be fed up with the control of poor states by rich states. Famines are usurping souls, while grains are thrown into the sea so that they become scarce. Is there a way to remedy this condition? The way is religion, which mandated the meeting of people on the basis of compassion, mercy and cooperation, a meeting that should bear its fruit. There is no way for the removal of vice from the world except through religion, for it tames instincts, strengthens the soul, establishes justice, organizes human relations on the basis of virtuous morals, and shows that (virtue) and justice do not discriminate between races, but are applied to the people of the earth.

The message is that injustice and inequality in the world is caused by powerful, rich, exploitative (implicitly non-Muslim) countries that dump grains into the ocean while poor people die of famine. However, if these nations faithfully adhere to religion, then justice, mercy and cooperation will prevail. Injustice and exploitation are externalized to the non-Muslim realm, and justice and prosperity are premised on adherence to religion.

Postcolonial constructions of citizenship and nationalism have also been erased from contemporary textbooks. These constructions focused on discourses of liberation from imperialism, solidarity with the struggles of Arab peoples and other oppressed peoples, freedom from exploitation, expanding social provision and the equality of women. The History textbook examined for this chapter (*HGSC*) places the origin of virtue, civilization and innovation in either Ancient Egypt or Islam. Little discussion is offered of any intellectual trend in Egypt or elsewhere in the Arab World (from socialism to political Islam to Baathism or Wahabism), of internal or regional struggles, hierarchies, differences or divisions. These selective silences are reflected in other History textbooks, where, in reference to the postcolonial regime for example, only the nationalization of foreign companies is portrayed as a positive nationalist act: There is no reference to the nationalization of local industries or to socialist legislation, practices, symbols or rhetoric (see MARED 2010). Similarly, the Sadat era is reduced to the declaration of a new constitution and the 1973 war, without any reference to economic liberalization, openings to Islamism or even Sadat's assassination. However, two themes do represent continuity with the Nasser era (1954–70): glorifying the president and sanctifying the military. Discussions of nationalism in the textbooks are permeated with references to the president's actions and pronouncements as examples of true patriotism and

wise stances. The military is constructed as the final savior and ultimate guarantor of the state.

Finally, the textbooks implicitly construct Egyptian nationalism as something of the past. Ancient Egypt and its accomplishments are constructed as key sources of national pride. Nationalism is embodied in historical struggles against foreign occupations of Egyptian land. Poetry pieces about love of the nation and Egyptian nationalist writings typically came from the pre-1952 era during the struggle against the British – but *not* from the more revolutionary phases of that struggle, such as the Urabi Revolt or the 1919 Revolution. Not only is Egyptian nationalism about relations with the “other,” but it is also about relationships that are over and done with: foreign occupation or aggression.

The Good Citizen, Islam and Neoliberalism

The parameters of good citizenship are heavily embedded in religious discourse across the textbooks. The first five characteristics of the “Good Citizen” listed in *NEFST* include “Faith in God Almighty and adherence to the correct teachings of religion and respect for the beliefs of others”; “Integrity and diligence in work in pursuit of pleasing God, whether this work is religious or worldly”; and “Commanding virtue and forbidding vice through wisdom and good advice in his social sphere, in application of God’s words: ‘Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance’” (Surat al-Nahl, verse 125⁴; *NEFST*, 20). The idea of commanding virtue and forbidding vice in particular is often used to pressure others into Islamic observance and is the basis of the establishment of public morality police in countries like Saudi Arabia.⁵ The Good Citizen should also possess a host of additional civic, patriotic and “modern” qualities, values and attitudes. These include awareness of his civil and political rights and duties; a sense of initiative and positive participation in developing his society, including volunteer work and participation in elections and political party work; the use of scientific methods of thinking; moderation and acceptance of the other; the preservation of national unity; avoidance of passivity, selfishness, self-centeredness and apathy; pride in and belonging to the nation, its history and civilization; and faith in one’s skills and abilities, and developing

⁴ English translation of Holy Quran 16:125 (Ali 2001).

⁵ This verse could also be taken as inviting non-Muslims to join Islam, but this is not a theme in the textbooks.

them in order to contribute to the elevation of the nation (*NEFST*, 20). This text exemplifies a pattern whereby citizenship, national belonging and piety are discussed together, mainly in order to emphasize the citizen's duties to elevate the nation and observe religious injunctions in ways that obscure notions of citizenship as entitlement to rights.

There are important overlaps between some of these discourses and the promotion of neoliberal "active citizenship" in citizenship education curricula across the world. In fact, the Mission Statement of the Egyptian Ministry of Education in the late Mubarak era explicitly referred to active citizenship: "The Ministry of Education fosters equal opportunities for all Egyptian students to realize a quality education that empowers them to become creative, life-long learners who are tolerant critical thinkers with strong values and a wide range of skills for active citizenship and dynamic participation in an ever-changing global society" (MOE 2007, 76). New secondary school civics curricula across liberal democracies since the 2000s emphasize "active" engagement within the polity, presumably in response to the perception of young people as disengaged from political involvement. The language in these curricular documents "obliges the individual to be both responsible to the state and self-regulating so as to lessen the claims made upon the state" (Kennelly and Llewellyn 2011, 906). The idea of citizens being responsible for their conditions and the related narratives and process of responsabilization are central to neoliberalism. For Nikolas Rose, neoliberalism involves technologies of the self, or conduct of conduct, which in turn entail ongoing processes of responsabilization (1999). The neoliberal state seeks to create not only an individual who is an autonomous chooser and an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur managing his or her own life trajectories, but also "manipulatable" and continually encouraged to be "perpetually responsive" (Olssen 1996, 340).

Apart from its articulation of the Good Citizen around religious adherence, volunteerism and hard work, *NEFST* also devotes a chapter to describing the desirable individual qualities that lead to national progress. These values include time management, democracy, excellence in performing one's work and "community participation" (usually used to indicate charity and volunteerism). While these values are articulated as the "causes of the progress of advanced states," they are often framed within Islamic traditions, especially in the areas of democracy and excellence, and/or linked to the exemplary positions of President Mubarak. Thus, even in the deployment of modernist or neoliberal themes, Islamism, nationalism and glorification of the leader are used as frames of reference. The treatment of democracy in this textbook focuses on how the principles of democracy had their grounding in Islamic tradition

and how both the regime and the education system support democracy. The textbook emphasizes that Islam had called for democracy and its values and principles and applied those principles fourteen centuries ago while Europe was in the Dark Ages. The democratic principles of freedom of belief, fraternity, equality, individual accountability and popular consultation (*shura*) were given textual support from the Quran and the *hadiths*. The textbook defines democracy as a system in which “power is left to those whom the people chose to handle their affairs, expanding the circle of people’s participation in responsibility and decision making,” and in which citizens have the right to express their opinions in complete freedom through legitimate channels, making the people the decision-makers and participants in directing the agencies of the state and in exerting oversight over them (*NEFST*, 65).

To clarify the parameters of good citizenship, the textbook provides descriptions of bad citizens as well. From the very first pages – following the example of nationalist sacrifice by Mubarak in relation to Taba – students are invited to reflect, by way of contrast, on “individuals who commit unacceptable acts in society, from crimes and drug dealing, to abuse of public funds, non-compliance with the manners of public roads, lack of environmental awareness, lack of respect for the rights of others and many of the events we see in newspapers and different media day and night” (*NEFST*, 14). The nationalist/patriotic president who takes a stance (in relation to the other) is contrasted with the bad citizen who commits unacceptable, unethical and illegal acts. The textbook reflects the mantra of “science and faith,” championed by Sadat as the key values guiding the nation. Beyond the focus on religion, role models to emulate are primarily scientists, but also famous scholars of Egypt and Egypt’s only Nobel Laureate for Literature. According to the textbook, Egyptian models to be proud of in all fields, like “Avicenna, Jamal Hamdan, Mustafa Musharafa, Naguib Mahfouz, Ahmad Zuweil, Magdi Yacoub and other Arab scientists across history,” are presented to students “in order to take them as role models and become acquainted with their scientific achievements” (*NEFST*, 14).

As apparent from the definition of the good citizen, political rights were interestingly highlighted, despite the repression and actual restrictions on their practice (see Chapter 1). In terms of political rights, *NEFST* presents democracy as a positive value, but does not indicate concrete rights or liberties associated with it. It then describes the state’s “support for democracy” and its protection and defense of freedoms by highlighting Mubarak’s supposed emphasis on “consulting with opposition leaders in all situations that necessitate the adoption of a unified stance” and his insistence on the right of young people to “participate

with their opinions in confronting society's problems" (*NEFST*, 67). The textbook then moves to the Ministry of Education's efforts in "supporting democracy" through initiatives such as debating societies, the school parliament and the TV show "A Dialogue with Adults," through the introduction and deepening of concepts of tolerance, national unity and rejection of extremism, and by convening videoconferences with teachers to receive their feedback (*NEFST*, 68). As elaborated in Chapter 6, such activities hardly reach the majority of schools due to poor resources. The text then explains that democracy and social peace are the natural outcomes of a good education. The student who has been trained to understand dialogue and who courageously expresses opinions and accepts those of others will be raised with the seeds of democracy within them and become a responsible citizen who participates with conscious will in choosing his leaders, a believer in teamwork who is able to coexist with others (*NEFST*, 68).

Freedom of speech was therefore the main citizenship right affirmed by the textbooks, even if it was often denied in reality. There is little mention or explanation of other political rights, the political system or existing political parties in this textbook, although such theoretical explanations exist in other textbooks. As outlined previously, within its articulation of nationalism and patriotic behavior, the textbook already delineates the acceptable parameters for participation of the citizen in political change. In particular, protest as a mode of political expression and participation, even within sanctioned nationalist themes, has been erased from national history and from discussions of patriotic behavior. With the effective blocking of other institutional channels of participation, however, the vilification of protest amounts to a denial of participation rights.

Beyond this supposed support for democracy, other social, economic and political rights receive minimal coverage in all the textbooks. There is no mention of social justice or social and economic rights, as found in Nasser-era textbooks, for example. The focus is instead on the role of the citizen in elevating the nation through sacrifice, piety, charity and entrepreneurship. It is again *NEFST* among all the textbooks examined that provides the most explicit definition of the developmental ideology of the regime, which seeks to displace the responsibility for social issues, social provision and indeed renaissance, onto society. A lesson entitled "The Role of the State in Human Development" is divided into brief sections on education, training, health, the environment and self-education. Lists of laws issued, national conferences held and a declaration that education is Egypt's National Project were presented as demonstrating the interests of the state and its achievements in relation to human development. These were followed by a section on "Activating the Role of Civil

Society in Human Resource Development,” where “civil society” is associated with the Mubarak era in particular; is portrayed as having contributed to solving transportation, education and housing problems; and is the hope for a true renaissance:

The term “civil society” began to appear after President Mubarak came to power in the beginning of the eighties, that is, society with all its civil nongovernmental and non-profit organizations and institutions that contribute to economic social and political activities and conclusively and effectively confront the chronic problems the state is suffering from in the fields of transportation, education and housing. It is futile to rely completely on the state to solve these problems, and the hope in bringing about a real renaissance will not come about except by reviving the institutions and organization of civil society. (*NEFST*, 50)

Civil society in the regime’s discourse is made up of organizations that provide services and assistance to the poor, most of which are either faith-based or funded through international organizations. To be clear, civil society is not used to refer to advocacy groups, professional syndicates or human rights organizations, which are the targets of periodic repression and condemnation. Nonetheless, the president is indirectly credited with this explosion of charitable citizenship.

A brief discussion of globalization sheds further light on the ideological direction promoted by the textbooks. The text outlines the arguments put forward by critics of globalization (inequality, unemployment, environmental impact, Americanization, the power of multinational corporations) and its proponents (offering technological solutions in many areas, better products due to competition, greater international cooperation). The text concludes that globalization is simply a fact that has taken over the world and “cannot be avoided by hiding in the caves of the past,” even if inequality is caused by global patterns and is unavoidable (*NEFST*, 35). The prescription that emerges from the discussion is interesting. The role of Egyptians in a world defined by technological, communications and economic change is to achieve excellence in their work in order to perfect local production, to buy local products to reduce unemployment, to refrain from the overzealous buying of unnecessary foreign products and to arm themselves with spiritual values and avoid psychological illnesses (*NEFST*, 30). These prescriptions return to the role of religion as a coping mechanism and lay the basis for blaming the citizen for the consequences of these economic policies in terms of the decimation of local industries, balance of payment deficits and personal responsibility for productivity.

Not only do the textbooks ignore most categories of rights in relation to the state, but they also reflect a denial of forms of exclusion and difference relating to class, region, gender or religion. The textbooks

either downplay or ignore various forms of difference, poverty and inequality. In particular, the Islamization of the public sphere since Sadat has implied a fundamental shift in the position of Egypt's Christians as equal citizens of the state. Since the late 1980s, Coptic and secular figures have had no success in replacing the memorization of Quranic selections in Arabic textbooks with other material, in reducing the overall Islamic orientation of the texts. Coptic history has always been part of history curricula (Abdou 2017b), and Mubarak-era textbooks do explicitly highlight "national unity," respecting the "other" and combatting extremism as aspects of good citizenship.⁶ However, the frame of reference for discussing political and moral issues is clearly Islamic, emphasizes the supremacy of Islam over all other religions and presents it as the basis and predecessor of all human, and especially European, intellectual and scientific achievements. Some scholars have argued that forcing Islamism into textbooks is not only aimed at establishing an Islamic and Islamist identity but also serves to humiliate and disparage minorities. Thus, in one example, the few pages devoted to Coptic history in one textbook end with an assignment to "write ten lines to the Danish cartoonist who maligned the Prophet" (MARED 2010). Toronto and Eissa have similarly argued, with reference to Islamic Education textbooks, that they exhibit "the inherent contradiction in promoting tolerance and respect for other religions and at the same time including material that instills an exclusivist, triumphalist attitude by emphasizing the pre-eminence of the Muslim community" (2007, 49; see also Groiss 2004).⁷ It could be argued that the instances in which

⁶ Based on a textual analysis of Egyptian history textbooks from 1890 to 2017, Abdou (2017b) finds that, with few exceptions – and contrary to widely circulated claims – Coptic history has consistently been included in official textbooks, but allocated a disproportionately smaller space compared to other eras. He also shows how Copts are constructed in these historical portrayals as a largely persecuted and victimized people (by Egypt's Roman rulers), with few contributions – implying a narrative arc of decline.

⁷ In his detailed report on the content of Egyptian school textbooks of all grades and subjects, Groiss (2004) documented the passages that relate to Jews, Christians, war, peace, the Palestinian problem, jihad, terror and tolerance. Groiss, who has conducted similar studies of Saudi Arabian, Iranian and Palestinian Authority textbooks, surveyed 103 Egyptian textbooks for use in primary, preparatory and secondary state schools and 16 textbooks for use in preparatory and secondary schools within the religious Azhari school system, published between 1999 and 2002. His conclusions can be summarized as follows: Judaism and Christianity are both respected as monotheistic religions and despised as unbelief; the Christian West is not presented as a rival as such, but the Crusades and modern Imperialism are vividly described using hostile language; Egyptian textbooks endeavor to foster a positive attitude among students toward the Copts, who are depicted as an integral part of the Egyptian nation (although incidents of conflict are not discussed); the image of the Jews, both historically and at present, is very negative; Zionism is portrayed negatively; the Middle East conflict is depicted as a

religious faith (without framing it in Islamic terms) is articulated as the basis of good citizenship constructs ideal citizenship as inclusive of both Muslims and Christians. However, the saturation of the public sphere and textbooks themselves with an Islamic framework can only be seen as undermining the inclusion of Christian citizens.

When mentioned, sectarian tensions are portrayed as foreign directed, addressed by the declaration of a new Coptic national holiday by the “wise president,” and not really a problem because there is no discrimination in Egypt or fanaticism among its people. As the textbook puts it, “President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak affirmed this fact by issuing his important political decision whereby the 7th of January [Coptic Christmas] became a national holiday in Egypt for all Muslims and Christians, which is a clear message to anyone who dares to tamper with national unity in our dear Egypt” (*NEFST*, 72). Another section in *NEFST* explains the role of the state in supporting national unity and preserving society’s values, and provides the awkward example of the rejection of foreign intervention in educational curricula (*NEFST*, 30), a prominent theme of Islamist discourses on education discussed in Chapter 6. Egyptians are portrayed as a tolerant people “whose hearts fanaticism [has] not entered.” Sectarian incidents are condemned as attempts to weaken the nation linked to the “old attempts” of the British when they were occupying Egypt and trying to cause disunity by claiming to protect Coptic Christians. The latter, however, realized this plan and took part in demonstrations for the liberation of Egypt so that the conspiracies that caused strife between the sons of the same nation were destroyed. In this narrative, the external enemy was the cause of the problem, not any official or societal discourses or practices, and it was the Copts who chose to resist such attempts. The textbook affirms that all Egyptians have the same rights and duties, and that places of worship provide educational, health and cultural services to all Egyptians in all sectors of society without discrimination with the goal of developing society. It should still be noted that the discourses of the textbooks are still more tolerant than many variants of public discourse in the country. They therefore signal to students and teachers the parameters of sanctioned discourse about Christians, sectarian tensions and interfaith relations.

usurpation of Palestinian land by foreigners with the help of Western imperialism; the solution to the conflict depends on the Palestinians being granted their rights; the 1973 war is depicted as a major Egyptian victory; martyrdom for the nation is exalted; jihad is portrayed in its military sense only; and although there is a rejection of terrorism in principle, there is support for Palestinian operations in Israel.

Finally, gendered dimensions of citizenship in terms of disenfranchisement and discrimination are also hardly discussed. In relation to gender, a section of the Islamic Religious Education textbook outlines traditional female occupations as more appropriate for women (teacher, nurse) and explains the different rights to inheritance of women as commensurate with their different financial responsibilities. While the textbooks generally operate within traditional parameters and portrayals, they do not deploy the sexist and derogatory discourses that are widely employed in public and private discourses.

While *NEFST* provides the most explicit and extensive discussions of citizenship among all secondary stage textbooks, the corresponding textbooks in the general track, National Education textbook for first secondary (*NEFSG*) and National Education for the General Secondary Certificate (*NEGSC*), had a markedly different content and focus. The first secondary textbook, *NEFSG*, is divided into sections on the “Historical Importance of Egypt’s Location,” “the Genius of the Egyptian people” (focusing on the establishment of the first centralized state in history, and describing the apparatuses of the Ancient Egyptian state, the production of paper and its construction wonders), the Crusades and military responses to them. These are all topics covered elsewhere in Geography and History textbooks in the general secondary and earlier grades. The second part of the textbook discusses a number of modernist, liberal, nationalist and Islamist intellectual figures – notably ignoring leftist figures, including Rafa‘a al-Tahtawy, Muhammad Abdu, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayid, Sayyid Darwish and ‘A’isha Abdul Rahman. The presentations are very cursory and offer bullet points to be memorized as opposed to detailed narratives to reflect upon. For example, the section on the modernist Islamic thinker Muhammad Abdu emphasizes a number of discrete ideas: his respect for “the mind” (reason) and its use in interpreting the Quran, his rejection of blind adherence to tradition, the compatibility of Islam with the demands of modern times, the permissibility of relying on non-Muslims in areas that “benefit Muslims,” the permissibility of depositing money in savings accounts, encouragement to learn foreign languages, the notion that predestination does not imply surrender and despair but reliance on God through work, the importance of perseverance and trust in God, and finally his rejection and condemnation of Sufi Orders that ignore the value of work and call for life to be abandoned in the name of reliance on God. Despite the importance of these issues as topics for debate for the past century of Islamic thought, the textbook did little to invite students to reflect on them.

In terms of the parameters of citizenship, references to the rights to protection, provision and participation were mostly absent from the

general secondary textbooks as well. One telling exception is a brief mention of “social solidarity” in the third chapter of *NEGSC*, where the “achievement of the values of social solidarity” before 1952 includes introducing social insurance, pensions and insurance against old age and sickness. The example reflects three critical elements of official discourses. First, these rights are described as “Islamic” so that the Islamic frame of reference had to be prominent. The reference to Islamic values is not, however, employed to provide a religious basis for these forms of social protection as part of a more progressive understanding of Islam or of a religion-centered but right-based citizenship. Second, social solidarity is described in relation to “values,” not articulated as “rights” framed in terms of social justice, nor placed within a discourse on a welfare or developmental state. Third, it is the pre-1952 monarchical order, not the Nasser era, that is credited with the focus on social protection and public services. This reflects to some extent the hostility to the Nasser in official discourses since Sadat and Islamist influence on Arabic textbook authorship (Chapter 1). The text briefly indicates that social solidarity was expanded by the July Revolution and that recently the state has guaranteed the provision of services to its citizens through its specialized National Councils, such as the National Council for Women, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood and the National Council for Human Rights. The work of these councils is however very limited in terms of their impact on the ground, much of it in fact being funded by donor projects and private donors, not by the state.

While operating within the same framework as the textbook for technical education, notions of citizenship were not as explicitly articulated, the role of civil society and the importance of democracy were not stressed, and brief discussions of intellectual trends in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century were superficially introduced. On the one hand, it is possible that the “New Thought” of the National Democratic Party under Gamal Mubarak had not yet arrived to these general secondary textbooks. On the other hand, it was perhaps intentional that a nod toward rational moderate Islam was thought to be well suited and more legitimizing to present to middle-class students.

Citizenship rights are not referenced in any of the Arabic Language textbooks, except for a prominent focus on justice presented within an Islamic frame of reference. Two of the three Arabic Language textbooks examined open with readings on justice, which were fully based on and refer back to early Islam, the Quran and other foundational Islamic narratives. The first lesson in the technical track textbook (*ALTSTIAS*) presents a more explicitly Islamist discourse that links Islamic notions of

justice to the state, its governance and the condition of the nation. It explains that justice is the basis of religion, of governance and the civilizing of the world, stressing that the nation would be in good standing only if there is protection for the weak and the deprived. The stated “main ideas” of the lesson include the following: the justice of the ruler being to rule by what God has decreed; religion’s call to justice; the Prophet warning against injustice; the just having a high status among the people and being rewarded by God; the history of Islam as based on justice; and (caliph) Abu-Bakr establishing justice as the just Prophet had taught him. In the textbook for the General Secondary Certificate (*ALSSG*), the lesson on justice states that the whole history of Islam was established on the basis of justice alone and equality in all things, that Islam made justice the basis of all triumph and blessing, and that the unjust will be the fuel of hellfire. The main ideas given in the reading include themes such as: “the concept of justice in the Holy Quran”; “with Godly justice, the conditions of human societies improve”; and “justice is the first of God’s attributes, on which he establishes his creation.” Strikingly, the only readings that relate to state-society relations are entirely based on an Islamist frameworks, where the progress of the nation and the establishment of justice are premised on and stem from Islam in general, but not also on governance based on Islam. Nonetheless, even when Islam is associated with justice, there is no elaboration of concrete legal, political, economic or social rights that could be inspired by or derived from Islamic texts.

Two final examples show how the textbooks obscure citizenship rights and discuss them only via nationalist and religious tropes. A brief section in the general secondary History textbook describes the conditions of Egyptian society under British occupation. Here, poor social conditions are presented as a reason for rejecting British rule, and it becomes appropriate to demonstrate the injustice that befell the Egyptian people under occupation. The neglect of education by the British, its high fees and limited recipients are highlighted, as well as the introduction of English as the main language of instruction. Even the otherwise censored term “poverty” is used. The spread of feudalism, the unequal distribution of agricultural land and its concentration in the hands of the few are examples of the negative social realities under colonialism. Most peasants suffered extreme poverty (*mu’damin*) in this period, and workers had no rights protecting them from the oppression (*istibdad*) of their employers, nor any pension rights or social insurance, so that “major capitalists exploited workers in the worst manner.” This sudden snapshot of social conditions stands almost on its own in the entire textbook. There is no mention of how these conditions compared to those under the preceding

ruling dynasties, nor indeed the succeeding regimes, and certainly not to contemporary conditions. The passage is clearly an abridged remnant of Nasserite textbooks. However, it is telling that the only citizenship-related and ideological references – to capitalism, exploitation, poverty, social insurance and to “the people” as workers and peasants – retained in History textbooks several decades later are those that refer to conditions under rule by the “other”. The “other” can be held responsible for poverty, inequality and the lack of access to education, otherwise such terms and issues are almost never referenced. Another discussion of state provision and taxation policies in this textbook describes taxes on agricultural land under Islamic dynasties and their differentiation based on the religion of the taxed individual.⁸ This is followed by an explanation of the categories of distribution of *zakah* or religious alms to the poor and needy (in another rare mentions of “the poor”). Here, taxation is embedded in an Islamic framework and poverty is linked to the elective religious duty of the “individual” to pay alms.⁹ While Egypt’s experience of state socialism is given almost no treatment and portrayed in a more nationalist and less ideological light, even economic liberalization under Sadat is largely ignored, other than the focus on the 1973 war, construed as a decisive military victory for Egypt.

Arabic Essay Questions as Regime Messages

Arabic Language essay questions (*taʿbir*) in unified national examinations represent a key vehicle for expressing regime messages in the school system and offer a succinct distillation of nationalist messages in the curricula and how they are meant to be replicated. Essay questions are developed centrally each semester and can therefore be frequently updated. They also happen to be an arena in which oppositional discourses can be voiced, monitored and suppressed. The following are three indicative examples of essay topics from General Secondary Certificate final exams between 2002 and 2009 (Chapter 7 discusses post-2011 examples).¹⁰

⁸ *Khiraj* is typically levied on non-Muslims (an unspecified amount in the textbook, although 50 percent of the produce of Jewish lands is listed in the same lesson), and *zakah* is taken from Muslims or converts to Islam (10 percent). The *jizya*, another tax on non-Muslims, is mentioned, along with an explanation that it is not an Islamic innovation.

⁹ *Zakah* is not collected by the state in Egypt, making it far closer to charity than to a duty or entitlement of the citizen.

¹⁰ Past national exams can be requested from the Ministry’s archives, but they are also reprinted in external study guides.

- Love of the homeland is part of [religious] faith and should be translated into words and deeds. *Write expressing your noble feelings and [describing] what youth should do to serve their homeland.*
- Egypt will rise with the thought of its scientists, the arms of its youth, the flourishing of its economy, the strength of its army and its adherence to its religious values.
- Egypt, God's *kinana* [*lit.* quiver] on his earth, has unified its people and sacrificed its youth and its money to fight off the barbaric attacks of the Tartars and Europeans, and still has the prominence in defending its nation and unifying it. *Write about the role that Egypt undertook, and undertakes, in the defense of the Arab nation and achieving its unity.*

The framing of these essay topics builds on the overall spirit of the textbooks and succinctly reflects the key political messages that students are expected to echo. As apparent from the first essay topic, love of nation and faith are intimately linked, and students are expected to expound on their “noble feelings” of love for the nation. The other dominant themes are also well represented: including “science,” faith and the army as essential to national progress; Egypt being under constant external threat and supposedly continuing to “defend Arab causes”; and the duty of the young to serve their homeland. It is clear to students that only answers that fit very closely with the spirit and letter of textbook discourses will receive good marks.

Conversely, essays that do not follow the official line are expected to be marked down at the minimum or the student might receive a failing grade for the essay section, for the whole subject or to face even more dire consequences. Although most cases receive little or no national coverage, independent newspapers have reported on cases where students or teachers have been penalized for voicing opinions critical of the regime, however mildly. In one of the more highly publicized cases, a technical education student in Luxor attempted suicide in 2008 after failing to find employment because employers feared harassment by state security if they hired him. The student was famous for his phrase “an unjust leader and an oppressed people,” written across an examination answer sheet for which his school failed him in the final exams. In 2010, a preparatory school student who wrote an essay expressing dissent in her Arabic exam received a failing grade in this subject, underwent security investigations and would have had to repeat the year had her case not received national media attention. Teachers feel similarly monitored, and their every mark – in fact, anything they or their students write – may be scrutinized by supervisors and cause trouble with security personnel in the Ministry and beyond (see Chapter 1 on the securitization of

education). It is not only subject supervisors and other supervisors who monitor teachers. This surveillance may be coordinated with the security personnel in each school and educational district. In fact, throughout their own schooling and university years, teachers also undergo different forms of political and security screening, monitoring and investigation by state security for engagement in oppositional activities of any kind. On the other hand, students who do not wish to engage in flattery to the regime or give credence to its claims are able to choose nonpolitical essay questions, of which there is traditionally at least one topic among the three choices given in the final exam. These typically address issues relating to friendship and family, or the dangers of smoking or drug use among youth.

Author, Textbook, Teacher, Student

The preceding discussion may make the textbooks seem more coherent and developed than they really are. Most textbooks are structured in a very exclusionary manner in their presentation, content and expected modes of reproduction and assessment, and this is fully recognized by students and teachers alike. Textbooks are usually composed and often approached by students and teachers as sets of definitions, lists of events and dates, and likely exam questions, with “ideal answers” prepared by tutors and found in external textbooks. They were also not treated as exalted sources of authoritative knowledge. They were often dismissed as “stupid,” “retarded,” “garbage” and as “not reflecting reality,” and almost always condemned as too long and filled with useless detail (*hashw*). Engagement with textbook content seemed so limited that I sometimes doubted whether it was worthwhile studying it. However, textbooks are not just important for understanding the official tropes of imagined citizenship or how they are skewed in the educational sphere, but for appraising the legitimizing power of the state in how far these narratives are lived, appropriated or contested by students (Chapter 6). The textbooks and the diversity within them also indicate key struggles *within* the state.

The diversity and multiplicity in these official narratives indicate a state that is not a unitary entity putting forward one coherent message for young people across educational stages, tracks and subjects. The main source of this bounded diversity is not only competing voices and currents within the state bureaucracy, including Islamist-leaning staff in the Ministry of Education: It also stems from subject-related differences. Textbook authorship is a bureaucratically driven process in which all participants have been cleared by the security apparatus and they exercise

self-censorship based on their understanding of the red lines they are meant not to cross in relation to politically sensitive issues. The composition of authorship committees and their disciplinary backgrounds leave an undeniable mark on the textbooks.¹¹ For example, Arabic-language professors have a tendency to have Islamist sympathies. This may explain troubling patterns like the fact that Egyptian or Arab literature is hardly taught to Egyptian students in any meaningful manner, probably because its best works are not sufficiently Islamist or non-oppositional. History professors, conversely, typically have nationalist, leftist or liberal inclinations. Religious Education textbooks are greatly influenced by official religious institutions (al-Azhar and the Coptic Church). National Education authorship committees are sometimes composed of history and philosophy professors, and sometimes political science professors, who tend to be liberal and emphasize theoretical explanations and descriptions of political institutions.

Beyond their content, the wider institutional setting, assessment dynamics, presentation style, teacher training, attitudes and values all determine what actually arrives to students from these textbooks. Textbooks are taught (or not so well taught) within a particular schooling context. The nature of assessment in the system, which especially involves exam-oriented tutoring and pervasive cheating (Chapter 2), determines if and how the texts are presented. That is, students might pay for one or two revision sessions for a pass/fail subject like National Education, but its classes are often cancelled or taken over by other teachers, and student knowledge of this material is patchy at best. The content and message of the texts is mediated by teachers and, importantly, by private tutors operating outside the formal system. Textbooks do not speak in the classroom. Teachers speak for them and students receive them, and they are mediated by the discursive field in which they arrive.

Notably, if the textbooks were taught in a cultural context that is not so saturated with Islamist discourse, the same textbooks could be presented and received very differently. To give one example, on a rare occasion when National Education was actually taught in a classroom during my time in the schools, the main message of the first lesson of the book (discussed earlier) was that believing in God is the basis of citizenship and the definition of the Good Citizen. This was the point the teacher repeated over and over in between her admissions that she was not familiar with the material and her complaints that this was not her subject

¹¹ I do not detail these issues for each subject, but scholars like Ehaab Abdou (2017a) have described relevant aspects of the ideological battles over the country's modern education and textbook content.

of specialization. While religious adherence as a component of good citizenship was indeed listed explicitly and prominently in the textbook, other themes were also mentioned, including respect for the beliefs of others, knowledge of civic and political rights, and participation in political and volunteer work. The teacher, however, seemed to be unwilling, unqualified or unsure about how to elaborate on them. As Khalil (2009) notes, when it comes to intolerance and discrimination, the flaws of these textbooks are multiplied many times over when they are interpreted by teachers in classrooms.

While students mostly engaged with the texts instrumentally and with distance and indifference, classroom commentaries of the official curriculum were made with humor and ridicule, especially with regard to the provision of social services. For example, when commenting on the state's achievements, one teacher in the girls' private school simply changed his tone to convey sarcasm, employing rhetorical questions: "The state provides what, children? It provides everything for us." This kind of subversion was far more common, at least in the research schools and in my presence, than more overt and elaborate contestation. This type of ridicule was, however, applied to discourses on the state but not to discourses that invoked religion and generated considerable deference, as elaborated in Chapter 6.