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### **Images of Arabs and Islam in Israeli Textbooks**

The following is a synopsis of the CMIP research paper was presented by CMIP Project Director of Israeli Textbooks, Amos Yovel, at the symposium sponsored by the Truman Institute of Hebrew University entitled: *"We" and "Them" in Israeli and Palestinian Collective Memory*

Textbooks in Israel reflect the fact that Israeli society comprises a broad spectrum of worldviews and lifestyles. There are many expressions of sensitivity, empathy, respect for Israel, a yearning for peace and coexistence between the peoples, stories of friendship between Arabs and Jews. At the same time they also contain stereotypes, prejudices and pejoratives. Two examples that reflect the two poles of the spectrum between arrogance on the one hand, and education towards openness and refraining from prejudices on the other.

A first-grade reader in the ultra-Orthodox stream presents the following story: "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, came to the Ishmaelites and asked them: 'Do you want to receive the Torah?' They said: 'What is written in it?' He said to them: 'Thou shalt not steal'. They said to Him: 'We cannot accept the Torah, it is difficult for us not to steal.' And so, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, went from nation to nation, and not one of them wanted to receive the Torah. When He went to the Jewish people, they immediately said: 'We will do and we will hear.'" (45, Everything in its Time, first-grade reader, 1995, pp. 233-234)

A seventh-grade reader used in the state-run educational stream states the following: "Many people think: The dove is a bird that pursues peace. This belief is incorrect; it is a prejudice: people believe it without checking it. There are a lot of prejudices. For example:

1. The Jews control the world and exploit all those who live in it.
2. The blacks are inferior, they are incapable of being scientists.
3. The Arabs only understand the language of force.

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During the year, make a long list of prejudices. Write them down and keep them in a special folder called, 'That's What They Say, But It's Not True - Prejudices.' Try to find a drawing or caricature that fits each prejudice. Be ready to explain orally why these are prejudices."

(78, I Understand, 1993, p. 259)

These are extreme examples. Between these two poles there exists an incredibly wide range of stories, literary figures, different approaches of analyzing the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, various beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes, hateful terms, displays of brotherhood and sometimes expressions of empathy towards distress of Arabs. It is impossible to characterize all Israeli textbooks as being the same. Yet, one can discern a clear distinction between two languages: in the state-run and the religious state-run streams the language is factual without using hateful terms and stereotypes, whereas in the Ultra-Orthodox stream there are derogatory adjectives, prejudices, patronizing expressions and disrespect to the Arabs.

Of course, using factual language does not mean that the authors remain neutral and do not express their position on controversial issues. Their standpoint is the Jewish, and in most cases the Zionist, position regarding the Arab-Israel conflict.

In the report we examine the books that are currently being used in the three streams within the Israeli education system: the general state-run stream, the religious state-run stream, and the ultra-Orthodox ("Independent") stream. 360 books were examined from the Ministry of Education's list of approved books. 40 books (within the 360) were examined that are used in the ultra-Orthodox schools and are not included on the Ministry's list.

1. All of the books, without exception, begin with the basic assumption that the existence of a sovereign and independent Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael is legitimate and justified from every standpoint. In this respect there is no difference between the books of the Zionist streams and those with non-Zionist outlooks used by the Ultra-Orthodox and the "Post-Zionists".

2. In no book is there any indoctrination against the Arabs as a nation or any attack against Islam. On the contrary.

3. All of the books express a yearning for peace, coexistence and a situation in which there will be no wars. There are considerable differences in the way in which peace is presented and the ways to achieve it, but in no book is a war against Arabs trumpeted.

Let us begin with the question of recognition and disregard.

All of the books in the state-run and state religious streams determine that the two prominent subjects that gave rise to opposition by the Arabs were land purchases and the immigration of Jews, whose growing number was perceived as a threat by the Arabs. Presenting the motives for the Arabs' opposition does not mean that agreement with them is expressed in the books, but the fact that the information about the reasons for opposition is conveyed to the student develops within him an understanding and openness to the fears of the Arabs. In any case, there is no ignoring or holding back of information relevant to the student making a judgment on the causes of the conflict from its beginning.

The situation is different in the Ultra-Orthodox stream. Here the Arab's position is presented as being one of constant hatred that is independent of political,

economic or military circumstances, and which stems from the difference between Jews and Arabs. According to this approach, Arab hatred cannot be changed. Religious explanation is also offered for the Arab hatred:

**"Ongoing Conflict Halakha - It is known that Isa hates Jacob**

Arab countries feast their eyes on Israel's territory, arguing that Jewish Israel is a foreign implant in the very heart of Arab states. The Palestinian Charter states that a holy war - a jihad - must be undertaken to liberate Israel-Palestine from the Jews. Not only the countries bordering on Israel act against it, but the rest of the Arab countries as well." (364, **The Near East**, p.39)

History books used in the general and state religious streams, which deal with the history of Zionism and Jewish settlements in Eretz Yisrael, provide the students with the various approaches and positions which existed in the Zionist movement vis-a-vis the Arabs. The student is even presented with internal criticism by central leaders over the behavior of Jews in certain instances, and is exposed to arguments raised by important Zionist leaders, that Arab fears over Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael must be understood, and that ways for rapprochement with them must be found, in order that they accept the Zionist enterprise, or at least not oppose it. In many books the message is conveyed to the student that it is important to get to know the Arabs, their religion, language and culture, and there are also displays of empathy, understanding for their distress, respect for their culture and their way of life.

In both the state-run and religious state-run streams Islam is described with respect. All the books elaborate in detail how Mohammed established Islam and explain the basic fundamentals of Islam in a factual, objective description. Many books emphasize that Islam is closer to Judaism than to Christianity.

Most of the books present Jerusalem as a holy city to Jews, Muslims and Christians. They emphasize non-Jewish religions' emotional attachment to Jerusalem. In literary anthologies there are poems describing people from the three religions living side by side in friendship, and the message is optimism about the possibility that peaceful coexistence is feasible. At the same time some books of the Ultra-Orthodox stream ignore the affinity of other religions' affinity to the city.

"Your injured head still waits/Woe unto us - for gentiles have wounded you...  
Your ribs have been stabbed, Jerusalem/by piercing arrow crosses?  
And rounded crescents/that insolently dot the horizon".  
(**Our Childhood** 6, p. 277)

The political controversy about Jerusalem is referred to only in a few books.

In many books, of all the streams, there are expressions of yearning for peace. In general, the peace is perceived as wishful thinking, as something unattainable.

"But peace; real peace,/This is a wish, this is a dream.  
We will all seek peace,/Always peace, not combat, not fire.  
For this, we will all hope;/There shall be peace upon Israel!"  
(204, **The Way of Words**, B 1993, p. 107)

The contribution of the Arabs to human culture is described in many books. "Despite the religious split which divided believers in the empire, a rich Arab culture developed in it...the Muslims transferred numbers, which replaced Roman numerals, which were not convenient for arithmetic functions. They also translated into Arabic the rich literature of the Greeks, which dealt with philosophy, science and medicine...However, the Arabs were not simply **Cultural**

**middlemen**, they were also **creators of culture**. For example, they were the first to discover the existence of infectious diseases and to build public hospitals. Because of their considerable contribution to various scientific fields, there are disciplines that to this day are called by their Arabic names, such as algebra. The Islamic religion also influenced the development of culture. The obligation to pray in the direction of Mecca led to the development of astronomy...The duty to make a pilgrimage developed geography and gave a push to the writing of travel books which helped develop trade...

In many literary anthologies there are stories about friendships between Jewish and Arab children or adults. Some stories start out with suspicion toward the Arab that stems from preconceived negative notions about Arabs. During the course of the stories, the suspicion disappears and in its place friendship develops. The meaning is obvious: on the personal level, in daily life, the stereotype does not exist. It is simply wrong. Several readers feature stories in which a Jewish narrator tells of an Arab friend who fled to another country and became a refugee. These stories express much sorrow over the separation from the Arab friend. The readers also include stories on assistance given by Jews to Arabs and by Arabs to Jews.

One who reads Israeli textbooks of the state-run and religious state-run streams gets the impression that there is a sincere effort to transcend hostility, to remove stereotypes, and to build a basis toward coexistence and mutual respect between the two peoples.