

Conclusion

Since the mid-nineties of the last century the Palestinian people has begun a phase of educational self-determination. The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education began exercising its right to administer the affairs of the educational system. The first thing it started [to do] was to build and plan a curriculum that will revolve around a Palestinian national identity. Great efforts have been made to ensure that this identity will have, as its motto, [a sense of] belonging and national unity, in addition to cultural openness.

Introduction, **Civic Education, Grade 4, Part 2 (2004) page not numbered**

This paragraph, taken from one of the school textbooks of the latest issue, presents in a nutshell the PA official perception of the essence of the Palestinian curriculum. Although cultural openness is considered to be one of the pillars thereof, the emphasis is put on Palestinian national identity, which is dealt with in the PA textbooks not only in cultural and political terms, but also from a civic angle, advocating ideals of civil society such as human rights, tolerance, democracy etc., to an extent that is hardly found in the curricula of neighboring Arab countries.

Within this context, what is the PA textbooks' attitude to the "other" and to peace?

We have by now acquired sufficient source material for a thorough study of this question. With the latest publication of school textbooks in 2003/4, two-thirds of the entire Palestinian school curriculum has been completed. Students of eight grades out of twelve, namely, grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9, have been provided with new, original Palestinian, textbooks. One additional book has been introduced into the curriculum of each of grades 5 and 11. The PA production of textbooks since 2000 has so far yielded 132 books and 4 teacher's guides, in addition to 2 editions of an atlas that was published by non-governmental bodies but has been approved for use in the PA schools. Although we still have to wait for the remaining textbooks to appear, we are now in a position to answer the above-mentioned question, based on the findings we already have.

To begin with, the latest issue features two important elements absent in all the earlier published books. One is the mention of the mutual recognition by the PLO and Israel under the Oslo Accord of 1993. The other is the presentation of that accord as a peace agreement between the two parties. But these two additions hardly change the overall picture even in this latest issue, because the manifestations of non-recognition of the State of Israel and the mention of a violent liberation struggle against Israeli occupation are far

more numerous. Also, a regression has been spotted in this latest issue, as the earlier recognition of the ancient Israelite kingdoms in the Holy Land is now absent. In short, the general trends within the PA school textbooks remain basically the same throughout the whole series of publications, though there may be changes of nuance.

The general trends of the PA school textbooks regarding the crucial issues of the attitude to the “other” and to peace, as they appear in the latest issue, can thus be summed up as follows, using the criteria of UNESCO and CMIP that appear in the Introduction:

1. Lack of adequate and objective information about the “other” – whether Jews, Israelis, Christians and the West. Judaism and Christianity are not discussed (the subject entitled “Christian Religious Education”, which is an integral part of the Palestinian curriculum – although not in this latest issue – is studied by Christian students alone). Judaism is just referred to as a religion based on a book revered by Islam. Basic facts about Jewish history and civilization are missing from the textbooks, as well as basic facts about Israel, its society, culture, etc.
2. The “other” is not recognized. Israel is not found on any map, except in one map showing the 1949 armistice lines, where it is named “the Jewish State”. Israeli regions, cities and sites are presented as Palestinian and pre-1967 Israeli territory is referred to as Palestinian or by circumlocutions such as “the Green Line” or “the lands of 1948”. The borderline between “Palestinian occupied territories” and “Israel-proper” is often blurred. Israel’s status as a sovereign state is not recognized, nor is the status of Jerusalem as its official capital. Jerusalem in the Palestinian textbooks is exclusively Arab and serves as the capital of Palestine which, on certain occasions, replaces Israel as the sovereign state in the region. The Israelite or Jewish historical past in the Holy Land and in Jerusalem in particular is ignored, and even implicitly denied, as shown, for example, by the Arabization of the Canaanites in the Palestinian textbooks, and by the omission of centuries of Israelite statehood from a historical list. Such is the fate as well of the Jewish holy places in the country, including Jerusalem. Moreover, the 5.5 million Jewish citizens of today’s Israel are not counted as inhabitants of the country in any chart or other demographic information, which indicates the illegitimacy of their mere presence there in Palestinian eyes.
3. The “other” is also stereotyped. This is the case with the Jews, who are portrayed in a negative light, in the context of their relations with Jesus Christ and the Prophet Muhammad, where – in the latter case – it is insinuated that they are traitors. The Jewish national movement – Zionism – is portrayed as a colonialist movement that

planned to expel the Palestinians from their land from its very inception. Similarly, Israel has only a negative side: It is oppressive, aggressive, an occupying entity that violates human rights, tries to obliterate the Palestinian national personality, and causes the Palestinians physical and mental harm. The West too is stereotyped, with Imperialism being its most evident characteristic in modern times. No Jewish or Israeli individual of our time is ever depicted in the textbooks. Nor is the slightest reference to possible friendly relations between Jewish and Arab individuals ever made.

4. *Though open hateful expressions against Jews and Israelis are relatively few (see, for example, the reference to the Jews of Khaybar in Arabia as employers of trickery against the early Muslims), there is enough hostile wording to create prejudice and hatred. Such are the expressions that appear in the sub-chapter "Israel's Image".*
5. *The Arab-Israeli conflict and the history of the Palestinian problem are not presented in an objective and honest manner. The textbooks portray the conflict as one between aggressors (Israel) and victims (the Palestinians), not as a conflict between two national movements, each with its own legitimate rights and interests. According to the textbooks, the eventual outcome of the war of 1948, namely, the occupation of parts of Palestine and the emergence of the refugee problem, was actually planned by Zionism fifty years earlier. The books fail to mention the fact that that war was initiated by the Arabs in defiance of the UN resolution, which had partitioned Palestine between the two rival communities. Nor is there any indication in any of the books that the idea of partition has been internalized or accepted and there is much in them to indicate the opposite.*
6. *As regards peace, in spite of the evident progress mentioned above, the textbooks still do not advocate peace with Israel. Rather, they envisage a violent and bloody liberation struggle the geographic limit of which is never specified. The practice of exalting Jihad and martyrdom, noted in earlier textbooks, continues here as well, though to a somewhat lesser extent. Palestinian individuals who were killed or imprisoned by Israel after having been involved in armed attacks against Israelis are looked upon as martyrs and prisoners-of-war, respectively.*
7. *Beyond the disturbing cases of inaccurate information in the textbooks that have already been mentioned, such as the maps without Israel's name on them, the population figures without the 5.5 million Jews being part of them, the distorted presentation of the history of the conflict, etc., emphasis should be placed on the gross falsification of history as reflected by the general trend, so common in Arab historiography, of posthumous Arabization of all ancient nations of the Middle East and North Africa. This trend finds its expression in the Palestinian textbooks with regard to the ancient Canaanites and Jebusites, who are claimed to have been Arab,*

contrary to historical, ethnographic, linguistic and archeological evidence which – in the case of the Canaanites – establishes their being part of the north-western branch of the Semitic race, rather than of the southern, Arab, one. In other words, they were closer to the ancient Hebrews than to the Arabs. As for the Jebusites, the only source that mentions them is the Bible and it does not provide enough information that would enable us to determine their racial descent.

8. *Are equal standards applied? As already mentioned, only the Palestinians have national rights and are historically connected to the Holy Land – according to the textbooks. The Jews are not recognized as having parallel rights or connections. Another field where equal standards are not applied is that of education to tolerance. This exalted value is applied to various types of human beings. None of them, however, include Jews or Israelis.*

All these findings indicate that the PA textbooks are still below the international standards represented by the criteria developed by both UNESCO and CMIP, as far as the attitudes to the “other” and to peace are concerned. It seems to be too optimistic to expect a major change in this Palestinian approach in the upcoming issues of textbooks for grades 5, 10, 11 and 12 – in the light of the prevailing trends in the textbooks that have so far appeared. However, CMIP will continue its surveillance of the PA school textbooks till the end of the publication process.