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Newsletter June 2000 – Stereotypes In Palestinian Textbooks

The following CMIP research paper was presented by CMIP Director of Research, Itamar Marcus at the symposium sponsored by the Truman Institute of Hebrew University, entitled: **"We" and "Them" in Israeli and Palestinian Collective Memory**

Stereotypes in PA Schools

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace has reviewed over 160 Palestinian Authority (PA) school books and teacher's guides and has found negative stereotyping of Jews and Israel throughout the school system. This stereotyping is very broad based, attacking Jewish and Israeli belief, religion, behavior, and even negating Jewish national existence. Significantly, this stereotyping is not mere isolated name-calling. Rather there is an overt educational goal in much of the stereo typing of Jews, with two distinct educational messages. The first, an ideological message, involves the negation of the State of Israel's historical **right** to exist. The second, a current pragmatic message, involves portraying Israel and Jews as a genuine **danger** to Arabs, Muslims and Islam.

In teaching that Israel has no Right to exist, the four pillars of Judaism, the nation, religion, history, and land, are systematically denied, leaving 20th century Jews as imposters, pretending to be something they are not, as in the following examples:

The Jews "deluded themselves that their religious faith was sufficient to turn them into one nation"

[Modern Arab History and Contemporary Problems, Part Two, for Tenth Grade p. 49]

"The Zionists turn[ed] their attention towards Palestine as the national homeland of the Jews, while relying on false historical and religious claims."

[ibid p. 50]

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"The Jews claim that this is one of the places belonging to them and call it "The Western Wall", but this is not so."

[Reader and Literary Texts for Eighth Grade p. 103]

Even in the newest books produced by the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education, Jewish presence is totally erased from the Land of Israel. For example:

"Jerusalem [speaking to the students:] 'I have many Islamic holy places... [a list] As for my Christian holy places...[a list]"

[Palestinian National Education for 3rd Grade P. 14]

"Write down the names of the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem. Write down the names of the Christian holy places in Jerusalem."

[ibid. Page 15]

"Tourists from all over the world come to Palestine... Muslims come to visit ... Christians come to visit Bethlehem..."

[Ibid. p. 23]

The educational message: Christians and Muslims have a history here. Jews do not.

Tragically, this is not limited to the old generation of schoolbooks, as prominent Palestinian historians are quoted regularly presenting the identical distorted messages from every possible forum. Note the following: "Judaism is a part of our Arab Canaanite heritage ... This land is for us [Muslims] and for our brother Christians... This is our land, in which we have no partners, and no one aside from us has any historical connection to the land ...we are the owners of the land."

[Dr. Issam Sesalem, History lecturer at the Islamic University in Gaza, PA television, May 14, 1999.]

This is what is being conveyed to the next generation of Palestinian history teachers.

This is what is being conveyed to the next generation of Palestinian history teachers. After teaching that Israel is not what the Jews claim, it is instructed that Israel is a European colony. The establishment of the state of Israel is revised from the authentic Jewish national liberation movement and turned into a colonialist plot with two goals. First: It is an anti-Arab European plot to split and exploit the Arab world. Second: It was a European self-defensive need to be rid of the Jews for European safety. These messages are expressed in the PA schoolbooks as follows:

"The colonial powers regarded the Zionist Movement as the means for the attainment of their greedy colonial aspirations ...imposing their rule on it in order to exploit its natural resources. **The European colonial powers spread the idea of Zionism among the Jews....**"

[Modern Arab History and Contemporary Problems, Part Two, for 10th Grade p. 48]

And this is the key phrase: "The colonial powers spread the idea of Zionism among the Jews....". The movement is not inherently Jewish. The Jews, with no connection to the land would not have come. It was a European scheme with European goals.

The second goal of Zionism: All the classic anti-Semitic justifications for persecuting the Jews are presented as actual Jewish behavior. The Jews were so detrimental to European society that Europe supported Zionism as an act of self-defense, as a means to expel the Jews. The following are some of the main points:

"Christian European society's hatred of the Jews has existed since ancient times ... the Jews ... remained within themselves ... [with] the Racist seclusion that the Talmud called for, with behavior that aimed to corrupt and destroy the society's in which they lived. There are a number of reasons that caused the Europeans to persecute the Jews everywhere, they were:

The Bible is full of texts that support the Jews' tendency to racial and religious zealotry, and they respond with the spirit of hatred toward the other nations... The Jews of Europe were hated because of their hostile Jewish belief towards Christianity... their taking over the economy... The Jews' feeling of racial, religious, cultural and political superiority... The profiteering and money-changing trades in which they specialized..."
[The Contemporary History of the Arabs and the World, Pp. 121-122]

These are reasons the Jews were persecuted, and are the reasons the Europeans wanted to be rid of the Jews, which led Europe to support Zionism.

To summarize this first educational message, from every different angle Judaism is dismembered. The Jews are not a nation. Their religious claims and history are lies. Even the Western Wall is not Jewish. Jews don't belong in the Middle East. They are a Colony.

The second type of stereotyping, defining Israel and Jews as a danger, is widespread, as in:

"Zionism believes in the elimination of the original inhabitants"
[The Contemporary History of the Arabs and the World, P. 123]

"The Jews ... have killed and evicted Muslim and Christian inhabitants of Palestine, whose inhabitants are still suffering oppression and persecution under racist Jewish administration."
[Islamic Education for Ninth Grade # 589 p. 182]

"Write in your exercise book: An event showing the fanaticism of the Jews in Palestine against Muslims or Christians."
[Islamic Education for Ninth Grade p. 182]

But this stereotyping goes much further as the books teach that the danger is inherent not only to Israel and Zionism but also to the Jews and their beliefs. For example, Racism is defined through the Jews. After a long section in the school book delineating the evils of racism, which includes phrases like: "Racism: Mankind has suffered from this evil ... Satan has, in the eyes of many people, made their evil actions appear beautiful..." The section ends with the following generalization: "Such a people are the Jews..." [Not, Zionists, Jews!!]
[Islamic Education for Eighth Grade p. 95]

Islamic sources are also used to promote the danger stereotype, first by only selecting negative stories about Jews, and second, by ending the sections about Jews with generalizations about the innately negative behavior of Jews. Some examples:

"I learn from this lesson: I believe that the Jews are the enemies of the Prophets and the believers."

[Islamic Education, Part Two, for Fourth Grade #531 p. 67]

"From the Uhud expedition... a number of lessons can be learned...: Treachery and disloyalty are character traits of the Jews and therefore one should beware of them."

[Islamic Education for Ninth Grade #589 p. 87]

"The Jews adopted a position of hostility and deception towards the new religion. ... They fought against his religion in all ways and by all means, a war that has not yet ended until to day, and they conspired with the hypocrites and the idolaters against him and they are still behaving in the same way..."

[Islamic Education for Seventh Grade p. 125]

This section needs a special comment. Although Islam has many positive references to Jews, all of these have been excluded from the PA books. All the Islamic texts included have negative portrayals of Jews. The editors have gone to great lengths to portray Islam as having an anti-Jewish ideology. This suggests that the problem is not with Islam but rather with the editors.

In addition to these traditional sources, modern events are also misrepresented to promote the danger stereotype. One example: In 1969 an Australian [non-Jew] set the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on fire. Yet note what the children are taught:

"This arson is a further chapter in the Zionist plot, whose aim is to take control of this Islamic holy place, the Dome of the Rock and the whole area of the Jerusalem sanctuary and to destroy all that is holy to Islam."

[Reader and Literary Texts for Eighth Grade #578 p. 97]

Finally turning Zionism into the archetypal evil danger, it is classified with Nazism: "The clearest examples of racist belief and racial discrimination in the world are Nazism and Zionism."

[The Contemporary History of the Arabs and the World, P. 123]

Most problematic of all, this negative stereotyping has an operative purpose: to teach the children that they are responsible to undo the injustice of Israel's creation, by destroying the State of Israel. I will cite one example:

1. "...there will be a Jihad and our country shall be freed. This is our story with the thieving conquerors. You must know, my boy, that Palestine is your grave responsibility ... Know, my son, that Palestine is your country... that its pure soil is drenched with the blood of Martyrs... Why must we fight the Jews and drive them out of our land?"

[Our Arabic Language for Fifth Grade p. 64-66, 69-70]

There are two reasons, as shown, to answer this question: 1. The Jews have no historical right to exist as a nation 2. The Jews are a danger.

PA education regarding Israel can be summed up as follows: Israel has no right to exist. Israel and Jews are a danger. The conclusion: Israel must be destroyed. The yearning for Israel's destruction is thus presented as being both a legitimate act of self-defense and the fulfillment of historical justice. These messages are uniform throughout the school system. In all the books reviewed CMIP did not find even one positive reference to a Jew or Judaism.

I will end with one additional note for concern. There seems to be an ongoing movement among historians to actively promote this stereotyping and de-legitimization. Dr. Yussuf Alzamili, Head of the History Department in Han Yunes Government Educational College, while speaking to other educators at a symposium, defined the challenge of developing a Palestinian national education:

"Alzamili called on all universities and colleges to be active in the writing of the history of Palestine and not to enable the defiled and the enemies to distort it...or to enable legitimacy for the existence of Jews on this land.
[Al Ayaam, 12-4-98]