

30. Social Development of the Arab Sector

Some of the descriptions of the changes in Arab villages are written in condescending and patronizing language. In contrast, there are books – primarily geography books or books that combine geography and history – that describe the processes occurring in Arab settlements in language that is substantive and factual, pointing out achievements and development along with problems and distress. At the same time, even the descriptions that highlight the problems focus on problems of lifestyle, employment, welfare and economics, and do not address national and political issues or the standing of Israeli Arabs. These issues are discussed in Civic Studies books. Here we will examine the language and the adjectives that are used in the description and analysis of social development in the Arab sector.

For the First Time

An example of condescending language:

"In the State of Israel, the minorities, for the first time in their history, came to know the taste of personal and economic equality between men and women, and among villagers themselves, and there was increased recognition of the value of an individual, of his rights and duties vis-a-vis society and the state. Relations between families and communities improved, acts of revenge and hostility in villages disappeared almost completely, and there was a growing trend towards education and learning a trade. Democracy is increasingly taking root in their midst, and its value is growing among them." (220, **The Geography of Israel**, 1995, p.413).

The history and geography textbooks used in the religious schools and in state-run secular schools clearly differ in their presentation of Arab agriculture and the Arab fellah (a word in Arabic for peasant farmer) from that of the textbooks in the ultra-orthodox stream, which present Arab agriculture in the most negative way.

Arab Agriculture

"The residents of Peki'in [a village which Jews never left through all the course of history] were noted for the diligence and did not leave an inch of land on the slopes of the mountain untilled. Although the work was primitive, as is customary among the fellahin [the Arab farmers], thanks to the abundance of water and the natural wealth, the Peki'in residents were able to support themselves from this work... They are different from Arabs in their strict observance of religious matters".

(329, **Our Childhood 8**, 1989, p.265).

"The land in the mountain region is covered with rocks. Further inland, the region was covered with forests, but the Arabs from the villages had their sheep graze in the forests and chopped trees for firewood until the place became desolate. After the Arabs left their villages, trees started growing there again."

(365, **The Good Land** – Land of Israel studies textbook for fourth and fifth grades, 1991, pp. 69)

Another geography book contains a similar passage:

“For hundreds of years, the red sandy earth was not considered fertile. The Arabs, residents of the land in the past, did not know how to improve the soil: they did not use compost to fertilize the soil and had trouble irrigating it. When the Jewish settlers wanted to buy the land from the Arabs, the latter were glad to get rid of it (especially since large portions of it were covered with swamps, as mentioned) and sold it to the Jews.

“The Arabs thought the Jews were foolish and ‘throwing their money down the drain’: for such terrible land, they were paying huge sums. However, the Holy One Blessed Be He, blessed the Jewish settlers with wisdom: they learned to fertilize and irrigate the land and they turned the previously ‘unsuccessful’ red earth into some of the best plots in the country, especially for growing citrus fruits.

In the summer, the fields must be irrigated. The Arab residents of the Sharon region in the past did not know how to draw the water from the few wells they managed to dig up to the hilltops. They even had trouble finding a layer of ground water from which they could draw water through additional wells.

“The Jewish settlers were able to find the ground water layer at a depth of 100-600 meters and they pumped water from there to the hilltops with a mechanical pump they had developed (instead of with the manual pump that had been used until then).” (372, **Eretz Hemda [A Beautiful Country]- the Central and Southern Coastal Plain**, 1990, pp.52, 167).

“When the land of the Sharon region was Arab-owned, they were unable to grow much in the tough, dry land. Therefore, the Arabs agreed to sell the land for next to nothing to Jews who came to buy the lands. The Jews, who also benefited from God’s help, fertilized the land, improved the soil, learned effective irrigation methods for this land and managed to transform this land into fertile land.”

(359, **On the High Places of the Land – the Coastal Plain**, p.22).

Geography books used in ultra-orthodox schools similarly describe life in Egypt in the Nile region near the Aswan Dam, but after the derogatory description the author admits that efforts have been made by the Egyptian governments to improve the situation:

“With the construction of the dam... the water stagnating in the irrigation channels caused the bilharzia worms to grow in the water. Any kind of contact with the water from the reservoir [beside the dam] that has not been purified causes disease. The farmer touches the water. His children play in the water in the channels and the women wash clothing with contaminated water. That is how they contract the disease...

“The villages in Egypt are very miserable. The houses, which are no more than huts, are built very densely. There are no grassy areas and no trees providing shade to be found in the Egyptian villages. The roads are unpaved. And in the filthy alleyways, neglected children flit about. The village is a source of disease.

“Successive Egyptian governments tried to improve the farmer’s lifestyle by handing over additional land to them. The Egyptian government invested large sums in improving conditions in the village by providing clean water piped into the houses and linking up the villages to the electricity grid. Schools, hospitals and stores were built.

Nevertheless progress is very slow. Egyptian governments do not have enough money to develop all of the villages in Egypt.”

(364, **The Middle East**, 1998, pp.70, 71, 364).

Traditional vs. Modern Farming

In most textbooks used in the state-run secular school system, Arab agriculture is depicted in positive terms. The common term used to describe Arab agriculture is “traditional farming,” a term that is not by definition negative. The Arabs are associated with traditional farming directly or by the inclusion of a photograph of an Arab with an explanation of what traditional farming is beside it. For example, in order to illustrate the method of threshing wheat with a stick, that was common in the Biblical period, a 1995 workbook for the Book of Judges and the Book of Ruth (there is no mention of which grade the book is meant for) features a photo of an Arab, and the caption under it states:

“A contemporary man threshing wheat with a stick. Photo from an Arab village in Samaria. This method is gradually disappearing from our region.”

(10, **With the Judges**, 1995, p.38).

“In the past, most non-Jewish settlements were rural communities, and their residents engaged primarily in traditional farming. They raised crops that were suited to the mountain, such as olives and tobacco. They worked their small plots manually or with the help of work animals such as horses and donkeys. To overcome the problem of the steep slope of the mountains, the residents built agricultural terraces. The villages were built very densely: the houses abutted one another and the streets were winding and narrow.

Since the establishment of the State, the number of non-Jewish settlements has hardly changed, but great changes are underway in those settlements. One of the most prominent changes is that most of these places grew and developed and today they are urban communities and some of them have even received the status of a city (for example: Um al-Fahm, Shfaram, etc.).”

(69, **The Middle and Southern Coastal Plain and Northern Israel**, 1992, p.248).

The same textbook gives a general explanation of traditional farming without specifically mentioning that the reference is to Arabs. However, underneath the explanation is a photo of an Arab plowing land, and beneath it the caption states: “In one of the Galilee villages – an Arab plows his land with a hand-held plow pulled by a donkey to prepare the land to for growing vegetables in the midst of an olive grove.”

(69, **The Middle and Southern Coastal Plain and Northern Israel**, 1992, p.135).

A book published by Educational Television, which contains programs that were broadcast on television, depicts traditional farming in a positive light, explaining its advantages from a functional perspective. At the end, it tells of changes in, and the modernization of, Arab agriculture.

“Until recently traditional farming was the main economic base of the mountain region. The term traditional farming refers to a method of working the land that was handed down from generation to generation and did not involve the use of modern technologies and know-how.

“One of the characteristics of traditional farming is self-sufficiency, i.e., it is agriculture whose goal is to provide the basic sustenance needs of families or villages in an independent manner. This type of agriculture enables those who engage in it to support themselves even if they are isolated or cut off and it did indeed enable the communities in the mountain region to sustain themselves throughout history, even in times of war and occupation...

‘During my wanderings through the villages of Judea and Samaria, I am always moved anew by the fellahin’s (peasants farmers) ability to build their villages in the scenery and integrate into it, as they did in this beautiful mountaintop village, Ras Karkar. The distance from the urban center to the fellahin villages is an hour and a half and the trip in essence brings me to the land of the Bible. You see the piles of sheaves in the barns. You see the fellahin women seated beside the piles and threshing... the seeds are scattered among the sheep and goats and this is important fodder for the animals’...

“Traditional Arab farming has undergone many changes in recent years. In some places, I see that tractors and state of the art harvesters are being used and replacing the scythe and the threshing sledge. Mechanization is gradually taking over traditional Arab farming”

(163, **The Central Mountain and Jerusalem**, Educational Television Publications, 1994, pp.19, 24, 25).

A textbook for second graders in general schools stresses that the Jews are the ones who brought modernization to Arab agriculture: "A portion of the Arab population currently earns a living from agriculture. From the Jews, they learned how to use modern and innovative methods to work the land. They saw the Jews developing new branches of agriculture and using modern methods of raising crops, such as greenhouses, using airplanes for spraying insecticides, raising chickens in coops sealed with a plastic material, growing and producing flowers, and more. The Arabs learned how to use most of these modern methods. Even the Arab peasant farmers engage in industrial growing of crops for export to foreign countries, such as strawberries, peanuts, tobacco, olives, flowers and more."

(25, **New Israel Reader**, second grade, 1987, p.74).

Problems of the Arab Sector

A geography book for high schools in the state-run stream presents the development of the Arab village in Israel in a substantive manner, without pejorative statements or stereotypes, and also discusses the problems of Arab settlements, without saying that they stem from the Arabs' backwardness or nature. The problems are presented without noting explicitly who is responsible for them. The student is exposed to the difficult situation in the Arab settlements and can conclude that the state neglected the Arab sector and must see to finding solutions:

“The Arab settlement was not planned in advance. Houses were built close together in the old nucleus of the village, in order to create a concentrated settlement with good protection. The traditional Arab village is built on the basis of housing for the expanded family – the Hamula (family of parents and children together). In recent years, there has been a rise in the residents' standard of living, which happened as a

result of non-agricultural employment that occurs outside the settlement ... Various services are also developing within the Arab settlements: traditional services, banking and personal services. At the same time, almost no industrial plants have been built in them, and most Arab settlements still lack a developed urban infrastructure of lighting, water, sewage and sidewalks." (71, **Man and Environment**, 1999, p.194).

Another geography book in the state-run sector makes the following suggestion to students: "If you also want to learn about the Arab village located in our area, plan this activity in class with the teacher." Underneath the text is a picture of an Arab village. (320, **Our Moshavim**, 1988, p.95).

Another geography book describes things in similar fashion, while focusing on problems, in a way that arouses empathy for the problems of Israeli Arabs:

"Since the establishment of the State of Israel, fast changes have been occurring in the non-Jewish settlements... new neighborhoods were built... various services are developing in the settlements... One of the most prominent changes is that most of these settlements grew and developed, and they are now urban communities... Since the establishment of the state, sanitation and medical services have developed greatly in the non-Jewish settlements... the educational system in these settlements has problems and difficulties".

Further on, a statement by a teacher is quoted:

"I wish we had many more and expansive schools. With new equipment and more textbooks that are appropriate for us".

The author of the book continues saying: "It is important to emphasize that there are almost no industrial plants in the non-Jewish settlements and in many of them the internal roads and sewage and water systems have not been completed... Employment possibilities in Nazareth [the biggest Arabic city in Israel] are insufficient for the city's many residents... There is a problem of unemployment, crowding of the large population... a severe shortage of apartments. Public buildings such as schools and kindergartens are lacking". (164, **The Southern and Northern Mediterranean Coastal Plain**, 1992, pp.248, 250, 252-254).

A book dealing with geography and demography contains photographs of traditional and modern agriculture, and of traditional and modern building in Arab settlements. The title of the illustrations: "The transition from a traditional lifestyle to a modern lifestyle in the non-Jewish population". (8, **People and Space**, 1997, p.110).



The statement that the Jews developed the economy in Israel is repeated in a history book:

"Another issue related to relations between Jews and Arabs was the economic development of Eretz Yisrael at the end of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The Jewish sector played a considerable part in this. The importing of capital and development of means of production by Jews advanced the economy of Eretz Yisrael and greatly developed it. This fact also helped advance the Arab economy, and added another dimension to the new relations that were formed between Arabs and Jews".

(299, **The World and the Jews in Recent Generations**, 1998, p.226).

Monologues

Another book that combines geographic, historical and demographic analysis devotes a broad chapter to non-Jewish settlements and the changes occurring in them, accompanied by pictures and statistical data about sources of employment and the education system (69, **The Southern and Northern Mediterranean Coastal Plain, and Northern Israel**, pp.250-254). What is different about this book is that it presents monologues from several Arab speakers: a construction worker, an elderly man and a teacher. The use of first person underscores for the student, in a way that arouses empathy, the speakers' feelings – both positive and negative – regarding changes in sources of livelihood, lifestyle, economic development and family life, alongside nostalgia for life in the past, and complaints about the problems and difficulties in the present.

Section 1: A construction worker

"I have lived in my village since I was born, 40 years ago. Today, unlike when I was born, it's incorrect to call this place a 'village.' I walk around the village and see changes on every corner: new and expansive neighborhoods, many cars, stores, banks, offices and cafes. All of these did not exist when I was a boy. On the one hand, these changes are good – modern life, more convenient and easier. On the other hand, however, our village is no longer quiet and tranquil as it once was: there is a lot of noise and traffic accidents – and that is not good, not good at all. And another difference between then and now. Then, most people worked in the village, in agriculture. Today, most of the residents work in all sorts of places outside the village: in factories, hospitals, or they teach in schools, and a great many work in construction in large cities. I too work building houses. Every day I wake up early in the morning, travel a long time to the city and return home in the evening, very tired, and I have no time to meet friends or to play with my children."

Section 2: An elderly man

"I am already an old man, 70 years old, but I still have strength to work our land. Only my 14-year-old grandson helps me in this work. His father, and almost all of his father's brothers, work outside the village, in the big city. Only my eldest son has a store here in the village. Today, it is easier to work the land – my sons added a lot of innovations to the orchard: our trees are watered by drip irrigation and I spray the bad weeds at night, with the help of the tractor and the sprayer. We spend a lot of money on the orchard and earn only a little. In general, life today is not like it used to be. Then, people treated an elderly person with respect, listened to his advice and to his stories. Less so, now. Today, it's the young people who are important. I think that's justified, because they earn our livelihood. They learn many things in school and our village has grown and developed thanks to them. But for me, things used to be better in the past. Then, everyone worked in the village and there was time to be together. I hope that in the future people will return and work in the village. If, for example, industrial plants are built in the village, then there will be work for people here locally, and they will not have to travel every day to the big city."

Section 3: A teacher (woman)

"I am a teacher in my village. It is difficult being a working woman, a housewife and a mother of four children. But I like my profession and the children in my class, and I am not willing to give up the work. When I went to study at the teachers college, my family was angry with me. They did not understand the step I took. At that time, only a few girls left to study and work, and my family thought that I was rebelling against tradition and the family. But I was persistent and I succeeded! And now I am willing to reveal that, at the time, there were many moments when I was very frightened and almost gave up on everything. My husband agrees with me on the issue of my work, on the condition that it does not harm the home and the family. It is difficult, sometimes very difficult, but I am happy and do everything willingly. Our school has developed a lot in recent years: new classrooms have been built and each year more and more children come to study in it. Once, only a very few girls came to study, but today nearly all the girls do, and I encourage them to continue with their studies. I feel bad about the children who do not come to school, and about those who come only occasionally. I wish we had many and more spacious schools, with new equipment

and more textbooks suitable for us. I think it is very important to develop education, because that is the way to advance in life."

(69, **The Southern and Northern Mediterranean Coastal Plain, and Northern Israel**, 1992, pp.251, 252).