

The Attitude to the "Other" and to Peace in Tunisian School Textbooks: A Preliminary Report

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Introduction

The following is a preliminary report on the attitude to the "other" and to peace in Tunisian schoolbooks, based on a survey of 64 textbooks for grades 1-13 in the subjects of language, science, social sciences, Islamic Education and philosophy, all written in Arabic (there are also several science books written in French) and mostly published in 2007. Four books were published in 2006 and 17 others do not carry dates (see the List of Sources below).

Each of these books was carefully scrutinized, and any text related to the attitude to the "other" and to peace, as well as the attitude to the Middle East conflict, has been singled out and studied. Each of these quotes is to be translated into English and inserted in the final report as is, so that the source material will be able to speak for itself.

The criteria used by IMPACT-SE for analysis have been developed by UNESCO and by IMPACT-SE itself. They are worded in questions such as: Are other peoples and communities recognized and respected, or stereotyped and prejudiced? Does education foster peace? Are political disputes presented objectively and honestly? Is wording likely to create prejudice, misapprehension and conflict avoided?

Following are the main findings (the full report is scheduled to be released by next April).

Part 1: The Attitude to the "Other"

A. Historical "Others"

There are several kinds of "others" referred to in Tunisian schoolbooks. Historical "others" include the indigenous Numidians, the Phoenician settlers who founded Carthage, the Roman occupiers and their Byzantine successors, Vandals, local Berbers and others. Inhabitants of pre-Muslim Tunisia are all considered part of Tunisia's past, even the Romans, destroyers of Carthage – the only empire in Tunisian history, and even the Berbers who despairingly fought against the Muslim Arab invaders. There is a story in a 9th grade book about their female leader under the title "A Valiant Berber [Woman]".¹ Under the title "Carthage and its contributions to

¹ [Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) pp. 16-17

Roman civilization" we find a passage about St. Augustine.² It should be noted in this context that no attempt is made to "Arabize" any of these pre-Muslim inhabitants, contrary to the posthumous Arabization of ancient nations of the Middle East carried out, for instance, in Syrian and Palestinian schoolbooks.

After the crystallization of the Tunisian Arab-Muslim identity, all "others" are considered foreigners. Early foreigners, such as Normans, Spaniards and Ottomans, are referred to objectively, with no hateful language being used, unlike the treatment of the Crusaders in Egyptian and Syrian textbooks, for example. Even the Spanish Reconquista is referred to as such,³ rather than as "imperialist aggression" as other Arab textbooks would do. The 30-year Spanish military presence in Tunisia in the 16th century –to counter the threatening Muslim Ottomans – is not regarded as foreign occupation.⁴

B. The West

The West is the most significant "other" in the Tunisian textbooks, due, probably, to Tunisia's geopolitical position as a small Arab and Muslim country on the shores of the Mediterranean, not far from Europe, with a long history of contact and confrontation with the latter. The West in the books includes several facets: Western civilization and its impact – directly and in the context of globalization, Western contemporary economic and political world hegemony *vis-à-vis* the Third World, historical Western Imperialism – including French Colonialism in Tunisia and the neighboring countries, and including Western support for Zionism and Israel, and, finally, the United States as a hegemonic world power. All are sensitive issues which have resulted in the depiction of the West in negative terms in Arab school textbooks in general. Let us now review the Tunisian position in this matter.

Western Civilization, its Impact, and Globalization

Tunisia is a leading country in the Arab world as far as openness to Western civilization is concerned. As such, much information is given to the student about Western history and culture, including Western literary, philosophical and scientific material translated into Arabic, at a greater extent than is usually encountered in schoolbooks of other Arab nations. On the other hand, the Tunisian textbooks, much the same as their Arab counterparts, tend to attribute European civilization's leap forward during the Renaissance to the preceding influence of Medieval Islamic civilization. A Tunisian textbook for grade 8 dedicates a whole chapter to this argument.⁵ But in the Tunisian case, and contrary to the situation in other Arab curricula, this argumentation is not restricted to the sphere of inter-civilization rivalry. Rather, it is used as a means of facilitating the adoption of Western norms which are presented as a product of a larger effort of humanity, in which the Islamic civilization of the Middle Ages played a decisive role:

The values of liberty, justice, tolerance and democracy, on which our contemporary civilization is founded, draw their intellectual, social and political authority from the rich human stock of the period of Enlightenment and modern European Renaissance... which went back, in its turn, to seek

² History, Grade 10 (?) p. 77

³ History, Grade 11 – Humanities (?) pp. 258-254

⁴ History, Grade 12 – Humanities (?) p. 72

⁵ Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 8 (?) pp. 25-35

inspiration from the ancient civilizations regarding the meanings of humanism and the supremacy of reason, wisdom and the law...

History, Grade 11 – Sciences (2007) p. 7

Human civilization is a shared product to which various nations have contributed, and of which the Arab-Islamic tributary was among its most important and most fertile ones.

History, Grade 11 – Humanities (?) p. 266

Accordingly, the Tunisian textbooks express less alarm and more confidence when talking of the threat of Western cultural influence. The threat exists, they agree, in view of Western domination of the world's largest communication media⁶ and the Western-inspired globalization process. But one should confront it on its own ground, which necessitates openness rather than self-seclusion. The Islamic Education textbook for grade 13 is adamant about that and freely criticizes fellow Arabs for their negligence in this respect:

The world today is going through a phase radically different from what it used to be, which requires from us a radically different behavior as well, or else – we would become ossified and petrified and the globalization current will no doubt sweep us away eventually.

Islamic Thinking, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 72

Globalization seems to be a fast train about to depart from the station of the end of this century. It is now hissing pressingly to anyone who wants to come aboard in the direction of the station of the next century... [However,] most Arab states have resigned to "their fate" on the platform, turning their eyes right and left, among their packed belongings and [among] the great number of their sons in their worn clothes and their wretched and hopeless gaze, because they cannot embark this train.

Islamic Thinking, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 80

Western Economic and Political Hegemony vs. the Third World

These are attributed to historical phenomena, such as Colonialism and Capitalism,⁷ rather than to inherent evil in the West, as sometimes stated in schoolbooks of other Arab nations. But on the whole, and although some Tunisian textbooks – Geography books in particular – heavily dwell on the issue of world inequality between the haves and the have-nots, the terminology used in this respect is not "the West" against "the Third World", but rather "the advanced world" vs. "the progressing world" and Japan is included in the former.⁸ Value judgment terms are very rarely used and the text does not hesitate to criticize the developing countries for unwise economic decisions.⁹

As far as global environmental pollution is concerned, "the advanced world" is duly accused of bearing the lion's share of responsibility for that.¹⁰ This is a recurring motif in schoolbooks around the Middle East. But only in the Tunisian textbooks

⁶ Geography, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) pp. 69-70

⁷ Geography, Grade 12 – Sciences (?) p. 59

⁸ Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 8 (?) pp. 116-127

⁹ Geography, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 77

¹⁰ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) pp. 311-312

would one find the assertion that this very part of the world is also most active in fighting pollution on a large scale.¹¹

Western Imperialism

Western Imperialism is thoroughly discussed in history textbooks of the higher grades, with all its vices: foreign occupation, exploitation, hypocrisy, racism, robbery of land and other natural resources, foreign settlement and discrimination, violence, deprivation, poverty, hunger, disease, etc. Special attention is given, understandably, to French Colonialism in Tunisia and neighboring Algeria and Morocco (see below), but harsh criticism is also reserved to Italy's colonial persecution in Libya¹² and to Spain's destructive Colonialism in America.¹³ Though European in origin, Imperialism is not depicted as an exclusively European phenomenon in history:

Human Europe once exited geographical Europe and gradually occupied the rest of the world. There is nothing in this matter which would cause [our] surprise, since the peoples of Europe had been preceded in this field by many peoples in other continents.

Philosophy, Grade 13 – Sciences (2007) p. 123

Western Support for Zionism

This is considered part of Imperialism, first – Britain's, and later – America's. Britain's motives are said to have been a desire to separate between the eastern and western parts of the Arab world by implanting a foreign human element in between.¹⁴ Later, when Britain discovered its need for Arab support against the Axis, it changed its policy, which sent the Zionists to America to ask for support in return for defending the latter's interests in the region.¹⁵ Unlike schoolbooks of other Arab nations, the Tunisian ones do not continue this imperialist connection beyond the establishment of Israel in 1948, since the Soviet Union supported it as well, and instead talk of the support of "the Powers" for the new state.¹⁶

France

France is a major "other", both as Tunisia's former colonial power and as Tunisia's most important economic and cultural non-Arab partner today. This duality poses a problem: On the one hand, Tunisian students should learn about their country's struggle for independence in which French soldiers and settlers play the role of the villain, and, on the other hand, fostering sentiments of friendship towards France is required by Tunisia's present conditions. The problem is solved by restricting the relevant data of the struggle against France to relatively higher grades, that is, beginning in grade 6,¹⁷ and giving the bulk of the anti-French material in high school (grades 10-13), while in the lower grades one can find passages talking of friendship between Tunisian and French children¹⁸ and contacts between Tunisian and French

¹¹ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 313

¹² History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 332 and see the photograph on p. 319 (the hanging of the Libyan freedom fighter Umar al-Mukhtar)

¹³ History, Grade 12 – Humanities (?) p. 19

¹⁴ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 258

¹⁵ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 355

¹⁶ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 356

¹⁷ Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 6 (2007) pp. 41-65

¹⁸ Reader, Grade 2 (2007) pp. 27-28; Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 6 (2007) p.

schools.¹⁹ This way, the demonizing material necessary for building the student's national spirit is given after the infrastructure for friendship had already been set and, thus, remains an issue of the past. Another element used to diminish possible hard feelings against the French on the backdrop of their actions in North Africa is the sporadic insertion of passages by French intellectuals and papers protesting against such actions in the name of France.²⁰ Such a move helps to detach what may be described as "Eternal France" from the atrocities on the ground.

The United States

The Tunisian schoolbooks' attitude to the United States is not hostile in general, except for one literary piece written by an Iraqi writer during the war of Kuwait in 1991 and inserted into a 12th grade book.²¹ But it is not friendly either. Although America is portrayed as a dominant world power in neutral terms most of the time, one can discern on several occasions isolated expressions of criticism regarding its tendency to base its world hegemony not only on its economic, technological and communicational strength, but rather on its military power.²² Other accusations against America include its alliance with Zionism against the Palestinian people following World War II,²³ the discrimination against Afro-Americans,²⁴ the vast influence of American companies in Latin American "banana republics",²⁵ as well as a statement prophesizing the disintegration of the American family.²⁶ Such motifs are present in schoolbooks of other Arab nations, though more extensively and using more abusive language. It should be noted in this context that the bulk of this material appears in the Tunisian textbooks for the last two grades. In addition, geography textbooks speak about the United States in respect and present it as a unique country in world history in terms of its economic, social and political development.²⁷

C. Israel, Zionism and Jews

Tunisia, being an Arab state, considers itself part of the general Arab front against Israel, especially as it has not yet concluded a peace treaty with the latter. All references in Tunisian schoolbooks to Israel and Zionism (except one),²⁸ as well as many references to Jews, appear within the context of the Middle East conflict and are colored by the formal Tunisian policy, as is the case in the curricula of other Arab countries. However, the Tunisian books sometimes feature positive elements not encountered in their Arab counterparts (see below).

The Middle East Conflict

The presentation of the conflict is clearly biased. No attempt is made to show the Jewish side's viewpoint or treat it on equal footing. According to the Tunisian

¹⁹ Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 5 (2007) p. 150

²⁰ See the piece in History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 328: A Frenchman's protest in Le Monde against torture in Algeria.

²¹ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Humanities (2006) p. 269. The author is of a Palestinian origin.

²² Geography, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 142

²³ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 270

²⁴ Arabic Grammar, Grade 8 (?) pp.198, 216

²⁵ Geography, Grade 11 – Humanities (2007) p. 50

²⁶ [Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) pp. 129-130

²⁷ The best example is the relevant text in Geography, Grade 12 – Sciences (?), especially pp. 108-112

²⁸ A photograph of a camel lying down in a parking lot between two cars appears in [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Humanities (2006) p. 319. The background indicates that the photo was taken in an Israeli gas station. The context is general with no Israeli connotation.

schoolbooks, Palestine is an exclusively Arab country which should have become independent following the Second World War and could not do so due to the Zionist project and the support it received from British Imperialism and, later, from the United States and the international community.²⁹ The Jews' historical connection to the country is hardly discussed³⁰ and Jewish holy places there are not mentioned as such.

The Tunisian narrative is as follows: The anti-Semitic tide in Europe during the last third of the nineteenth century brought about the end of former attempts on the part of the Jews to integrate in European society. Under the influence of European secular nationalist ideas, European Jews developed their own version of separate nationalism, mostly related to Palestine, under the name "Zionism".³¹ Zionism failed to achieve its goals before WWI, but succeeded during that war in concluding an alliance with British Imperialism, followed by international recognition of Zionist goals in Palestine through the Mandate arrangement that was imposed on the Arabs.³² During the period of British Mandate the Jews managed to increase their numbers in Palestine and buy large tracts of land. But the imminent war with Nazi Germany forced Britain to close ranks with the Arabs and revise its pro-Zionist policy, which caused strife with the latter and their eventual turn to Washington for assistance.³³ A new alliance was formed, which also obtained international support at the expense of the Arabs.

This international support found an expression in the UN resolution of 1947, which partitioned the country between Jews and Arabs. The Palestinians and the Arab governments rejected the resolution and started a war in order to foil its execution.³⁴ The statement by the Arab leaders reads:

The Declaration of the Governments of the Arab States in Response to the Partition Resolution on 8.12.1947:

"The Arab governments do not approve the resolution of the United Nations and consider partition null and void. They stand for the independence of Palestine and its sovereignty and will take decisive measures which would foil the partition project and wage a war for that purpose."

History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 348

The war ended in a defeat, which brought about the establishment of Israel, the annexation of additional Palestinian territories to it and the expulsion of large portions of the Palestinian people.³⁵ There were several other wars between Israel and the Arabs in which the latter lost additional territories, but the Palestinians managed to wage an armed struggle against the occupiers, which brought them international recognition.³⁶ Major political shifts in the region – the Egyptian-Israeli separate peace, the defeat of Iraq in its war over Kuwait, the collapse of the Soviet Union and

²⁹ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p.340; History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 269

³⁰ History, Grade 11 – Sciences (2007) pp. 13-14; Literature, Grade 11, Part 2 (2007) p. 56

³¹ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 343; History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 258

³² History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) pp. 269-270

³³ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 355

³⁴ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 271

³⁵ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 271

³⁶ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) pp. 272-273

the emergence of the United States as a sole world power – forced the Palestinians to revise their policy and enter into a peace process with Israel.³⁷ They have gained some achievements as a result, but the peace process is stuck due to Israel's refusal to go along with the Palestinians' demands.³⁸

The preceding is the standard Arab narrative of the conflict, with perhaps a special nuance inserted by the Tunisians, namely, that it was the Arab side which defied the UN Partition Resolution and declared war on the Jews. Other Arab curricula tend to blur this point and portray the Jews as the initiators of the war. But the conclusion remains the same: The Palestinians are the sole owners of the land; Israel was born in sin; force alone has made the Palestinians accept its existence; and Israel obstructs peace.

In addition, Tunisian literature textbooks strive to foster solidarity with the Palestinian people through inclusion of poems and stories written by Palestinians, which speak of steadfastness and resistance and stress the uneven confrontation between unarmed people (the "stone children") and the overwhelmingly armed Israeli forces. Pictures, illustrations and cartoons are also used.

[Cartoon]

No rest for the colonialist on the occupied land

[Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 305

[Photograph]

A Palestinian boy confronting an Israeli tank

Philosophy, Grade 12 – Humanities (2007) p. 240

More alarming in this context are pieces by Palestinian poets which promote the ideal of violent liberation rather than a peaceful solution.³⁹ In one case, such liberation is equated with the purification of the land of filth⁴⁰ (see below: the Tunisian attitude to peace).

Israel: The Issue of Recognition

The Tunisian textbooks differ from other Arab ones I have studied in that they alternately use terms of recognition and non-recognition regarding Israel, while other Arab books are consistent in their attitude of non-recognition. Thus, a book for grade 7, for example, features a map of the whole country under the name "Palestine", while a map in other books carry the name "Israel" within its pre-1967 borders. Contrary to Palestinian usage, Tel Aviv appears on some maps.

[Map]

"Palestine"

[Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) p. 158

[Map]

"The State of Israel"

³⁷ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) pp. 273-274; History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 357

³⁸ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 274

³⁹ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) pp. 301-302

⁴⁰ [Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) p. 159

Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 9 (?) p. 89

There are texts, sometimes on the same page, which mention either "the State of Israel" or "the Zionist Entity".⁴¹ Cases of "the Occupied Land"⁴² or "Occupied Palestine"⁴³ in reference to Israel-proper are also found. The mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO within the Oslo agreement is mentioned as well.⁴⁴

Israel's Image

Israel's image is totally negative to the point of demonization. Among the most severe examples is the claim that "the Zionist Entity" pursued a policy of extermination against the Palestinians, citing two isolated cases of massacre in 1948 and 1956 as a proof.⁴⁵ In a Palestinian poem about a Gazan child, the enemies – Israelis – are depicted as ravens.⁴⁶ Israelis are described as killers of children,⁴⁷ with the controversial case of Muhammad al-Durrah prominently featuring in both picture and text.⁴⁸ A Tunisian student who would like to learn more about Israel will find in the textbooks the following: massacres,⁴⁹ expulsion,⁵⁰ arrests,⁵¹ house demolitions,⁵² torture, execution by hanging (in spite of the fact that Israel had already abolished capital punishment in the early 1950s, save for Nazi criminals),⁵³ aggression against neighboring countries,⁵⁴ etc.

Yet, here again, the Tunisian books surprise us with an unexpected touch of humane attitude towards Israelis: An often-quoted Palestinian poet, the late Mahmud Darwish, who grew up in Israel before joining the PLO in the 1970s, had a relationship with an Israeli-Jewish woman, named Rita. Two of his poems about Rita appear in the books and the editors comment about the dilemma of having love relations with a member of the enemy nation.⁵⁵ The implicit message: Israelis are human beings who can sometimes be loved. Such an attitude is not to be encountered in other Arab textbooks we have studied so far.

Zionism

As mentioned, Zionism is not recognized as a national movement and it is said to have been closely connected with Western Imperialism. But its history is told objectively,⁵⁶ without the usual derogatory terms used in schoolbooks of other Arab nations. The Palestinians, for example, dub it "racist".⁵⁷

⁴¹ Social Sciences, Grade 9 (?) p. 90

⁴² [Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) p. 55

⁴³ Literary Horizons, Grade 10 (?) p. 208

⁴⁴ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 357

⁴⁵ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 271

⁴⁶ [Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) p. 159

⁴⁷ [Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) p. 172

⁴⁸ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) pp. 108-110

⁴⁹ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 356

⁵⁰ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 218

⁵¹ [Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) p. 165

⁵² [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 163

⁵³ Literary Horizons, Grade 10 (?) p. 213

⁵⁴ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 349

⁵⁵ [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Humanities (2006) pp. 93-94

⁵⁶ See, for example, History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 258

⁵⁷ History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 10 (2004) p. 60

The Jews

Not much is to be found in the Tunisian school textbooks about the Jews. Apart from a brief description of their early history in ancient Palestine (and the more detailed history of the Zionist movement mentioned above), there are only sporadic references. Judaism does not fare better: the Ten Commandments and a photograph of an old Torah scripture from the Tunisian island of Jerba is all the Tunisian student can derive from the books.⁵⁸

The Jews' image is neither explicitly positive nor negative – contrary to books of other Arab nations which paint Jews in black. Philosophy textbooks for the higher grades present Jewish philosophers,⁵⁹ which may cause the student to hold these specific Jewish individuals in esteem. Other mentions of Jews in Medina depict them in a less favorable light as far as their tense relations with Prophet Muhammad are concerned.⁶⁰ But in this particular respect the Tunisian books do not dwell much on this rivalry, which is used by books of other Arab nations to foster anti-Jewish sentiments.

Anti-Semitism, including the Dreyfuss affair in France, is briefly discussed as a background to the emergence of Zionism,⁶¹ and Nazi persecution is very briefly mentioned. There is no direct reference to the Holocaust. There is one mention of the "Nazi crimes against the Jews" which brought about the support of Zionism on the part of Western public opinion and the development of a "guilt complex" and a desire to compensate the Jews in the Middle East – at the expense of the Palestinian people.⁶² Another passage mentions the merciless persecution of Jews in Europe within a resolution of the American Congress.⁶³ On the other hand, the French-turned-Muslim philosopher Roger Garaudy is much praised for "having exposed the falsity of Zionist argumentation" – probably in his capacity as Holocaust denier.⁶⁴

Part 2: The Attitude to Peace

Under this title we usually include anything related to the perceptions of peace and war and of the relations that should prevail among various groups. Most important among the latter is the issue of tolerance.

Tolerance

Religious tolerance towards the followers of other monotheistic faiths is a traditional value in Islam and is often discussed in school textbooks. The Tunisian books as well emphasize this value many times, relying on verses from the Koran and the Prophet's Sayings (*Hadith*). There is even a warning in one of the books against the inclination of devoted worshipers to exclude and show enmity toward non-believers, which contradicts the spirit of their own religion.⁶⁵ It should be noted here that the issue of pan-human solidarity is a motif stressed in Islamic Education textbooks, which utilize

⁵⁸ History, Grade 11 – Sciences (2007) pp. 14, 15, respectively

⁵⁹ Philosophy, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 1 (?) pp. 39 (Baruch Spinoza), 180 (Claude Levi-Strauss)

⁶⁰ Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) p. 139

⁶¹ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 343

⁶² History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 355

⁶³ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 345

⁶⁴ Philosophy, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 1 (?) p. 128

⁶⁵ Philosophy, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 1 (?) p. 192

the religious precepts in order to develop a sense of openness and tolerance to the "other".⁶⁶ One example is the following Prophetic Saying (*Hadith*):

A funeral procession went by [in Medina] and the Prophet [Muhammad] stood up and we stood up [as well]. We said: "O Messenger of God, this is a Jew's funeral." He said: "Is it not a soul? Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up!"

Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) p. 32

Another piece strongly criticizes radical Muslims:

We find mentions of respect for other religions, freedom of faith and respect for all opinions in thirty six [Koranic] chapters [*Surah*] and one hundred and twenty five [Koranic] verses. Tolerance, therefore, represents the basic idea in the Koran. How come, then, that some people have made the Book of God a tool of bigotry and narrow-mindedness?

[Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) p. 159

But the real contribution of Tunisian schoolbooks to the ideal of tolerance is found in the constant endeavor to instill in the students' mind the need to interact with the "other" as a precondition to the development of the "self": "It is impossible today to perceive our existence outside of the dialogue connection with the 'other'... The 'other' is essential and the dialogue with him – in whatever form – is necessary" ([Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Sciences (?) p. 154).

Dialogue with the "other" is repeatedly encouraged. Inter-cultural mutual fructification means self enrichment,⁶⁷ and the communication media and translational endeavors are the means for openness to the "other" and for mutual understanding. There is a call in one of the books for dialogue with the "other" and for the acceptance of the other voice.⁶⁸ The precondition to dialogue is recognition of the "other" – his identity, beliefs and culture.⁶⁹ The "other", says another text, should be regarded as a human being like us, with the same rights and duties, even if he differs from us in his color, religion and education.⁷⁰

Non-negation of the "other" is a continuous motif in the Tunisian books and it starts at an early age. Lessons on peace and tolerance are already given in the books for grades 2 and 3.⁷¹ The lesson for grade 3, for example, talks of mankind's unity with no distinction of color, gender and faith.⁷² Students in grade 7 are requested to describe in writing or illustration a situation in which they live in an atmosphere of tolerance and coexistence with the "other".⁷³ "Coexistence, says the text below that exercise, is accepting the existence of the 'other' and living with him side by side with

⁶⁶ See in particular Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) lessons 2-5

⁶⁷ [Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Sciences (?) p. 158

⁶⁸ Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) p. 35

⁶⁹ [Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Sciences (?) p. 201

⁷⁰ [Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Sciences (?) p. 199

⁷¹ Reader, Grade 2 (2007) lessons 1, 2; Reader, Grade 3 (2007) pp. 107-108

⁷² Reader, Grade 3 (2007) p. 108

⁷³ Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 7 (?) p. 272

no attempt to abolish or harm him" (Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 7 (?) p. 272).

Another motif in this context is the emphasis on the equality of all nations. No nation is superior and each shares with the other both positive and negative traits.⁷⁴ Racism is unacceptable.⁷⁵

Peace

Education for peace starts in the lower grades, as one can find lessons in favor of peace in grades 2 and 3.⁷⁶ A grade 3 book features fables about peace arrangements among animals.⁷⁷ War is accepted only in cases of aggression or against oppression.⁷⁸ A question posed to tenth-graders asks for their opinion regarding the effectiveness of negotiations vs. the use of arms.⁷⁹

Tunisia has not yet joined the peace process in the Middle East, which might explain its neutral position on this issue. There are few references to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979, some of which with the connotation that it harmed Arab solidarity and the Palestinian armed struggle against Israel.⁸⁰ The Oslo agreement is discussed in a neutral language and the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan is briefly mentioned. But the Tunisians insert in the books a statement by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in which he stresses the right of the (future) state of Palestine, the state of Israel, and the neighbors of both to live in peace.⁸¹ This quotation is absent from the Palestinian schoolbooks themselves, which systematically avoid any advocacy of peace with Israel.

Jihad and Martyrdom

Jihad is a favorite subject in Arab curricula and in Iran. One might find there whole chapters about this issue, backed by Koranic verses, Prophetic Sayings, poems, stories and illustrations. The Tunisian books do not deal much with this issue and they tend to play down its significance and relevance to our own days. Jihad and Jihad fighters are mentioned in the context of Tunisia's struggle for independence in the 1950s⁸² and once in relation to the Palestinian revolt of 1936 against the British.⁸³ An Islamic Education textbook features a definition of the term which states that the original meaning of Jihad in Islam has always been a spiritual struggle against one's own moral deficiencies. But, due to historical events (the persecution of the Prophet of Islam by his fellow townsmen), it has also come to denote defensive war.⁸⁴

In Arab and Iranian curricula, the ideal of martyrdom (*shahadah*) is glorified and the student is subjected to heavy pressure to adopt it personally. However, it is used in Tunisian books almost exclusively in the context of Tunisia's past struggle for

⁷⁴ [Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) p. 110

⁷⁵ Arabic Grammar, Grade 8 (?) p. 194

⁷⁶ See Reader, Grade 2 (2007) lessons 2, 3; Reader, Grade 3 (2007) pp. 107-108

⁷⁷ Reader, Grade 3 (2007) pp. 121-122, 128-130

⁷⁸ Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) p. 34

⁷⁹ Literary Horizons, Grade 10 (?) p. 214

⁸⁰ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 351

⁸¹ History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) p. 267

⁸² See, for example, History, Grade 10 (?) p. 187

⁸³ See the photograph of Palestinian Jihad fighters in History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 346

⁸⁴ Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) pp. 37-38

independence,⁸⁵ as well as in a description of a Palestinian leader who fell in battle against British forces in the 1930s (Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam).⁸⁶ But there are other occurrences of this term in poems written by non-Tunisians on the subject of Palestine, which appear in literature textbooks and elsewhere.⁸⁷ At any rate, no explicit or implicit advocacy of embracing Jihad or *shahadah* in an ongoing or future war against the enemy is found in the Tunisian textbooks, unlike the case in other Arab or Iranian books.

Terror

A revealing passage in one of the books states in a footnote to a French document about attacks and sabotage in Tunisia in the early 1950s that what is actually meant is "resistance to French Colonialism" (Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 6 (2007) p. 60). This statement makes clear that Tunisian educators still believe that end sanctifies the means. Such an approach is evident in a few references to the Palestinian armed struggle against Israel, where the term "*Fidai*" is used.⁸⁸ One text describes the PLO terrorist attack on the Israeli sports team at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972 as one of the *fidai* actions which aimed at attracting world public opinion to the Palestinian cause.⁸⁹

Conclusion

From the preceding material it is clear that the Tunisian schoolbooks can serve as a model for other Arab textbooks in the following fields:

- Emphasis on equality between all human groups, and on the importance of tolerance, peace and dialogue with the "other".
- Openness to the "other" and its culture (the West in this case).
- Formal adoption of foreign values (democracy, etc.) under the conviction that they are all products of universal cultural efforts throughout history.
- Rejection of the idea of cultural self-seclusion and advocacy of active participation in world cultural activities.
- Acceptance of Globalization as a *fait accompli* and its presentation as an opportunity alongside its being a threat.
- Use of religion as a platform for universal *rapprochement*, rather than as a means of alienation *vis-à-vis* the "other".
- Restriction of the ideals of Jihad and martyrdom to historical events, with no immediate implication on the student's own future.
- Avoidance of using historical events ideologically: non-Arabization of ancient Tunisian peoples (although it would have been probably tempting to present the Phoenicians of Carthage as "Arabs" who invaded Rome), as well as neutral treatment of past enemies with no attempt to weaving a centuries-long conspiracy of a multi-faceted enemy (as is done regarding the Crusaders and Western Imperialism in some Arab curricula).

⁸⁵ See, for example, the inscription next to a photograph showing a line of bodies of Tunisian victims of the clashes with French forces in Bizerte in 1961, History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 398

⁸⁶ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 346

⁸⁷ [Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) p. 159; History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 359

⁸⁸ *Fidai* – a traditional Islamic term denoting a person who is ready to sacrifice his life for a cause, usually in the realm of religion. Nowadays, it is used to denote members of the Palestinian armed organizations.

⁸⁹ History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) p. 350

- Objective explanation of Western Imperialism as a historical phenomenon with its own contemporary political, economic, social and ideological backgrounds, rather than its presentation as proof of the "other" being inherently evil.
- Fostering friendly relations with individual members of the "other" entity in spite of historical or current enmities (France in the Tunisian particular case).
- Objective criticism of the "other" whenever necessary, with due presentation of positive aspects (references to anti-imperialist Frenchmen and the presentation of the United States in Tunisian schoolbooks).

These are all important points hardly existing in books of other Arab nations studied by us, namely, Syria, Egypt (except for the attitude to the Coptic minority), Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority, as well as non-Arab Iran.

The only deficiency found in the Tunisian schoolbooks, as far as the attitude to the "other" and to peace is concerned, is their treatment of the Middle East conflict and its Jewish-Israeli side. As already stated above, the presentation of the conflict is biased, with no explanation of the foundations of the Jewish position. The Jewish side is presented as the sole source of the conflict and Israel is demonized, with no attempt to bring to the student possible positive information about it. Furthermore, the Tunisian textbooks seem to take a reserved position towards peace in the region and there are – albeit few – instances in which violent struggle of liberation is advocated, though not directly. There is even one case in which an obvious terrorist action (the Munich Olympics raid, 1972) is mentioned in a favorable context. All that should be rectified before Tunisian role model can become effective.

Yet, even in this field, one can find a few positive points absent in other Arab curricula. Apart from the honest admission that it was the Arab side which started the war of 1948 in defiance of the UN Partition Resolution, and thus caused the Palestinian disaster (an admission also appearing in one Palestinian textbook), the Tunisian schoolbooks feature – as already mentioned – the following important characteristics:

First, they avoid extensive coverage of the relations between Prophet Muhammad and the Jews of Arabia, which were tense most of the time and ended in expulsion, massacre and enslavement of the various Jewish tribes. These events are ordinarily used by Arab educators to foster hatred to Jews today, which makes the Tunisian ones uniquely positive.

Second, Israel is sometimes recognized both in the text and on maps. Although it is not done consistently in all cases, it is still a great improvement compared to other Arab textbooks. In no other case, except for two Israeli maps reproduced in one PA book, does the name "Israel" appear on a map in the Arab schoolbooks studied by us.

Third, the Tunisian books alone refer to an Israeli individual in a positive context, in a love poem by a Palestinian poet. Other Arab schoolbooks (unlike the Israeli ones) systematically avoid any positive reference to Jewish or Israeli individuals. This is a crucial point, since the absence of the "other" individual as an

ordinary person leaves the student with the impression of the "other" as a threatening alien group and blocks the road to future understanding.

Fourth, a statement by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in favor of peaceful coexistence between the State of Israel and the (future) state of Palestine is quoted in a Tunisian book. This is not done in the PA textbooks themselves, as they systematically avoid any call for peace with Israel. In other words, though the Tunisian books do not contain open advocacy for peace with Israel, the inclusion of this statement by Arafat may be interpreted as an implicit call for such peace.

Our study of the 64 Tunisian school textbooks has thus found that, provided they improve their treatment of the Middle East conflict, they might serve as a model for their Arab counterparts. In fact, many aspects of their attitude to the "other" and to peace can be adopted right now.

List of Sources

Language

1. Reader, Grade 1 (2007) 118 pages
2. Exercise Book, Grade 1 (2007) 136 pages
3. Reader, Grade 2 (2007) 144 pages
4. Exercise Book, Grade 2 (2007) 160 pages
5. Reader, Grade 3 (2007) 168 pages
6. Exercises in Reading, Grammar and Writing, Grade 3 (2007) 256 pages
7. Ways of Discourse, Grade 4 (2007) 174 pages
8. Exercises in Grammar and Writing, Grade 4 (2007) 144 pages
9. Reader, Grade 5 (2007) 174 pages
10. Writing, Grade 5 (2007) 191 pages
11. [Literary] Texts, Grade 6 (2006) 222 pages
12. Exercise Book, Grade 6 (?) 248 pages
13. [Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (?) 216 pages
14. Arabic Grammar, Grade 7 (2007) 303 pages
15. [Literary] Texts, Grade 8 (?) 272 pages
16. Arabic Grammar, Grade 8 (?) 232 pages
17. [Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) 211 pages
18. Arabic Grammar, Grade 9 (2006) 133 pages
19. Literary Horizons, Grade 10 (?) 402 pages
20. Literature, Grade 11, Part 1 (?) 256 pages
21. Literature, Grade 11, Part 2 (2007) 287 pages
22. [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Humanities (2006) 328 pages
23. [Literary] Texts, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) 318 pages
24. [Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 1 (2007) 376 pages
25. [Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 2 (2007) 351 pages
26. [Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – Sciences (?) 263 pages

Science

27. Science, Grade 2 (2007) 160 pages
28. Science, Grade 3 (2007) 160 pages
29. Science, Grade 4 (2007) 152 pages
30. Science, Grade 5 (2007) 175 pages
31. Science, Grade 6 (2007) 159 pages

- 32. Biology and Earth Sciences, Grade 7 (2007) 143 pages
- 33. Biology and Earth Sciences, Grade 8 (2007) 197 pages
- 34. Natural Sciences, Grade 9 (2007) 183 pages

Social Sciences

- 35. Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 5 (2007) 240 pages
- 36. Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 6 (2007) 279 pages
- 37. Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 7 (?) 280 pages
- 38. Social Sciences: History, Geography, Civics, Grade 8 (?) 304 pages
- 39. Social Sciences, Grade 9 (?) 280 pages
- 40. History, Grade 10 (?) 224 pages
- 41. Geography, Grade 10 (2007) 118 pages
- 42. History, Grade 11 – Humanities (?) 272 pages
- 43. History, Grade 11 – Sciences (2007) 200 pages
- 44. Geography, Grade 11 – Humanities (2007) 160 pages
- 45. Geography, Grade 11 – Sciences (2007) 144 pages
- 46. History, Grade 12 – Humanities (?) 358 pages
- 47. History, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) 279 pages
- 48. Geography, Grade 12 – Humanities (2007) 415 pages
- 49. Geography, Grade 12 – Sciences (?) 296 pages
- 50. History, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) 439 pages
- 51. Geography, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) 399 pages

Islamic Education

- 52. Islamic Education, Grade 7 (2007) 111 pages
- 53. Islamic Education, Grade 8 (2007) 158 pages
- 54. Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) 144 pages
- 55. Islamic Thinking, Grade 10 (2007) 104 pages
- 56. Islamic Thinking, Grade 11 (2007) 80 pages
- 57. Islamic Thinking, Grade 12 – Humanities (2006) 109 pages
- 58. Islamic Thinking, Grade 12 – Sciences (?) 95 pages
- 59. Islamic Thinking, Grade 13 – Humanities (2007) 238 pages

Philosophy

- 60. Philosophy, Grade 12 – Humanities (2007) 280 pages
- 61. Philosophy, Grade 12 – Sciences (2007) 191 pages
- 62. Philosophy, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 1 (?) 327 pages
- 63. Philosophy, Grade 13 – Humanities, Part 2 (?) 400 pages
- 64. Philosophy, Grade 13 – Sciences (2007) 408 pages