

Fundamentals of Palestinian Education
Attitudes toward the "Other" and Peace in the new Palestinian Syllabus

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The Palestinian Authority recently completed a seven-year project that revamped its education system by replacing its old Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks with new Palestinian books for use in schools across the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The new books were examined by CMIP in order to test whether they adhere to UNESCO proposed criteria as far as the attitudes to the "other" and to peace are concerned.

In that regard, the CMIP study reached the following conclusions:

- Jews are presented as foreigners who have no rights in the land whatsoever. Even Jewish holy places are not recognized as such. Rather, they are presented as Muslim holy places usurped by Jews. The Palestinians are presented as the only legitimate inhabitants of the land since antiquity and for this purpose they are depicted as direct descendants of the ancient Canaanites and Jebusites, who are portrayed as Arabs. Consequently, Israel's 5.5 million Jewish citizens are not counted among the country's legitimate inhabitants and, until recently, their cities – including Tel Aviv – were not listed on maps.
- Israel is not recognized as a sovereign state. Its very establishment in 1948, in accordance with UN resolutions, is dubbed "occupation" of Palestine and its name is omitted from all maps – except for two Israeli maps reproduced in one Palestinian textbook. In many cases the name Palestine covers the whole country on maps and some texts present Palestine as a sovereign state in the region instead of Israel. Israeli Cities and regions within pre-1967 borders are labeled as Palestinian areas and circumlocutions such as "the Lands of 1948" or "the Interior" are used to describe Israel's pre-1967 territory.
- Jerusalem is presented as an exclusively Arab city occupied by the Jews. Except for very few cases, Jews are not described as inhabitants of the city and their holy places in Jerusalem are never recognized.

- Jews are demonized and are depicted as having a dubious, or even murderous, character and are sometimes defined with derogatory terms. Israel is presented as the source of all evil, including cases of drug addiction and family violence in Palestinian society. The textbooks list over twenty five Israeli perceived crimes against the Palestinians. Objective information about Israel or Jews is rare and consequently does not balance out the copious amount of negative references. The textbooks never describe a Jew or Israeli as an individual and refer to them as part of a threatening group instead, thus denied any human traits.
- Zionism, the Jewish national movement in modern times, is portrayed as a racist-expansionist movement connected to Western imperialism which aspired from its very inception to expelling Palestinians from their land or even exterminating them. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory written about a century ago in Czarist Russia, is presented as historical fact and students are taught that it relays the “confidential resolutions” of the first Zionist congress. Under international pressure the PA published another edition without this reference, but there is no indication that the old copies were indeed removed from schools and stores.
- The textbooks display a biased view of the conflict by presenting Jews and Israel as exclusively responsible for the hostilities while Palestinians and Arabs are portrayed as victims. Their share of responsibility, such as starting the 1948 war by attacking Israel in defiance of the UN resolution of 1947, was not mentioned in the books until recently.
- Peace with Israel is never advocated even when the peace process is discussed. Much emphasis is put instead on the struggle for liberation from occupation with no clear distinction between the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and those of “Israel proper” in pre-1967 borders.
- Traditional Islamic concepts of Jihad and martyrdom are explicitly emphasized and used to highlight the religious character of the struggle against Israel. Terrorism against Israel is not openly advocated but not rejected either and those involved in such activity (*Fidais*) are praised and described as martyrs or prisoners of war.

Following are some examples taken from the new Palestinian textbooks:

The Jews ("Zionists") grabbed Palestine from its rightful owners:

“The Zionist gangs usurped Palestine, expelled its people from their cities, villages, land and homes and established the state of Israel.”

Arabic Language – Reading, Literature and Critique, Grade 12 (2006) p. 104

Jewish holy places are presented as Muslim holy places seized by Jews:

“...The attempt to Judaize some of the Muslim religious places like the Mosque of Abraham [the Machpelah Sanctuary – Cave of the Patriarch] and the Mosque of Bilal bin Rabbah [Rachel's Tomb].”

National Education, Grade 7 (2001) p. 55

The "Arab" Canaanites of antiquity are the only legitimate inhabitants of Palestine in history:

“The Arab Canaanites... gave mankind the greatest achievements of civilization during their long history... They preserved their existence and their deeply rooted presence in the Palestinian soil and remained – in spite of the waves of invasion that descended upon their country one after another – the cream of the land and its essence, while those transient waves were [merely] an anomalous exception [both] to logic and reality.”

Reading and Texts, Grade 9, Part 2 (2004) pp. 34-35

The 5.5 million Jews are not counted among the inhabitants of the land:

The Inhabitants of Palestine on 1.2.1999

The West Bank	1,973,000
Gaza	1,113,000
The Palestinians of the Interior*	1,094,000
The Palestinians of the Diaspora	4,419,000
Total:	8,598,000

National Education, Grade 6 (2000) p. 11

* "Interior": A circumlocution for Israeli pre-1967 territory.

The establishment of the state of Israel is presented as "occupation":

“...The Catastrophe [*Naqbah*], which took place in 1948, as the Jews occupied Palestine and established their state on its soil, and expelled the Palestinian people to exile and the neighboring states after having tortured it, massacred it and robbed its land, homes and holy places...”

Arabic Language – Reading, Literature and Critique, Grade 12 (2006) p. 109

The map shows the land as "Palestine" in its entirety and Israel doesn't exist:



The Nile Basin
"Palestine"

**History of the Arabs and the World in the Twentieth Century, Grade 12 (2006)
p. 153**

Palestine is described as a sovereign state in the region while Israel doesn't exist:

"The countries of Geographic Syria [*Al-Sham*] are Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon."
Islamic Education, Grade 2, Part 1 (2001) p. 98

The Israeli city of Nazareth is presented as a Palestinian town:

"The Arab homeland contains important religious sites to which Muslim and Christian pilgrims come from different parts of the world... as the case is with Palestine where Muslim and Christian holy places are found in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nazareth and other Palestinian cities."

Physical and Human Geography, Grade 12 (2006) p. 143

The use of the circumlocution "Lands of 1948" to describe sovereign Israeli territory:

"On June 23, 2002 Israel announced the beginning of the construction of a wall 600-1,000 km long and 7-8 m high to separate between the lands of 1948 and the lands of 1967."

Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006) p. 92

Jerusalem is presented as a captive city occupied by usurpers:

"Jerusalem is still captive and wounded and its captivity still causes grief among the Palestinian poets who have written hundreds of poems [expressing] love to it and longing for it... In the modern poems about Jerusalem the poets describe the suffering of Jerusalem the prisoner... praising its steadfastness and the Palestinian people's aspiration to its liberation..."

“...Jerusalem is not a silent geographic site in the modern poems about Jerusalem. Rather, it is a holy place talking, moving and full of life, interacting with time, space and events, whether the events depict the heroism of resistance and revolution or show the crimes of the usurping occupier.”

Arabic Language – Reading, Literature and Critique, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006) p. 111

A school text demonizing Israel:

“Your enemies killed your children, split open your women's bellies, held your revered elderly men by the beard and led them to the death pits...”

Reading and Texts, Grade 8, Part 2 (2002) p. 16

The Jews are presented as invading snakes:

“By your life! How come that snakes invade us.
And we [still] observe a protection covenant [*dhimmah*], which respects commitments.”

Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006) p. 67

Demonizing allegations of Jewish expansionism:

“They think out of their transgression that the Euphrates is theirs and that the Nile and the noble Kaaba are their borders.”

Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006) p. 80

Israel is blamed for drug use in Palestinian society:

“The phenomenon of drug abuse appeared in the Palestinian society during the era of Israeli occupation...”

Contemporary Issues, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006) p. 6

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an anti-Semitic text rife with outrageous conspiracy theories, is taught as historical fact in Palestinian schools:

“There is a group of confidential resolutions adopted by the [first Zionist] Congress and known by the name "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion", the goal of which was world domination. They were brought to light by Sergey Nilos and translated into Arabic by Muhammad Khalifah Al-Tunisi.”

History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 10 (2004) p. 63

The violent struggle for the liberation of Palestine from occupation still continues:

“Palestine is the blessed land... Its soil has been watered by the blood of the heroic martyrs who died in battles for its liberation and defense since the [days of the Prophet's] Companions to our own days.”

Islamic Education, Grade 12 (2006) p. 113

All Palestine is occupied, not just the West Bank and Gaza:

“The Green Line: An imaginary line appearing in green on the maps after the war of 1967 in order to separate the Palestinian lands occupied by Israel in 1948 from the lands occupied by it in 1967.”

Modern and contemporary History of Palestine, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006) p. 57

Jihad and martyrdom are ideals taught in school in the context of the struggle:

“Palestine is the land of *ribat** and Jihad.”

Arabic Language – Reading, Literature and Critique, Grade 12 (2006) p. 114

* *Ribat* – a traditional Islamic concept meaning a garrison-like steadfastness vis-à-vis the enemies of Islam.

“Belief drives the believer to sacrificing soul and property and investing them in God’s cause, because the believer knows that God greatly rewards for investing in his cause and for sacrificing for the sake of his religion.”

Islamic Education, Grade 12 (2006) p. 66

The school books sometimes refer to martyrdom as a wedding party:

“O my homeland, I would not cry in this wedding party, for our Arabness refuses that we cry over the martyrs.”

Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006) p. 13

Death and bloodshed are glamorized in a poem titled "the Martyr":

“Hearing [weapons'] clash is pleasant to my ear
And the flow of blood gladdens my soul
As well as a body thrown upon the ground
Skirmished over by the desert predators...”

Our Beautiful Language, Grade 7, Part 1 (2001) p. 97

In praise of those engaged in terror activities, the *Fidais*:

“O *Fidai*, your abode is Paradise, God willing!”

Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006) p. 112

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