Observations on Articles in Internationale Schulbuchforschung 25 4/(2003) of Georg Eckert Institute

At the end of 2003 The Georg Eckert Institute published Issue 4 of Volume 25 of its Journal of International Textbook Research, which contained four articles relating to the Middle East. CMIP has studied these articles and has the following observations to make concerning them. The Institute has not seen fit to post these articles on its website and in order to enable the reader of these observations, who does not have readily available a copy of the Journal, to make full sense of them it has been necessary to quote more extensively from the articles than would otherwise be the case. As a matter of courtesy these observations were sent to the Institute, prior to their publication here and, apart from the bald statement that “You will not expect us to share your evaluation, it appears to be disinclined to enter into any discussion of them. Should any of the individual authors respond, their views will be reported on this website.

Salem Aweiss: History Teaching in the Palestinian Context: Confronting the Interpretive Paradox! (pp. 319-341)

The author, according to the information on p. 341, teaches at the University of Florida. His reference to his and others’ joint work on p. 321 is in fact to the IPCRI 1 report1. A number of the points that CMIP saw fit to criticize2 in that the report repeat themselves in the current article; for example to write (at the foot of p. 321 and the beginning of p. 322) that “Judaism and the Jews are inadequately and inappropriately represented in relation to their presence in the region” is to grossly understate what the Palestinian textbooks actually do say in the matter. Similarly the author notes at the foot of p. 320: “Faced with an organized Jewish community in Palestine demanding immigration for the remnants of European Jewry and supported by the United States, Britain terminated its mandate in Palestine in 1948. This led to the creation of the State of Israel in the greater part of Palestine, the amalgamation of the remainder with Trans-Jordan in the state of Jordan and the dispossession of the majority of the Palestinian Arab population”. The war of that year and its antecedents are not mentioned, the Palestinian/Arab contribution to their misfortune being thus ignored.

2 “Detailed Comparison of the Reports on Palestinian Textbooks by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace and Report 1 of the Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information and Observations” at http://www.edume.org/react/ipcri/toc.htm
The article as a whole is technical, being concerned with the methods of teaching history in schools and the desideratum of developing a critical, and certainly an open and enquiring, attitude to the text. The author determines (p. 332) that “Teaching practices in Palestinian schools reflect the fact that elementary students are taught from early on to form powerful allegiances to the literal meaning of the texts... that historical accounts in the textbooks are a true reflection of what really happened in the past. Students, for example, are not confronted with the idea that historical enquiries might render a new interpretation to a particular historical account in the light of new evidence or different historical positions assumed by the enquirer [emphasis added]. This notion flies in the face of what students are taught about the correspondence between textbooks and what really took place in the past”. This is as close as the author comes to the suggestion that Palestinian schoolchildren be taught aspects of the Jewish or Israeli “narrative” in accordance with the UNESCO criteria.

The author gives reasons for this state of affairs (p. 333 bottom), but nowhere does he clearly refer to the need for nation building or for “narrating Palestinian nationalism”3. One may, then, beg leave to doubt how comprehensive is his analysis.

Later on (p. 337 bottom) the author states: “Politicians and educators alike should stand firm against historical distortions in school textbooks and in any book, for that matter. If we fail to do so, we are likely to produce students who lack the skills of independent, critical and analytical thinking and decision-making”. Nowhere does the author suggest what, if any, distortions there may have been so far as the Jews and Israel are concerned, but he does refer (p. 338 top) to the 2002 position paper of the Palestinian Ministry of Education to the effect that in the textbooks “the authoring team made it a point to end the section on the Crusaders with an ‘attempt to mollify the reader and help him to recognize the good present relationships with Europe’” and goes on, without further elucidation, to state: “It is to be hoped that this spirit will prevail in future editions of the textbooks that deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict”.

In his recommendations for the teaching of history (p. 338) the author includes the showing “of historical relationships between local, regional, national and global levels”; “teaching about the history of the building of Palestine without undermining or ignoring the formative variables”; the development of “pupils’ interest in the history of all the religious and ethnic groups that have or had a presence in the region”; and the development of “key concepts and skills and their application to knowledge deemed important to understanding the Israel-Arab conflict”. Where precisely Israel, the Jews, Judaism and Zionism are supposed to fit in, if at all, amidst all this verbiage is hard to fathom.

The author, therefore, fails to enlighten us regarding such detailed defects, if any, that he has found in the Palestinian textbooks in their treatment of The Jews, Judaism, Israel and the conflict and what concrete steps should, in his opinion, be taken to correct them.

The author is a member of the Georg Eckert Institute and his article concentrates “on the role of the Institute in lending its expertise in textbook research to researchers and pedagogues working on an Israeli-Palestinian comparison” (p. 345). In discussing changes in self-image and the image of the other in Israeli and Palestinian textbooks the author states (p. 349, bottom): “Strongly negative opinions have decreased, particularly on the Israeli side; on the Palestinian side the attempt is being made to completely avoid a clear picture of Israel and the Israelis in textbooks. Evidence of many of the individual points can still be found in the textbooks of today, however, the single aspects are less inclined to form a negative total picture as seemed in the older textbooks. Nevertheless it must be considered that such overall picture can quickly be restored if some of their elements have not yet been forgotten”. If there are changes for the better in the Palestinian textbooks surveyed by it4, as compared with earlier, Jordanian, books, CMIP is of the opinion that the most that can be said of them is that they hold out the hope for more far-reaching changes in the future and certainly do not constitute any real diminution in the negative total picture of Israel and Israelis and Jews and Judaism. To state that there is an attempt to completely avoid a clear picture of Israel and Israelis is an evasion. The picture comes through loud and clear.

The author speaks of “peace education” without giving consideration to the question of whether the parties to the conflict share the same concept of peace and whether this is the same as his. If “even the term “peace process”, when applied to Oslo, meets with criticism or contempt from the Palestinian side” (p. 351, last paragraph), this may be as much an indication of the Palestinian concept of peace and of the nature of the process. The fact that the Oslo “treaty is generally mentioned but not dealt with in more detail [and] there is neither a preparatory leading up to it nor are the (possible) consequences discussed” (p. 354, top) and the fact that the illegitimacy of war as such in the eyes of the international community is not taught, may have more than a little to do with this.

Criticism of martyrdom, certainly by CMIP, is not born of ignorance of “the positive evaluation accorded to risking one’s own life for the nation” (p. 351 bottom), but of its recognition. Likewise criticism of Palestinian textbooks based on the connection of martyrdom to the call for Jihad does not arise out of ignorance of the different kinds of Jihad, but, in the full knowledge of them, out of the emphasis placed on one kind of Jihad only. To state (p.353) that the Palestinian textbook authors cannot be blamed for Jihad meaning military reconquest of Palestine in the old Jordanian textbooks (and those of neighboring countries) and for the meaning of terms learned extramurally, is to miss the point of the criticism. CMIP accepts that “On, the one side, the valuation of the new Palestinian textbooks should be carried out in such a differentiated manner that the differences from the terms used outside the Palestinian textbooks should not be effaced. On the other side, teachers cannot neglect the connotations pupils bring into the classroom” (ibid.). But it is irrelevant. The books are criticized for

what they contain and what they contain does not exist in a vacuum, having a meaning that is different from the meaning of the same terms and ideas when used elsewhere. Furthermore, comparison with surveys of textbooks in use in neighboring countries\textsuperscript{5} shows that the differences between their textbooks and the Palestinian ones are not as great as the author apparently believes.

The author curiously has evaded the question of the non-appearance of Israel as such on maps or in the textbooks and, presumably, the description of areas within pre 1967 Israel as Palestinian, by shunting it into an arid discussion concerning “the representation or omission of borders in textbooks – especially in the Palestinian ones...” (p. 356). While he mentions that this is the official Palestinian explanation, he compounds it by suggesting that the borders of “extraterritorial” areas – Israeli settlements – within the Palestinian Authority territory would also have to be shown (p. 357). This argument is specious. Borders delimit; they do not define. The absence of a determined border between two political entities does not mean that that no part of them is to appear as such, the whole area supposedly being described by its historical or geographical name, which, coincidentally, happens to be the name of one of them\textsuperscript{6}. Within the context of the textbooks Foucault’s “archaeology of memory” (p. 357) is not so much a keeping alive of memories as a refusal to let go, which is what the internalization of the partition of the land would entail\textsuperscript{7}. The same applies to the code word “al-Quds” (p. 359). Nowhere do the Palestinian textbooks make clear, expressly or by implication, that ‘al-Quds” does not include any part of “Jewish Jerusalem”.

Whether or not, in the context of the Palestinian textbooks, the author is correct in his contention that “... it must be considered that the contents of textbooks for literature and religion evade the evaluation criterion of correctness and objectivity to a great extent... and it must be examined to what extent they reflect narrow, dogmatic, viewpoints and the inner variety of self interpretations and the variability of a cultural code which has developed over decades and centuries and which has shown historical flexibility and adaptability” (p. 360), this does not mean that every statement made therein is to be discounted. And this is even more so when it is echoed in the “reality books”. CMIP is of the view that statements even in non “reality books” have to be evaluated within the cultural context in which they are made and, whether or not they “evade the evaluation criterion of correctness and objectivity”, they do have some meaning and this must be sought against the background of such concepts as “the Arab homeland” and “Dar al-Islam”, among others, as well as the fact that nowhere in the Palestinian textbooks taken as a whole there is any indication that the idea of the partition of the land has been internalized.

The author mentions (p. 365) that CMIP is already reviewing new Israeli and Palestinian textbooks and also covering neighboring Arab countries. It is not completely clear to whom he is referring when he writes: “This process of textbook reviewing should be conducted more systematically and apply more scholarly methods” or whether it is meant to be a general exhortation applying to


\textsuperscript{6} The explanation that maps showing Israel would “upset” the pupils seems to be the very negation of education. The function of education is surely to deal with pupil’s emotions not pander to them.

\textsuperscript{7} For example “the establishment of the Independent Palestinian state on our entire national soil”. The Palestinian Society – Demographic Education, Grade 11 (2000), p. 134, PA1, p. 66. All references to pagination are to the Word format.
everyone. If this remark is meant to refer, inter alia, to CMIP, and intended to be more than a patronizing admonition, CMIP would welcome a more convincing, as well as detailed, demonstration of the shortcomings of its reviews than those contained in his article.
Elie Podeh: Recognition Without Legitimization: Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egyptian History Textbooks (pp.371-398)

The author of this article teaches at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His “article deals with the manner in which history textbooks in Egypt depict Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict” (p. 375) and is based on “[t]he latest edition of the textbooks in my possession [which] is 1998-99” as to which “I have no reason to believe that major changes have been introduced since then with relation to the depiction of the Arab-Israeli conflict” (p. 376, footnote 26). The article’s bibliography contains twelve books which “appeared in Cairo, in 1998” (p. 397), all of them in the fields of social studies, history, geography and civics. The report on Egyptian school textbooks by CMIP8 has surveyed textbooks in various subjects and in all grades, 103 of them in use in the state schools and 16 in the religious (Azharite) school system. Most of the state textbooks were published in 2002, with a minority published in 2001 and one in 1999. All the Azharite books were published in 2000 – 2002. CMIP has not monitored changes introduced in the edition surveyed by it, and has not based its findings, even in “historical matters” on history textbooks alone, but has made use of others to flesh them out9. For example much is to be learned about “[t]he concept of peace, as portrayed in the textbooks” (p. 391), as well as its opposite, from reference to language, Islamic education and story textbooks.

CMIP has found no reason to challenge the author’s main findings and such comments as it has to make are more a matter of the implications of those findings, which are not fully spelt out. Thus, for example the author notes that in the textbooks: “Jews are described as a people that is dispersed all over the world, striving to return to Palestine since the Babylonian exile more than a thousand [sic!] years ago” (p. 380). The quotation from the textbook currently in use, and on the earlier edition of which he is presumably basing his finding, reads:

"The Jews were dispersed in the countries of the world, aspiring to return to Palestine one day. That remained their hope since the Babylonian captivity. After a thousand years these hopes were renewed, but in the fashion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."10

Although the text may go on to deny the sovereign rights of the Jews to any part of Palestine, it is nevertheless a relatively objective, even though deficient, way of describing the connection of the Jews to the country and, in comparison with statements in the Palestinian11, Syrian and Saudi Arabian textbooks12 dealing with the matter, is almost understanding, if not sympathetic.

9 For example Islamic Education, Grade 11, (2002), p. 77, Egyptian Report p. 71, which perpetuates stereotypes down to the present day.
11 See footnote 4 above
The author terms this “recognition” and sees it as deriving from “the peace option in Egyptian policy, [and] the textbooks indirectly serve to ameliorate the demonic manner in which Israel has been depicted in the past. This Egyptian moderation reflects recognition – but not legitimization – regarding the Zionist enterprise and the State of Israel” (p. 392). He does not, however, specify clearly what this “recognition” means. What is recognition that does not impinge on legitimacy? A temporary, de facto accommodation? The author gives no indication whether the gap between “recognition” and legitimization is at all bridgeable, so long as any part of Palestine remains under Israeli sovereignty. If not, it is hard to understand how such recognition, in Egyptian eyes, is not merely a dead end, leading nowhere, and the peace, from which it is derived, remains nothing more than something in the nature of an agreement with Satan, dictated by circumstances and to be discarded along with the recognition when the situation allows.

The author, sums up Egypt’s commitment to peace as presented in the textbooks, by pointing out: “However, this commitment to peace stems from the benefits that Egypt and Arab countries derive from peace; it is not based on the recognition of the inherent importance and value of peace, or on the recognition of the Jews’ rights in Israel” (p. 391). Yet other Egyptian textbooks do exalt the value of peace as a general principle and an Islamic value, while at the same time specifying the restrictions Islam imposes on peace making, even to the extent of advocating war in the name of peace. The question is whether the conditional nature of peace, which arises out of the textbooks, can allow it to proceed anywhere beyond being a cold, delegitimizing, and discardable truce, without Israel meeting all Arab demands.
Jonathan Kriener: Palestinian School Textbooks: Between International Polemics and National Apologia (pp.399-406)

The author is a member of the Georg Eckert Institute and in the bibliography at the end of his article includes a number of Palestinian Authority textbooks, most of which were covered by CMIP in its 2001 report\(^{13}\), one was covered in the 2002 report\(^{14}\) and one in the 2003 report\(^{15}\). Curiously enough the bibliography includes, as secondary literature, an earlier CMIP report, not dealing with these textbooks, but none of the three reports that do, and it is, therefore, difficult to know whether his references to CMIP are to that report or extend to these three.

The author mentions “the unquestioned positive reference to the war of 1973 in which the Arab armies crossed the ‘green line’ into Israel’s core territory” (p. 401), which he regards as indicating “that the concept of defending Palestine propagated by the Ministry [of Education] still includes the part which today constitutes Israel” (ibid.). CMIP has been unsuccessful in finding the quotation in question and is unaware of any crossing of the ‘green line’ mentioned in any of the 107 books that it has surveyed in the three above-mentioned reports.

CMIP has dealt exhaustively with the question of maps, their labeling and the non-existence of the State of Israel on them, “trespasses” across the green line, and circumlocutions, as well as the specious arguments attempting to explain this away, elsewhere\(^{16}\). There is no point in repeating the same here. In the same way the spurious argument for the non-appearance of Israel on maps, cited with approval by the author: “The Palestinian Ministry of Education quite rightly argues that Israel has not yet defined its borders yet and they are subject to negotiations to come” (p. 401), has been addressed above\(^{17}\). The author’s contention that “The only passage that definitely, though only implicitly, contains acceptance of Israel’s existence is the Palestinian Declaration of Independence from 15 November 1988..., which accepts UN Resolutions since 1947” (ibid.), can be accepted only by ignoring the remaining contents of the textbooks. The author also sees the definition in one textbook of the task of the PLO: ‘... to constitute an independent Palestinian existence on Palestine’s ground, by which its liberation will be accomplished’ as implicitly pointing to the historical compromise with Israel (ibid.). The quotation in question is:

“The Achievements of the Palestinian Liberation Organization

1. The establishment of the independent Palestinian entity on the Palestinian lands that would be liberated.”\(^{18}\)


\(^{16}\) “Detailed Comparison of the Reports on Palestinian Textbooks by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace and Report 1 of the Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information and Observations” at http://www.edume.org/react/ipcri/toc.htm

\(^{17}\) Observations on article by Falk Pingel

\(^{18}\) National Education, Grade 6, (2000), p. 23, quoted in PA1 p. 67. All references to pagination in this and other reports are to the word format.
It is not immediately clear why the author draws the conclusion he does from this passage\(^\text{19}\). The fact that questions remain even for the author, notwithstanding his conclusion, as he himself states (p. 401), may give pause to doubt its correctness.

In dealing with the criticism of the textbooks that they "strengthen anti-Semitic (in the sense of anti-Jewish) stereotypes and Israel is accused of expelling and massacring Palestinians" (p. 402), the author states: "They [Israelis] are, however, not referred to as Israelis but only as soldiers, for instance in a story about a mother and her child, who go on a long bus ride to visit the father in a detention camp in the Negev desert but are sadly refused entrance to the prison" (ibid.). The passage in question\(^\text{20}\) is accompanied by a picture showing the soldiers in front of the prison on which an Israeli flag is clearly shown flying. What virtue the author sees in the omission of the description "Israeli" from the written text is not immediately clear.

The author goes on to state that it is wrong "to claim that the Palestinian textbooks accuse Israel of expelling the Palestinians. Expulsions and massacres are mentioned, although not as Israel's fault but as a consequence of the Israeli conquest" (p. 402). Leaving aside for the moment the question of what is the precise distinction that the author is trying to draw, he is presumably referring to a passage that reads:

"The Palestinian people were expelled from their land as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, [they] faced massacres and were forced to emigrate to the neighboring countries."\(^\text{21}\)

There are however a number of other passages\(^\text{22}\) in which the fault of Israel, the Jews and Zionists receives clearer, grammatical, expression. It would seem, therefore, that whatever value, had by the point that the author is trying to make, is greatly diminished.

A more careful reading of the reports issued by CMIP would have led the author to understand that it has never raised the demand "to avoid mentioning the expulsions during the wars and to deny towns like Nazareth, Beer Sheba and even Jerusalem their Palestinian character" which "equals a demand for national amnesia" (p. 402). Whatever objections CMIP may have to the Palestinian textbooks in this respect relate to the one sided and distorted nature of the presentation of these matters. The role of the Palestinians (and Arabs) in bringing about their own misfortune receives no attention and places in Israel are presented as exclusively Palestinian, as if time stopped running before 1948. It is always possible to explain each individual presentation, as the author seeks to do, but the unrelieved mass of such presentations over 107 textbooks says something, which is not addressed by the author and, until it is, explaining is but explaining away. The author also does not refer to passages clearly referring to the liberation of territory within pre 1967 Israel\(^\text{23}\), preferring instead to refer to the arguable meaning of a passage appearing in the foreword to the teacher in

\(^{19}\) A passage marginally more supportive of his conclusion is to be found in a textbook that he does not quote or include in his bibliography. See The Palestinian Society – Demographic Education, Grade 11 (2000), p. 131, PA1 p. 64

\(^{20}\) Our Beautiful Language, Grade 2, Part 1, (2001) p. 72, PA1 p. 33 and 78

\(^{21}\) National Education, Grade 6 (2000), p. 13, PA1 p. 24

\(^{22}\) See, for example, texts quoted in PA1 pp. 12, 14, 22, 25, 26 and 46, and PA3 Chapter 4, passim.

each of the textbooks, which, in any case, is not learned by the schoolchildren, while ignoring the plain meaning of texts which most certainly are.

When compared to the Syrian or Saudi Arabian textbooks the presentation of the Jews in the Palestinian books, certainly in the context of the beginnings of Islam, is mild though the author’s statement: “The Jews’ conduct is not marked with terms like treachery or cunning” (p. 403) is immediately contradicted by his reference (ibid.) to the goals of one of units in a textbook:

“The Second Unit: The Emergence of Islam
The Unit’s Goals: …
6. Comparing the position of Muslims and Jews in keeping agreements and treaties.”

It is also contradicted by his reference (ibid.) to stereotypes exemplified by the command of the Prophet to his secretary:

“The Messenger [Muhammad] ordered Zayd Bin Thabet to learn the Jews’ language in order to be safe from their trickery,”

while he surprisingly ignores the version, omitting the last eight words, to be found in a later textbook.

In summary CMIP does not think that textbook research can be advanced by the selective interpretation of passages taken in isolation.

**Conclusion**

The above-quoted articles, in particular those relating to the Palestinian textbooks, betray a certain studied reluctance to allow clear expression to the depth of the resistance embodied in the textbooks to the acceptance of the Jews as a people, Jewish rights in Palestine, the legitimate existence of Israel or the very idea of partition. In the same way they ignore the full implications of this for peace or any kind of reconciliation and thus do scant service to textbook research in this respect.

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24 For example “the establishment of the Independent Palestinian state on our entire national soil”. The Palestinian Society – Demographic Education, Grade 11 (2000), p. 134, PA1, p. 66


26 History of the Arabs and Muslims, Grade 6 (2000), p. 24. PA1 p. 11

27 History of the Arabs and Muslims, Grade 6 (2000), p. 133. PA1 p. 11