



"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." UNESCO Constitution

*Abstract of a presentation presented at the International Conference on
"School Textbooks in the Greater Middle East: National Identity and Images of Self and Other"
June 28-29, 2011 – Jerusalem, Israel*

Self Identity and the Attitude to the "Other" in Tunisian Schoolbooks

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Schoolbooks in general play a significant role in the field of socialization, including the development of a shared collective identity that would answer the needs of state and society as a whole. To that end, both images of "self" and "other" are shaped in order to clarify who is included in that collective identity and who is not.

Tunisia has developed a unique type of identification due to its specific circumstances: it is a small North African country very close to Europe; it has a history of political compactness and ethnic and religious homogeneity; it shares important components of its identity with other North African and Middle Eastern nations. To that one should add Tunisia's modern founder's pragmatism and secularist world-view, which have inspired its educational principles.

Tunisia's identity as revealed in its schoolbooks is unique in three ways:

1. The "other" in general is elevated to the rank of the "self" and interaction between the two is made indispensable for the latter's development.
2. Openness to the global environment is considered both necessary and possible. Within this context Islam is used in the cause of rapprochement rather than as a means of alienating "self" from "other".
3. The Tunisian identity encompasses all former non-Muslim and non-Arab local civilizations, without the slightest attempt to "Arabize" any of them, contrary to the educational message in some other Arab countries.

The paper examines the formation of Tunisian national identity along these lines as reflected in Tunisian schoolbooks. The basis for this study has been provided by sixty-four books of various subjects for grades 1-13, nearly all published in 2007. They were examined within the overall research of Middle Eastern schoolbooks conducted at the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE).

IMPACT-SE's research methodology is based on meticulous scrutiny, page-by-page, of each book and the extraction of each piece of the relevant material, that is, the attitude to the "other" and to issues of peace and war – be it in the form of text, illustration, graph, etc. – and its insertion in the report as is, so that the material would speak for itself. The analysis is done in the conclusion part of the report and is based on UNESCO's resolutions and declarations.

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