



IMPACT - SE

Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural
Tolerance in School Education

Arabs, Islam and Palestinians in Israeli Textbooks
A Preliminary Update, November 2009
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IMPACT-SE has recently begun a review of the Israeli school textbooks in order to update both of its reports on them² and broaden their scope³. So far, 23 schoolbooks in language, bible studies, civics, history and geography for the higher grades⁴ have been reviewed out of more than 250 new schoolbooks introduced since 2002 and actually in use in the Jewish sector⁵ during the present school year of 2009-2010.

Arabs, Muslims and Islam

No explicit or implicit stereotypes or prejudices regarding Arabs, Palestinians, Muslims and Islam have been detected. All of these are addressed in an objective, non-condescending and non-judgmental manner. Muslim or Arab individuals or groups might be depicted as violent, aggressive or unfair, only when substantiated by relevant facts and not as a general statement, as can be seen in the following example:

“In May 1921 Arab acts of violence were committed against Jews in Jaffa. These acts of violence are called the “1921 Pogroms.” The clashes spread to other settlements [...]. During the five days of the clashes 42 Jews were killed and dozens were wounded.”⁶

Different and discordant views as well as disagreements among Arabs and Muslims are mentioned, thereby conveying a heterogeneous and non-homogeneous perception of these groups, as can be seen in the following instance:

“Until the 1930’s, the Palestinian public was led by two families: the Husseini Family, [...] represented the extreme attitude that rejected the right of the Jews to settle in the land of Israel [...] and [...] the Nashashibi family represented a more moderate attitude towards Zionism [and] was open to dialogue and compromise.”⁷

¹ The data for this report was collected with the aid of Ido Freund and Ido Mizrahi, and the research and writing process was supervised by Dr. Yohanan Manor.

² Arabs & Palestinians in Israeli Textbooks, September 2000, 143 pages. Arab, Palestinians, Islam and Peace in Israeli School Textbooks, July 2002, 55 pages.

³ The scope of report will be broadened to include minorities and gender.

⁴ See the Appendix for the list of these textbooks.

⁵ The Israeli education system with its 1.5 million pupils is divided into an Arab (Muslim and Christian) sector (25%) and a Jewish one (75 %) which is composed of three streams: State (43%), State Religious (14%) and Orthodox (18%).

⁶ 1870-1970 The Era of Fear and Hope: History chapters for High school, 2001, p. 161.

⁷ 1870-1970 The Era of Fear and Hope: History chapters for High school, 2001, p. 166.

Occasional quotes of individuals belonging to the “other” group strengthen the perceptions that the group is made out of individuals who are, indeed, first and foremost human beings. This can be seen in the following example, stated from an Arab (Palestinian) point of view:

“[...] I do not demand that [Israel] stops being “Zionist” or “Jewish,” but it is my right as a citizen, as a person created in God’s image, to be sure that my children who were born in the land of their fathers and their fathers before them will be entitled to the natural rights, bestowed onto all mortals according to the laws of natural justice [...].”⁸

Substantial accurate and sympathetic information is provided on Islam, its appearance, its attachment to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem, the history of the Muslims and the Arabs and their contribution to human civilization. An example regarding the appearance of Islam is as follows:

“The founder of Islam, a merchant from Mecca, called upon its inhabitants to give up idolatry and to believe in Allah but they rejected his call. By 622 when the threats against his life and the life of his followers increased they had to flee Mecca. This flight is called Hegira, and from it begins the Muslim calendar. During the period between the Hegira and his death, Mohammed succeeded in getting many tribes of the Arabic peninsula to join Islam ... He stated that all the tribes belong to one community of believers that he called Umma. According to his statement, the religion of Islam, common to all the members of the Umma, is more important than their tribal or family origin.”⁹

Another example regarding the attachment to the Holy Land and Jerusalem is as follows:

“The Land of Israel in general, and Jerusalem in particular, have been increasingly sanctified in Islamic thought – as Islam has developed and spread, both religiously and geographically. As Islam absorbed more and more of the world conquered by it, so it adapted and Islamized the values that it absorbed, including the holiness of the Land of Israel, its flora and its water, living in it, the sanctity of being buried in it and the like. All these became from that time onwards part of orthodox Islam ...The expression of the holiness of the Land of Israel and Jerusalem in Islam can be found in the erection of the pair of mosques on the Temple Mount.”¹⁰

A prime example from the schoolbooks of Arab contribution to human civilization can be found in a textbook on urban development from ancient times to the Middle Ages, which devotes almost half of its content to the development of cities in the Muslim world, stressing “*the important means invested by the Caliphs in developing existing cities and creating new ones according to precise planning,*”¹¹ and focusing at length on the example of Baghdad in the Tenth Century.¹²

⁸Being Citizens in Israel: A Jewish and Democratic State, 2001, p. 39. For other examples of an Arab/Palestinian-Israeli direct quote see Ibid, p. 40, as well as Northern Israel: The Galilee, Golan and Valleys throughout the Ages (Ed. Ruth Peleg), 1999, pp. 428-429, and Civil Studies for Matriculation Exams: A Jewish and Democratic State Facing Reality, 2006, p. 65.

⁹ Journeys through Time: Cities and Communities, 2008, pp. 30-31

¹⁰ This is the Land – Introduction to Land of Israel Studies, 1999, p. 161. Similarly, Nationality – The Beginning, 2008, p. 101.

¹¹ Journeys through Time: Cities and Communities, 2008, p. 31

¹² Journeys through Time: Cities and Communities, 2008, pp 60-92.

Palestinians

The Palestinians are referred to not only as Arabs and Muslims but also as Palestinians. The conflict with the Palestinians is presented as a clash between two national movements fighting for the same piece of land:

“The conflict relates to territories that the Jews call ‘the Land of Israel’ and consider as part of their homeland while the Palestinian Arabs call them ‘Palestine’ and consider them as part of their homeland.”¹³

The crux of the contention between the two antagonistic national claims is genuinely clarified in a text by David Ben Gurion on the Right of self determination (1931): “*There is no doubt that the Arab people of Eretz Israel [Palestine] is entitled to the right of self determination ... This cannot serve as a basis for blocking the rights of the Jewish people.*”¹⁴

The conflict is described in an objective and honest way even when addressing thorny issues such as the perpetration of extremely violent and immoral acts and the responsibilities in the creation of the refugees’ problem. In this respect, one textbook clarifies the meaning of “Plan D,” devised by the Hagana:

“Plan D, prepared to confront the expected invasion by the Arab states, provided a free hand to the Hagana’s commanders to empty critical strategic areas from its population and to expel hostile villages ... Yet, it is clear that there was no plan whatsoever to expel the Arabs from the territories of the Jewish state, and the subject was never discussed by the highest political institutions. ...

The Arab Higher Committee did not call by radio broadcast or by other means the Arabs of Palestine to flee, nor did the Arab countries ...

The invasion [by the Arab states] increased the motivation of the Hagana commanders to cleanse border areas from their Arab settlements ...”¹⁵

The Oslo agreement is not only presented as an aspiration to put an end to the violent conflict with the Palestinians but also as Israel’s recognition of “*the right of the Palestinian people to an independent state,*”¹⁶ as outlined in a Bible studies textbook.

Some textbooks mention the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the territories it was to control fully (area A), partially (area B) or not at all (Area C) according to the second Oslo Accord (see map 2).

More recent schoolbooks mention only area A, reflecting change on the ground and actual full Israeli control of areas B and C following the suppression of the second Intifada. See for instance the following map (map 1):

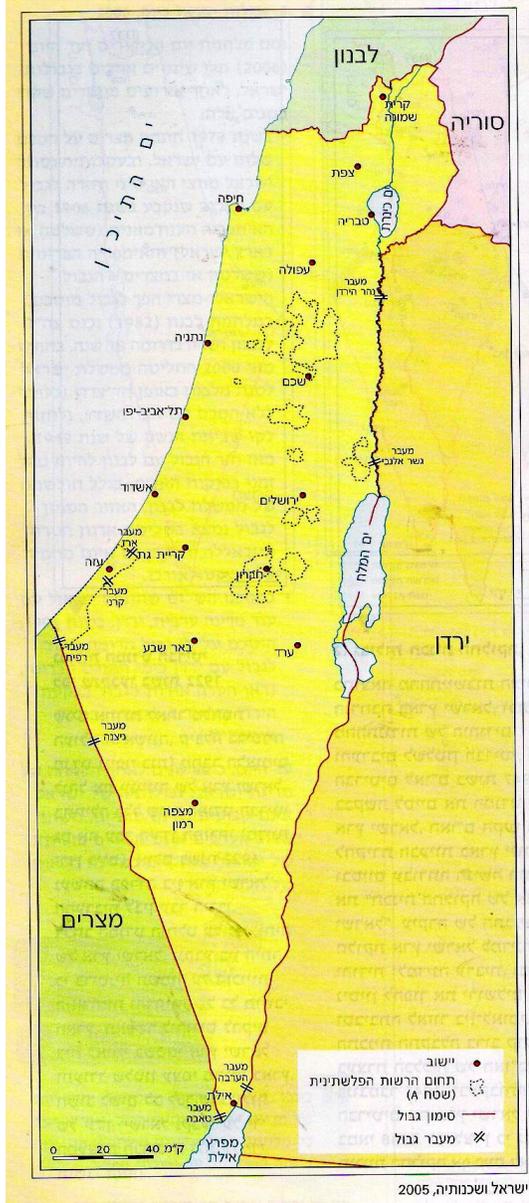
¹³ Israel in the 21st Century – Preparation for the Matriculation Exam, 2009, p. 18. See also Fein, Segurov, Lavie, Israel: Man and Space, Matah, Tel Aviv, 2007, p. 7.

¹⁴ Shula Inbar, Revolution and Change between the two World Wars 1920-1939, Lilah, Upper Grade, 2005, p. 66.

¹⁵ Revolution and Redemption in Israel and in the Peoples. *Part 3, 1939-1970* MaMad [Religious State Network], Upper Grades, Lilah, 2006, p. 312.

¹⁶ Destruction, Exile and Redemption: Chapters in Bible Studies with a Guide for Matriculation Preparation, 2005, p. 21.

Map 1: Israel and its Neighbors, 2005¹⁷



Map 2: Caption under map reads: A area: Full Palestinian control, B area: Civic Palestinian control, C Area: Full Israeli Control. (Being citizens in Israel, 2001. p. 13)



¹⁷Fein, Segurov, Lavie, Israel: Man and Space, Matah, Tel Aviv, 2007, p. 7.

Although the hardships of the Palestinians who fled or were deported from their homes are mentioned frequently, the actual term “Nakba” is rarely used, though it is mentioned in at least one book from the 23 examined so far:

“Because of the military defeat and the refugee problem, the Arabs refer to the 1948 war, which we call the **War of Independence** – as “**El Nakba,**” which in Arabic means: the catastrophe.”¹⁸

In the same book, the students are also asked the following:

“The War of Independence is called different names that express a different point of view on the war: The War of Independence [...], El Nakba.

Explain the meaning of every name. [...]

Explain the different points of view that led to giving each of these names.”¹⁹

In conclusion, there is no setback from the fundamentals²⁰ found in our two previous reports on Israeli schoolbooks, most of which have even been strengthened. Despite deterioration of Palestinian-Israeli relations after the second Intifada and the deep disenchantment with the peace process among Palestinians, peace is still considered something that might and should happen one day, and is presented as obviously positive and worthwhile for all sides.

¹⁸ 1870-1970 The Era of Fear and Hope, 2001, p. 314.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 315.

²⁰ Namely: Regarding the “other” as first and foremost a human being, overcoming suspicion, hatred and prejudices, knowing and respecting Islam and the Arabs, admitting the legitimacy of the rival national movement, presenting the conflict in a balanced way. See Manor, Yohanan, “Arabs and Palestinians in Israeli Textbooks. Changing the Perception of the ‘Other’”, in Michel Korinman & John Laughland, *Israel on Israel*, Valentine Mitchell Academic, London, 2008, pp. 225-239

Appendix - List of Textbooks (Grades 10-12):

History:

1. 1870-1970 The Era of Fear and Hope: History chapters for High School, 2001.
2. A National World Part 1: A Historical Trip down the Paths of Nationality in Israel and the World, 2008.
3. Nationality – The Beginning, 2008.
4. Revolution and Change between Two World Wars (1920-1939), 2005.
5. The World and the Jews in Recent Generations: Part B.1: 1920-1970, 1999.
6. Journeys through Time – Cities and Communities, 2008
7. Journeys through Time – From the Temple State to the People of the Book, 2008.
8. Journeys through Time – Nationality Put to the Test, 2008
9. Western Europe on the verge of the 21st Century, 1998.

Civil Studies:

10. Being Citizens in Israel: A Jewish and Democratic State, 2001.
11. Civil Studies for Matriculation Exams: A Jewish and Democratic State Facing Reality, 2006.

Geography:

12. Israel in the 21st Century – Preparation for the Matriculation Exam, 2009.
13. Northern Israel: The Galilee, Golan and Valleys throughout the Ages, 1999.
14. The Coastal Plain: Man and Environment throughout the Ages, 1997.
15. This is Jerusalem Part 1: From its Beginning to the Muslim Era, 1995.
16. This is Jerusalem Part 2: From the Crusades to Present Day, 1995.
17. This is the Land – An Introduction to Land of Israel Studies, 1999.
18. Israel: Man and Space, 2007.

Bible Studies:

19. Destruction, Exile and Salvation: Chapters in Bible Studies with a Guide for Matriculation Preparation, 2005.
20. Kings and Prophets for High School, 2005.
21. The Image of Man in the Bible, (?).

Language:

22. Hebrew – Comprehension, Language and Grammar, 2007.
23. Understanding the Text and Writing It, 2003.