

PALESTINIAN  
TEXTBOOKS:  
FROM ARAFAT  
TO ABBAS  
AND HAMAS

CENTER FOR MONITORING  
THE IMPACT OF PEACE  
AND THE  
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

# Palestinian Textbooks: From Arafat to Abbas and Hamas

Dr. Arnon Groiss

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace and  
American Jewish Committee

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace has changed its name to the Center for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education. Their research can be viewed at their Web site, [www.edume.org](http://www.edume.org).

All Rights Reserved.  
March 2008

## *Contents*

<b>Palestinian Textbooks: From Arafat to Abbas and Hamas</b>	1
 The Palestinian Schoolbook Publishing Project	 1
 Fundamentals of the PA Attitude to the “Other” and to Peace	 2
 Books for Grade Eleven: A Shift in Tone for the Better	 12
 Books for Grade Twelve: A Shift Back to a More Confrontational Tone	 15
 Conclusion	 17
 List of Sources Used in this Study	 19
 Notes	 22

*Palestinian Textbooks:  
From Arafat to Abbas and Hamas*

---

Arnon Groiss<sup>1</sup>

**The Palestinian Schoolbook Publishing Project**

For many years Palestinian schools in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip used textbooks published by the Jordanian and Egyptian authorities, respectively. Even under Israeli rule, between the years 1967 and 1994, those same books remained in use after having been “cleansed” of anti-Semitic and belligerent expressions. Following the transfer of power in the field of education in 1994 to the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA), it reintroduced the old, unrevised Jordanian and Egyptian books, stating at the same time—in response to Israeli complaints—that it would soon publish its own textbooks. Indeed, following the publishing of a few experimental books during the 1990s, the PA in 2000 launched a schoolbook publication process that provided new books to two grades every year. With the publishing of the books for grades 11 and 12 in 2005 and 2006, the process was completed.

In the meantime, some political changes took place within the PA. In November 2004, PA founder and chairman Yasir Arafat died, and Mahmoud Abbas was elected in his stead. In early 2006 free parliamentary elections brought to power a new government led by Hamas, which had been an opposition movement until that time. As it happened, the books for grades 1-10 were all prepared and published under Arafat, while the books for grade 11 were written under his successor, Abbas, and the books for grade 12, under the Hamas government.

*Dr. Arnon Groiss is the director of research for the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (formerly CMIP—the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace), a nongovernmental institute that studies the attitude to the “other” and to peace in school textbooks of Middle Eastern nations.*

This timeline gives the outside observer an excellent opportunity to examine whether political changes within the PA have had an impact on the PA curriculum so far as the attitudes to the “other” and to peace were concerned. Comparing the forty-two books issued for grades 11 and 12 with their predecessors, one can determine that some changes did occur, as analyzed below, although the fundamentals remained intact.

### Fundamentals of the PA Attitude to the “Other” and to Peace

Chief among these fundamentals is the denial of legitimacy to the rival “other.” The PA books do not recognize any rights the Jews might have in Palestine. The Jews’ aspirations regarding that land, based on their historical presence there, are styled “greedy ambitions” (*atma*)<sup>2</sup> and, until recently, that historical presence itself was played down, by presenting the Palestinians as descendants of the ancient Canaanites, who are presented in turn as Arabs and as the sole legitimate inhabitants of the country in antiquity.

The origins of the Palestinian people are the Canaanites, who immigrated to Palestine from the Arabian Peninsula in approximately 3500 B.C.E.

*National Education, Grade 5 (2004), p. 30*

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*

There is one case in which the Jewish presence in ancient Palestine is erased completely. Note the gap between the years 1200-586 B.C.E. (the ancient Israelite-Jewish period) in the following text:

Arab Palestine passed through many historical periods, as follows: the Bronze Age with its three phases, namely, the old, the intermediate and the new (3200-1200 B.C.E.), the period of the Babylonian and Persian rule (586-332 B.C.E.), the period of the Hellenistic (Greek) rule (332-63 B.C.E.), and the period of Roman and Byzantine rule (63 B.C.E.-632 C.E.).

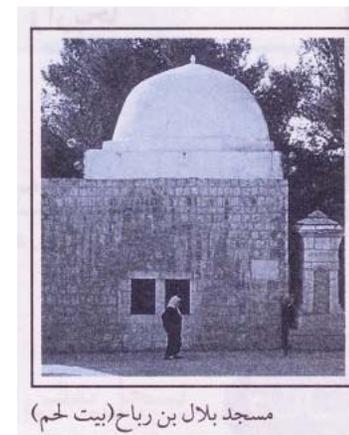
*Reading and Texts, Grade 9, Part 2 (2004), p. 36*

Even the Jewish holy places in the country are not recognized and are presented as Muslim holy places taken over by the Jews:

... The attempt to Judaize some of the Muslim religious places like the Mosque of Abraham [the Machpelah Sanctuary—Cave of the Patriarchs] and the Mosque of Bilal bin Rabbah [Rachel’s Tomb]

*National Education, Grade 7 (2001), p. 55*

In the case of Rachel’s Tomb, in fact, we see a myth in the making. In an experimental book issued by the PA in 1996, this place is still called the “Dome of Rachel, mother of our Lord Joseph and wife of Jacob.”<sup>3</sup> In a book published in 2001, it is given the name “Mosque of Bilal bin Rabbah.”<sup>4</sup>



The Mosque of Bilal bin Rabbah (Bethlehem)  
*National Education, Grade 7 (2001) p. 54*

Zionism, the Jewish national movement in modern times, is not recognized as such. Accordingly, Zionist Jewish immigration to Palestine in the modern era is dubbed “infiltration,”<sup>5</sup> and the 5.5 million Jews living in the country at present are not counted among its legitimate inhabitants, whereas the Palestinians of the Diaspora are. In the following demographic chart the Jews are absent:

The Inhabitants of Palestine as of February 1, 1999

The West Bank	1,972,000
Gaza	1,113,000
The Palestinians of the Interior <sup>6</sup>	1,094,000
The Palestinians of the Diaspora	4,419,000
Total:	8,598,000

*National Education, Grade 6 (2000), p. 11*

Even Israeli Jewish cities are not recognized. Tel Aviv, for example, was not shown on any map until recently.

In the framework of an overall effort to undermine the legitimacy of the Jewish national presence in the country, the official status of the Hebrew language is contested. Following is a stamp from British Mandatory times, reproduced in a PA textbook, with its Hebrew inscription erased:



*National Education, Grade 2, Part 1 (2001), p. 7*



The original stamp

Israel is not recognized as a sovereign state. With the exception of two Israeli maps reproduced in a grade 11 book, its name is not to

be found on any map at all. In textbooks, including on the covers of the books themselves, Palestine—which is presented as a full-fledged state—is sometimes represented as a sovereign state in the region in place of Israel, alongside Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

The countries of the Levant [Al-Sham] are Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

*Islamic Education, Grade 2, Part 1 (2001), p. 98*

And there are maps where the name “Palestine” covers the whole territory of pre-1967 Israel. Following is one example, among many, taken from an atlas approved by the PA for use in its schools:

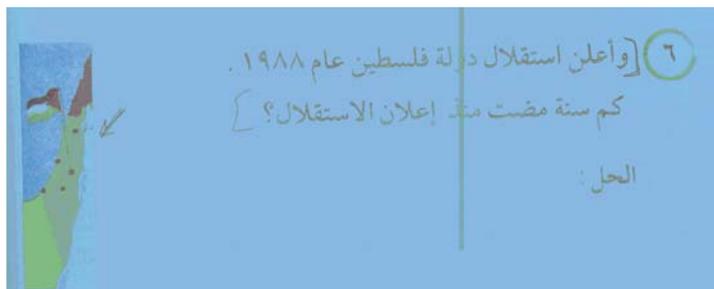


The Arab Gulf: Political “Palestine”

*Atlas of Palestine, the Arab Homeland, and the World (2002), p. 48.*

The books present regions such as the Negev, cities such as Haifa, Jaffa, and Nazareth, and sites such as Caesarea—all within Israel’s pre-1967 borders—as Palestinian.<sup>7</sup> Another phenomenon in this context is the use of circumlocutions such as “the lands of 1948,”<sup>8</sup> “the interior,”<sup>9</sup> or “the Green Line,”<sup>10</sup> to avoid using the phrase “Israeli territory.”

In a book for grade 3 students, a text referring to the Palestinian state is accompanied by a small map of the country in its entirety—including pre-1967 Israel—shown as one political unit under the Palestinian flag:



The establishment of the State of Palestine was declared in 1988.<sup>11</sup> How many years have passed since the declaration of independence?

*Mathematics, Grade 3, Part 1 (2002), p. 86*

Israel's very establishment in 1948, on the basis of the 1947 UN Partition Resolution, is not recognized and is referred to as the "occupation of Palestine."

Palestine faced British occupation ... in 1917 and Israeli occupation in 1948.

*National Education, Grade 6 (2000), p. 16*

Another fundamental relates to demonizing the rival "other"—whether it be Israel or the Jews, or as is done in books for grades 5, 10, 11, and 12, the West. This fundamental consists of three elements: First, denying the student any objective and adequate information about the rival, so that he or she will not have an impression of that "other" that is contradictory to the one advocated by the PA educators. With regard to the Jews, facts about their history, civilization, and religion are hardly available in the books. The Holocaust, for example, is not mentioned. Nor can the student find particulars about Israel—its political and social structure, economy, culture, etc.

Secondly, the individual "other" is totally ignored. In no case do the PA schoolbooks refer to Jewish or Israeli individuals in their daily lives, with their problems and aspirations. Jews and Israelis are always referred to as groups. Thus, a very important feature coloring the "other" as an ordinary human being is missing from the books, leaving in the student's mind an impression of a threatening group of aliens.

Third, the adversary is presented as evil, without a single positive redeeming trait. This negative presentation sometimes includes hateful expressions and derogatory terms, though not to the extent found in schoolbooks of other Arab nations such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, and even Egypt. The Jews, for example, are mostly portrayed within the context of their political rivalry with the Prophet of Islam in Arabia, or within the context of the present conflict, which automatically casts them, in both cases, into the category of villain. They are described, in the former context, as people who use tricks and violate treaties<sup>12</sup> and, in the context of the present conflict—as killers.<sup>13</sup> There are literary pieces in which they are referred to as "slaughterers" or "Tartar battalions."<sup>14</sup> Another book attributes genocidal intentions to the Jews:

The coming of the Jewish throngs to Palestine continued until 1948 and their goal was taking over the Palestinian lands and then taking the original inhabitants' place after their expulsion or extermination.

*National Education, Grade 7 (2001), p. 20*

An especially demonizing description is the following:

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<sup>15</sup>*

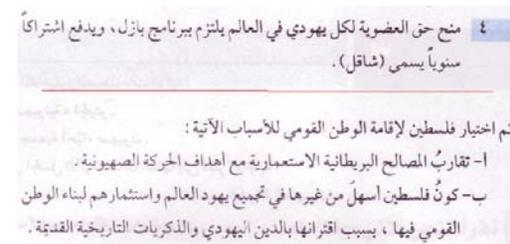
Israel is portrayed as a power that harms its immediate environment, as enumerated in a list of more than twenty-five crimes, beginning with its very establishment, through the occupation of Palestine both in 1948 and 1967, expulsion of the Palestinian peo-

ple, oppression of those under its control, aggression against neighboring Arab states, massacre of Palestinians, assassination of Palestinian leaders, destruction of the Palestinian economy, house demolition, stealing Palestinian land and water, breaking of Palestinian territorial unity, attempts at obliterating Palestinian national identity and heritage, usurpation or desecration of Palestinian Christian and Muslim holy places, and finally, Israel's responsibility for social ills such as drug addiction in Palestinian society, the meager participation of Palestinian women in economic activity, family violence, etc.<sup>16</sup>

The Zionist movement is presented as a racist movement connected with Western imperialism.<sup>17</sup> *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a czarist Russian fabrication from the early twentieth century, is presented in a PA history textbook for grade 10 as the secret resolutions of the First Zionist Congress. The text reads: "There is a group of confidential resolutions adopted by the 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."<sup>18</sup> Following worldwide protests, the PA issued a revised edition of this book, but for a long time there was no indication that the old copies had been removed from schools and stores. The 2007 revised book does not include references to the *Protocols*.



Presentation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*  
*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 10*  
(2004), p. 63



Lack of reference to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*  
*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 10*  
(2007), p. 63

As for the West, it began to be referred to in the PA schoolbooks for grades 5 and 10, which were published during Yasir Arafat's last year in power (2004). This phenomenon continued after his death, both under Mahmoud Abbas and the Hamas-led government, with a gradual intensification: The West is portrayed as an entity threatening Arabs and Muslims and as a source of detriment to both societies. The list of perceived Western crimes includes imperialism and the occupation of many Arab and Muslim countries; racial discrimination, invention of Zionism, and the support of Israel against the Arabs; the abuse of the West's world political and economic hegemony to exploit Arabs, Muslims, and other Third World nations; abuse of the environment; and the pursuit of a cultural attack against Arabs and Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

Biased presentation of the conflict is a third discernible fundamental within the PA books' attitude to the "other" and to peace. The adversaries—whether the Jews, Israel, or the West—always bear the burden of responsibility for the conflict, while the Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims are always presented as victims of the former's conspiracy or aggression. The Palestinian and Arab shares of responsibility for the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe) and for the ensuing calamities such as the refugee problem are never discussed. Until recently, even the mere fact that it was the Arabs who started the war of 1948, in defiance of the UN Partition Resolution of Novem-

ber 1947, was not mentioned. Within the context of the peace process, Israel is depicted as the party obstructing peace, while the Palestinians are portrayed as the ones who aspire for peace.

A fourth fundamental, and an extremely alarming one, is the absence of open advocacy of peace with the adversary, even when the peace process itself is being discussed. Instead, the books focus on violent struggle for liberation against the occupation, the extent of which is never specified. On the contrary, the description of Israel's very establishment in 1948 as an occupation of Palestine and the massive efforts made in the textbooks to present as Palestinian regions, cities, and sites within the pre-1967 Israeli borders leave a strong impression—surely among the students—that the struggle against Israeli occupation does not end within the boundaries of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Following are verses from a poem accompanied by a short explanation that expresses the theme of a violent struggle for the liberation of Palestine:

Good morning, O my homeland ...  
 A morning of glory and red liberty, watered by the martyrs' blood ...  
 "A morning of glory and red liberty, watered by the martyrs' blood ..."—the hope for the liberation of Palestine.  
*Reading and Texts, Grade 9, Part 1 (2003), pp. 20-21, 24*

An excerpt from a children's poem with a similar meaning:

I shall redeem my country with my soul,  
 I, the Palestinian child  
*Our Beautiful Language, Grade 1, Part 1 (2000), p. 132*

This struggle for liberation is further emphasized in the books with the help of the traditional Islamic concepts of jihad and martyrdom.<sup>20</sup> Jihad is elevated to a status immediately following belief in God and in His Messenger:

The Prophet was asked: "Which of [all] deeds is best?" He said: "Belief in God and His Messenger." He was then

asked: "Then, which one?" He said: "Jihad in the cause of God."

*Islamic Education, Grade 9, Part 1 (2003), p. 62*

The martyr's rank is also described as elevated: "The martyr's rank is above all ranks."<sup>21</sup> There is one case in which martyrdom is referred to as a wedding party.<sup>22</sup> A poem entitled "The Martyr" includes the following disturbing verses:

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*

Although expressions rejecting terror in general appear once or twice in the books,<sup>23</sup> they do not specifically refer to Israel in this context, beyond the accusation that Israel falsely presents the Palestinian liberation struggle as terrorism.<sup>24</sup> Except for one case in which terrorist activity against Israel is favorably discussed,<sup>25</sup> the PA books do not explicitly support it. But there are implicit favorable references to such activity by using the term "martyr" to denote Palestinian terrorists who were killed and "prisoners of war" for those imprisoned. "What is our duty toward the families of the martyrs, the wounded, and the prisoners of war?" the students are asked.<sup>26</sup> The "*fida'i*"—a term commonly used nowadays to denote members of the Palestinian armed organizations—is used approvingly. A poem for first-graders reads:

*Fida'i, Fida'i, Fida'i*  
 O my land, the ancestors' land  
*Fida'i, Fida'i, Fida'i*  
 O my people, the people of eternity  
 I shall live as a *Fida'i* and continue as a *Fida'i*  
 And shall die as a *Fida'i* until it [i.e., the land] returns ...  
 To the teacher: The teacher will repeat with the students this national song several times.  
*National Education, Grade 1, Part 2 (2000), pp. 57-58*

### Books for Grade Eleven: A Shift in Tone for the Better

Within the aforementioned general fundamentals, one can find some change of tone in the books for grade 11, prepared under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas (2005). This shift may indicate an attempt to provide an initial platform for subsequent departure from the old worldview established by Yasir Arafat. Following is a brief description of the main changes.

For the first time the Palestinian student is given a relatively substantial amount of information about ancient Jewish history in Palestine.<sup>27</sup> Also, Jerusalem is mentioned as the Jews' capital for that period,<sup>28</sup> a phenomenon not to be encountered in former books. The Jews are mentioned once as inhabitants of the city in 1948,<sup>29</sup> while former books had denied them that status and made Jerusalem an exclusively Arab city founded by the ancient "Arab" Jebusites and occupied by the Jews today.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, no connection is made between the Jews' presence in the country in antiquity and their present aspirations there; and Jerusalem is presented as an Arab city occupied by them.<sup>31</sup> There is no change regarding the Jewish holy places either, as none of them is recognized as such.

In addition, the Jewish presence in the country today is given some legitimacy by showing Tel Aviv and other modern Jewish cities on one of the maps (though their names appear so small that one needs a magnifying glass in order to read them):



Map of the State of Palestine (Settlements)  
*Physical and Human Geography, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006),*  
p. 20

Israel is still not recognized as a sovereign state, but there are two maps in which its name appears within its pre-1967 territory. These are Israeli maps reproduced in a PA history textbook for grade 11:



Map of Sharon's Project  
"Israel"



Map of Alon's Project  
"Israel"

*Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine, Grade 11,*  
*Part 2, (2006), pp. 57, 58.*

It might be tempting to conclude that it was easier for the PA publishers simply to leave the name as it appeared on an Israeli-made map than to add the word "Israel" on a Palestinian one. But they could have as easily erased it, as indeed they did in former years, when a Hebrew inscription was erased from a stamp of British Mandatory times reproduced in a PA textbook (see pg. 4).

Moreover, side by side with former circumlocutions such as "the lands of 1948," one also finds in the text the name "Israel," denoting Israeli pre-1967 territory as opposed to the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>32</sup>

As regards elements of the second fundamental demonizing the rival "other," here too one finds some changes. First, there are cases in which some objective information is given to the Palestinian student about the adversary. In addition to facts about the Jews' presence in the land in antiquity, the Palestinian student is also given some details about the Jewish Holy Scriptures—though lacking in depth and based solely on the Islamic point of view.<sup>33</sup> There is also a

brief mention of Jewish “suffering under the Nazis,” alongside the term “anti-Semitism,” without further elaboration.<sup>34</sup>

More importantly, the books for grade 11 do not refer much to the Jewish-Muslim rivalry in Arabia in the era of early Islam, thus reducing the number of anti-Jewish expressions. This is not the case vis-à-vis Israel, which is still blamed for various ills and damages suffered by the Palestinians. But the tone of the accusations is more rationalistic than emotional, possibly reducing the level of hatred.

Such nuances of change and softening have not been evident regarding attitudes toward the West under PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Rather, the opposite is the case. One can discern an intensification of the negative attitude to the West compared to former books—not in language per se, but in presenting the student with much more “incriminating” material about the West’s perceived crimes.

Within the framework of the third fundamental—that of biased presentation of both the conflict and the peace process—a brave step has been taken with the clear admission that it was the Arab side, not the Jews, who started the war of 1948 in defiance of the UN resolution,<sup>35</sup> thus bringing great disaster upon the Palestinians. Until now, this fact had been blurred or simply misrepresented. The Jews are not cleared of overall responsibility for the conflict, to be sure, but this new admission might serve as a first step on the part of the Palestinians toward taking some share of that responsibility. It should be added in this context that the text narrating the events leading up to the war of 1967 does not accuse Israel of exclusive responsibility for the deterioration of the situation then.<sup>36</sup>

As regards the attitude to peace, there is still no open advocacy of peace with Israel, although the story of the peace process is told in great detail.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, there is a clear decrease in the number of texts referring to the liberation struggle and to jihad and martyrdom. In addition, the issue of tolerance, formerly taught in PA schools with reference to Muslim-Christian relations only, now includes, in principle, the Jews as well.<sup>38</sup>

### Books for Grade Twelve: A Shift Back to a More Confrontational Tone

All the abovementioned indications of change, which might have signaled the beginning of a more peace-oriented PA curriculum in the future, had Mahmoud Abbas had a chance to stabilize his position in power, have disappeared with the ascendancy of the Hamas government, as evidenced in the books for grade 12 published under its control. With the sole exception of the continued use of the term “Israel” to denote Israeli pre-1967 territories,<sup>39</sup> the return to the old-style attitude is complete.

Thus all the changes representing a certain degree of recognition of the State of Israel, albeit limited, are gone, and so is the somewhat more rationalistic tone of criticism. The accusations against Israel are heavily emotional, with the addition of a newly introduced charge—racial discrimination against the Palestinians. This accusation had once appeared in a PA experimental textbook in the 1990s, but was later dropped. Now it reappears and fills the larger part of a chapter dedicated to the phenomenon of racial discrimination around the world. To make this accusation more formidably based, the definition of racial discrimination is stretched to accommodate Israeli activities including the occupation and annexation of the Old City of Jerusalem by Israel in 1967.<sup>40</sup>

Hatred toward Jews and Israel is further intensified by introducing expressions not found in earlier books. A poem reproduced in one of the books for grade 12 likens the Jews, in the context of the conflict, to invading snakes, a metaphor found, for example, in Syrian textbooks:

By your life! How come that snakes invade us  
And we [still] observe a protection covenant [*dhimma*],  
which respects commitments?  
*Arabic Language—Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006),*  
p. 67

Material criticizing the West is abundant. There are whole chapters on Western imperialism in the history textbook for grade 12, in

addition to many references to the West's cultural threats against Arab and Muslim societies in various other books.

As far as peace is concerned, the peace process is hardly discussed—certainly not favorably. On the other hand, the issue of violent liberation is treated in the books for grade 12 more extensively and passionately than in earlier books. For example:

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*

I swear by Al-Aqsa Mosque and those plains  
I shall not return the sword to its sheath and shall not lay down arms.

*Arabic Language—Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006), p. 85*

Within this context, an attempt is made to emphasize the religious character of the struggle by reintroducing a concept that had first been utilized during Arafat's last year in power (i.e., in books for grades 5 and 10)—*ribat*. *Ribat* is a part of the larger concept of jihad. It indicates a state of remaining steadfast and alert in lands under attack by the enemies of Islam. In the case of Palestine, *ribat* is perceived as the duty of every Muslim, of whatever age and sex, for which he or she will be greatly rewarded by God.<sup>41</sup> A grade 12 language book features the following statement:

Palestine is the land of *ribat* and jihad.

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

Also rewarded are the martyrs. The books for grade 12 reintroduce the extensive praise for martyrs and martyrdom,<sup>42</sup> and a former phrase likening martyrdom to a wedding party is repeated again:

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*

## Conclusion

The PA schoolbooks for grades 11 and 12 were studied in light of the educational fundamentals regarding the “other” and peace that existed in the PA textbooks for grades 1-10 published under the late Yasir Arafat. As shown in this study, these fundamentals deny the Jewish and Israeli “others” any legitimacy, demonize them, make them bear exclusive responsibility for the Mideast conflict, avoid any expression that would openly advocate peace, and encourage instead violent struggle against them. These fundamentals, in their various manifestations, are spread throughout the Palestinian curriculum and are found in books for all grades, as is easily discernable in the quoted source material within this study.

The change in the PA leadership following the ascendancy of Mahmoud Abbas in late 2004 brought some change, not in the fundamentals themselves, but in some of their manifestations, implying a degree of readiness on the part of the new leadership to ease somewhat the rigid guidelines dictating nonrecognition, demonization, and violence. In themselves, these changes did not depart from the basic fundamentals, but they provided some hope for further improvement in the future.

However, the formation of the Hamas-led government in early 2006 had a frustrating impact of these changes. If there were in 2005 glimpses of hope for a gradual improvement in the PA curriculum as far as attitudes to the “other” and to peace were concerned, they were nipped in the bud by the new government, as is reflected in the textbooks for grade 12 published under its control. The rigid and uncompromising approach toward Israel and the Jews on the one hand and the emphasis on a violent liberation struggle at the expense of peace advocacy on the other hand—both advocated by the PA founder, the late Yasir Arafat—hold firm. Thus, a unique historical opportunity for change within an ongoing project was lost.

But there still is hope. First, the grade 11 books are still being used in the PA schools. Secondly, the PA can utilize the book reprint mechanism to introduce changes, though on a far smaller scale. In

2007 the PA conducted a reprint operation for most school textbooks, which was done largely under the newly established authority of President Mahmoud Abbas following the governmental crisis with Hamas. Several changes have been discerned, most of which were minor, but there were some significant ones. For example, the 2007 edition of one of the books does not include a text that urged the students—as in the 2000 edition—to glorify “the concept of martyrdom and martyrs.”<sup>43</sup> To be sure, there were other changes for the worse, and the overall picture presented above remains intact. But the PA has thus shown that improvement of its school curriculum is definitely possible.

It is the task of all peace-loving parties in the world to encourage the PA to pursue this course of improvement so that the Palestinian younger generation will have a better future.

## *List of Sources Used in this Study*

### **Language**

- Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 1, Part 1 (2000)  
*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 5, Part 2 (2004)  
*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 6, Part 1 (2000)  
*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 7, Part 1 (2001)  
*Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, Part 1 (2002)  
*Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, Part 2 (2002)  
*Linguistic Sciences*, Grade 8, Part 2 (2002)  
*Reading and Texts*, Grade 9, Part 1 (2003)  
*Reading and Texts*, Grade 9, Part 2 (2004)  
*Reading and Texts*, Grade 10, Part 1 (2004)  
*Arabic Language—Reading, Literature, and Critique*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006)  
*Arabic Language—Reading, Literature, and Critique*, Grade 12 (2006)  
*Arabic Language—Linguistic Sciences*, Grade 12 (2006)

### **Islamic Education**

- Islamic Education*, Grade 2, Part 1 (2001)  
*Islamic Education*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2003)  
*Islamic Education*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005)  
*Islamic Education*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006)  
*Islamic Education*, Grade 12 (2006)

### National Education

- National Education*, Grade 1, Part 2 (2002)  
*National Education*, Grade 2, Part 1 (2001)  
*National Education*, Grade 2, Part 2 (2001)  
*National Education*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2003)  
*National Education*, Grade 5 (2004)  
*Palestinian National Education*, Grade 6 (1996)  
 [Experimental edition]  
*National Education*, Grade 6 (2000)  
*National Education*, Grade 7 (2001)

### History

- History of the Arabs and Muslims*, Grade 6 (2000)  
*History of the Modern and Contemporary World*, Grade 10 (2004)  
*History of the Modern and Contemporary World*, Grade 10 (2007)  
*Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005)  
*Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006)  
*History of the Arabs and the World in the Twentieth Century*, Grade 12 (2006)

### Contemporary Issues

- Contemporary Issues*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005)  
*Contemporary Issues*, Grade 12 (2006)

### Geography

- Geography of Palestine*, Grade 7 (2007)  
*Geography of the Arab Homeland*, Grade 9 (2003)  
*Physical and Human Geography*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006)  
*Atlas of Palestine, the Arab Homeland, and the World* (2002)

### Other Subjects

- Mathematics*, Grade 3, Part 1 (2002)  
*The Palestinian Society—Demographic Education*, Grade 11 (2000) [Discarded?]  
*Arts and Crafts*, Grade 7 (2001)

## Notes

1. Dr. Arnon Groiss is the director of research for the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (formerly CMIP—the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace), a nongovernmental institute that studies the attitude to the “other” and to peace in school textbooks of Middle Eastern nations. CMIP has issued some dozen reports dealing with Israeli, Palestinian, Syrian, Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, and Iranian school textbooks—the latter three studies copublished with the American Jewish Committee. Most of these reports are available on CMIP’s Web site, <http://www.edume.org>.

CMIP’s method of research includes careful scrutiny of all the books available on all subjects, extraction of any material related to the relevant issues studied—be it a text, map, photograph or illustration—and its insertion in the report as is. Concluding analysis at the end of each report is based on criteria suggested by UNESCO and developed by CMIP. The criteria include questions such as: Is the “other” recognized and accepted as equal or is it stereotyped and prejudiced? Does education foster peace and reconciliation? Are political disputes presented objectively and honestly? Are equal standards applied? Is the wording likely to create misapprehension and conflict avoided?

2. *National Education*, Grade 7 (2001), p. 22.

3. *Palestinian National Education*, Grade 6 (1996), p. 89.

4. Bilal bin Rabbah was one of Prophet Muhammad’s companions.

5. *The Palestinian Society—Demographic Education*, Grade 11 (2000), p. 21.

6. “Interior” is a circumlocution denoting pre-1967 Israeli territory.

7. For example: “Activity: Let us color the Negev desert on the map of Palestine” (*National Education*, Grade 2, Part 2, 2001, p. 25); “Palestinian Cities: ... Haifa ... Jaffa” (*Geography of Palestine*, Grade 7, 2007, pp. 76-77); “Let us express ... the religious position of one of the following Palestinian cities: ... Nazareth” (*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 6, Part 1, 2000, p. 44);

“[Roman] theaters of Sebastia and Caesarea in Palestine” (*Arts and Crafts*, Grade 7, 2001, p. 61).

8. *National Education*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2003), p. 43.

9. *National Education*, Grade 6 (2000), p. 11.

10. *Geography of the Arab Homeland*, Grade 9 (2003), p. 53. The “Green Line” refers the line that, prior to 1967, used to denote the armistice boundaries between Israel and the then Jordanian West Bank and the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip, which was usually colored green.

11. The PLO declared the independence of the State of Palestine in Algiers in November 1988.

12. *History of the Arabs and Muslims*, Grade 6 (2000), p. 133; *Islamic Education*, Grade 9, Part 1 (2003), pp. 48-49.

13. *Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 7, Part 1 (2001), p. 95; *Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, Part 1 (2002), p. 134. (In the latter source, the story that provided the reference was omitted in the 2007 edition.)

14. *Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, Part 1 (2002), pp. 77, 56, respectively. (The latter poem was omitted in the 2007 edition.)

15. This text was written by the Egyptian writer Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti, who died in 1924. It was not originally directed against the Jews, but its inclusion in a Palestinian textbook of today clearly has a demonizing effect regarding the Jews.

16. The references in this context are too numerous to be cited here, and the reader is referred to the chapter on “Israel’s Image” in various CMIP reports on PA schoolbooks at the aforementioned Web site, <http://www.edume.org>.

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

18. *Ibid.*, p. 63. (Sergey Nilos was the Russian author of this notorious document, under the auspices of the czarist secret police.)

19. There are numerous references to these issues in books such as *History of the Modern and Contemporary World*, Grade 10 (2004), pp. 55-58, 85-89; *Reading and Texts*, Grade 10, Part 1 (2004), pp. 100-06; *Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 5, Part 2 (2004), pp. 58-69. The books for grades 11 and 12 are rich in material in this respect, but the instances are too numerous to be cited here. The reader is referred to our forthcoming report on these grades to be placed on the CMIP Web site soon.

20. Martyrdom—*shahadah* in Arabic—stems from the Greek concept of “testimony,” namely, that one testifies to one’s belief by being ready to die for

one's religion. But while in Christianity this concept was mainly restricted to Christians who preferred dying to forced conversion, in Islam it has been expanded to also include Muslims who fall in battle and, nowadays, even those who kill themselves with others in what is commonly considered terrorist actions. In both societies martyrdom and *shahadah* are positive concepts.

21. *Linguistic Sciences*, Grade 5 (2004), p. 146.
22. *Linguistic Sciences*, Grade 8, Part 2 (2002), p. 105.
23. *Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, Part 1 (2002), p. 73.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
26. *Islamic Education*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2003), p. 63.
27. *Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005), p. 9 and also pp. 10, 11.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10, 11; *Islamic Education*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005), p. 15.
29. *Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006), p. 34.
30. *National Education*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2003), p. 50.
31. *Arabic Language—Reading, Literature, and Critique*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006), p. 111.
32. *Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006), p. 86.
33. *Islamic Education*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005), pp. 41-42.
34. *Contemporary Issues*, Grade 11, Part 1 (2005), p. 41.
35. *Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006), pp. 30-31.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76, 87-91.
38. *Islamic Education*, Grade 11, Part 2 (2006), pp. 110-11.
39. *Contemporary Issues*, Grade 12 (2006), p. 44.
40. *History of the Arabs and the World in the Twentieth Century*, Grade 12 (2006), pp. 124-27.
41. *Islamic Education*, Grade 12 (2006), pp. 86-87.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 66; *Arabic Language—Reading, Literature, and Critique*, Grade 12 (2006), p. 12; *Arabic Language—Linguistic Sciences*, Grade 12 (2006), pp. 81, 85: "Upon my word! I shall continue acting on the martyrs' path."
43. *Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 6, Part 1 (2000), p. 46.

**The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP)** aims to encourage a climate of tolerance and mutual respect between peoples and nations, founded on the rejection of violence and the changing of negative stereotypes, as a means to resolving conflicts. CMIP's main work consists of examining the content of school textbooks used in the Middle East to determine whether children are being taught to accept and recognize the right of the other to exist. Established in 1998, CMIP has become one of the leading experts in this field.

[www.edume.org](http://www.edume.org)

**The American Jewish Committee (AJC)** protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

[www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org)