

## **Palestinian Schoolbooks: An Updated Conclusion**

By

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**October 2009**

In the final report on the PA schoolbooks issued by IMPACT-SE in March 2008 under the title “Palestinian Textbooks: From Arafat to Abbas and Hamas” we checked the attitude reflected in these books to the “other,” Jews and Israel in particular, and to peace, especially within the Middle Eastern conflict. We reached the conclusion that the fundamentals of the Palestinian Authority schoolbooks regarding these issues:

- Delegitimize the Jewish and Israeli “other” by denying the historical and religious presence of Jews in Palestine and non-recognition of the State of Israel
- Demonize the “other” by ascribing dubious and nefarious characteristics to Jews (never portrayed as individuals) and the State of Israel
- Present a biased view of the Middle Eastern conflict by assigning Israel exclusive blame and absolving the Palestinians of any responsibility for it.
- Stress the ideal of a violent struggle of liberation rather than advocating the ideal of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The said report discerned some changes in that attitude for the better following PA Chairman Arafat’s death in November 2004 and the ascendancy of Mahmud Abbas to power, as well as a reversal of that development following the formation of the Hamas-led PA government in early 2006. Nevertheless, all in all, the PA seven-year schoolbook publishing project was described as dissatisfactory in this respect. Hope was then raised that the situation would improve through the mechanism of schoolbook reprinting which began in 2007.

Now, a year and a half later, we can sum up the reprinting process up to this point, taking into account a relatively large number of books that have undergone some change. Indeed, in three cases a term or even a whole quotation, brought forth in our said report as proof of a Palestinian negative attitude, no longer exists in the books. Thus, a book for grade 11 which described Jewish immigration to Palestine in modern

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times as “infiltration” has been removed from the curriculum,<sup>2</sup> probably for serious didactic reasons and not necessarily because of this description. In two other cases, poetic verses expressing readiness to fight and self-sacrifice were omitted in the 2009 reprints.<sup>3</sup>

Other cases of omission included some statements which expressed hatred, of which the most noted one is a poetic verse saying “They think out of their transgression that the Euphrates [River] is theirs and the Nile [River] and the noble Kaaba are their borders.”<sup>4</sup> A case in point is Islamic Education textbook for grade 12 of which the 2009 edition omitted several pieces such as a reference to the precept of befriending Muslims and alienating oneself from non-Muslims and criticism of “Orientalists” (that is, Western scholars of Muslim civilization).<sup>5</sup>

But this is only part of the overall picture and by no means does it reflect a significant shift in attitude. In fact, one can discern in the reprints a relatively “balanced” pattern of changes in both directions, which leaves the core fundamentals unaltered. Examples:

- A text, which mentioned in 2002 the three monotheistic faiths in relation to the land of Palestine and was followed by a question in which the student was requested to name them, omitted in 2009 both the word “three” and the question.<sup>6</sup>
- An exercise, which employed the terms “mosque,” “church” and “synagogue” in a book published in 2004, dropped the synagogue in 2009 and replaced it with another term denoting a mosque.<sup>7</sup> This case and the former indicate a growing tendency, which is also reflected in the media, to play down the role of Judaism in the history of Palestine.
- Short references to events related to ancient Jewish history in Palestine have also been omitted in 2009.<sup>8</sup>
- A poem has been added to a reprint which talks about loyalty to Jerusalem against those who “sneak” into it, which questions the legitimacy of Jews as that city’s inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>
- Several additions of demonizing descriptions of Israelis such as “the occupation has deprived the children of Palestine of happiness and smiles.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Palestinian Society – Demographic Education, Grade 11 (2000). The quotation appeared on p. 21 (p. 4 in our report).

<sup>3</sup> Our Beautiful Language, Grade 1, Part 1 (2000) p. 132 (p. 10 in our report); Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006) p. 85 (p. 16 in our report)

<sup>4</sup> Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2007) p. 80 – omitted in the 2009 reprint p. 74

<sup>5</sup> Compare Islamic Education, Grade 12 (2006) pp. 64, 116-117, respectively, to the 2009 reprint of the same book.

<sup>6</sup> Our Beautiful Language, Grade 3, Part 1 (2002) pp. 14-15; *ibid* (2009) pp. 10-11

<sup>7</sup> Our Beautiful Language, Grade 4, Part 1 (2004) p.17; *ibid* (2009) p. 14

<sup>8</sup> History of the Ancient Civilizations, Grade 5 (2004) p. 19: Queen of Seba’s visit to Jerusalem; *ibid*, p. 46: Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign against Jerusalem in 586 BCE

<sup>9</sup> Our Beautiful Language, Grade 6, Part 2 (2009) p. 19, and see also other references to the city of Jerusalem as exclusively Arab since the days of its “Arab” founders, with no mentioning of the Jews’ national and religious connection to it throughout history in Our Beautiful Language, Grade 6, Part 2 (2008) pp. 14-17.

<sup>10</sup> Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2009) p. 46, and see also Civic Education, Grade 6 (2009) pp. 52 (“the [Israeli] settlements exemplify the logic of force”), 55 (“What is it that enables Israel to pollute the [Palestinian] environment?”)

- There are several cases of addition of belligerent statements to the schoolbooks in reprints.<sup>11</sup>
- Martyrdom and martyrs are again mentioned in language exercises.<sup>12</sup> Although a language exercise which included the sentence “I swear that I shall continue acting on the path of the martyrs” was also omitted,<sup>13</sup> another piece was introduced in another book saying: “...the Palestinian mothers have become unlike all other mothers in this world and continue for the sixth decade to bury their children with trilling cries of joy! ...the Palestinian fathers continue to bury their sons calmly and promise to give the rest! ...the Palestinian of whatever age, religion, gender and affiliation becomes a martyr project!”<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, although positive changes have occurred in the reprinted books during the last two years, they still do not amount to forming a clear departure from the above-mentioned Palestinian negative fundamentals regarding the attitude to the Jewish and Israeli “other” and to peaceful resolution of the Middle Eastern conflict.

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<sup>11</sup> “Thousands of victims shall return; the victims of oppression shall open every door” Our Beautiful Language, Grade 7, Part 1 (2007) p. 37; “It seems to me that a treacherous dagger will dig in my back” Linguistics Sciences, Grade 8, Part 1 (2009) p. 29; “Say to those who cry for home out of love that battles do not want weeping” Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2009) p. 31, and see also the *Intifada* poem in Our Beautiful Language, Grade 6, Part 1 (2009) pp. 51-52.

<sup>12</sup> Reading and Texts, Grade 9, Part 1 (2008) p. 144; Reading and Texts, Grade 9, Part 2 (2008) pp. 117, 187

<sup>13</sup> Arabic Language – Linguistic Sciences, Grade 12 (2006) pp. 81, 85 – omitted in the 2009 reprint.

<sup>14</sup> Our Beautiful Language, Grade 7, Part 2 (2008) p. 67