

Texts of Hate

By Arlene Kushner

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Although questions are frequently raised regarding the ostensible moderation of PA president Mahmoud Abbas, somehow the entire issue of textbooks produced by the Palestinian Authority is given short shrift, as if it is of little import. Perhaps this is because there is the mistaken notion that, while the books once were problematic, they have been satisfactorily revised and no longer merit attention.

In point of fact, the contents of these books and the background to their publication are enormously telling: When we understand what the PA produces for its children, Abbas's intentions are laid bare, without the possibility of guile.

Serious work on these texts has been done by the Institute for Measuring the Impact of Peace and Tolerance in School Education (formerly known as CMIP), located in Jerusalem. The Institute has released a number of reports over the years, and is scheduled to soon release its latest, which is being supported by the American Jewish Committee. Dr. Arnon Groiss, who heads research, provided the material that forms the basis for this review:

It was in 2000 that the PA began publishing its own textbooks – two grades per year – to replace the Jordanian and Egyptian texts that had been in use in its schools since its inception. By 2004, texts for all subjects in grades 1 through 10 had been released. This work was done during the Arafat era.

The books, on examination, were found to promote:

Delegitimization of Israel. Palestinians, who are said to be descendants of Canaanites, are represented as the only legitimate possessors of the land. The presence of Jews as residents in Israel is ignored. It is so blatant that when population figures are given, the Jews are simply omitted. Jews are seen as having been invaders in antiquity and colonialists now.

All Jewish holy places in Israel – including the Kotel, the Western Wall – are presented as purely Islamic sites. Israeli cities, such as Haifa, are referred to as Arab cities. There is not a single map that has Israel marked on it. Nor is Israel mentioned by name in texts. Instead there are phrases used such as "the area occupied in 1948," and "area of the 1948 war."

Demonization of Jews. Objective information on the history or culture of Jews is lacking. Individual Jews are never mentioned, only groups; Jews are thus denied their humanity. Jews in Israel are represented as evil and without a single positive trait. Jews are said to commit treaty violations, use tricks, kill people, seek the expulsion and extermination of Palestinians. In an 8th grade text, we find: "Your enemies kill your children, split open women's bellies."

Violence.

There is no open support for peace based on reconciliation. "Liberation" of all of the land of Palestine is encouraged and praised. "Return" is seen as a violent process, part of the liberation. The emphasis on violence is intensified because of focus on the traditional Islamic ideals of Jihad and martyrdom

In 2005, after Abbas had become PA president, books for grade 11 were released. There was some minimal improvement in them, but it was relative.

For instance, two maps are included that mention Israel by name. This is not done in a positive sense, however, to teach children that here is Israel, and here is the Palestinian state. The maps are Israeli maps showing plans for the division of the land, and the accompanying text is negative: This is what the colonial occupiers are planning.

In the 11th grade texts, as well, for the very first time, Jews are mentioned as being in Jerusalem. And, for the first time, in a PA history text, Kings David and Saul are mentioned, and there is an occasional reference to pre-1967 Israel.

It is, perhaps, this hint of change for the better that has led some to conclude that all is well. That conclusion, however, would be greatly premature. For, by the time the 12th grade books were introduced in 2006, Hamas was part of the PA unity government, and with one single exception, any small beginning sign of moderation had disappeared.

In addition, what we must not lose sight of is the fact that *books for grades 1 through 10, produced under Arafat, continue to be in use*. And so, students must wait until grade 11 to see a map that has Israel on it, and to learn that there officially are Jews in Jerusalem. By 11th grade (age 16 or 17), perceptions and understandings – molded by the earlier texts – are likely to be firmly embedded.

And here we come to the most telling part of this entire process: In 2007, after the Hamas - Fatah split, when Fayyad had become prime minister, all of the textbooks were reprinted. Here was Abbas's opportunity to ensure that meaningful changes in these books were made for all grades. It didn't happen. Most alterations were simply in page layout and format. Very few substantive changes were made – and of those that were, some were improvements, while others made matters worse.

When one examines all that is objectionable in these texts, what is perhaps most striking is the veneration of martyrdom. The Palestinian youth are being taught to seek death and violence rather than peace and life.

The texts – in all subject matter – are rife with exhortations to pursue martyrdom and Jihad.

From *Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 7, Part 1 (2001), p. 97. A section from a poem, called "The Martyr" that is to be studied:

"I shall carry my soul in my palm
And toss it into the abyss of destruction
...Hearing [weapons'] clash is pleasant to my ear
And the flow of blood gladdens my soul."

From *Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 5, part 1, p. 70 (2004):

"The fighter goes to battle with two happy ends in front of him: either victory or

martyrdom."

From *Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 5, part 2, p. 32 (2004):

"The martyrs kiss it [the Palestinian flag] with their blood."

And, finally, from *Reading and Texts*, Grade 8, part 2, page 16 (2002), what is perhaps the most potent and disturbing example of them all:

"Your enemies seek life and you seek death..."

"These drops of blood that flow from your bodies will be transformed into red fiery shooting stars that will come down on the heads of your enemies."

The student is not being told to analyze this material that is part of a poem. Rather, the student is being welcomed into a culture of death and asked to participate in its bloody and destructive rituals.

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