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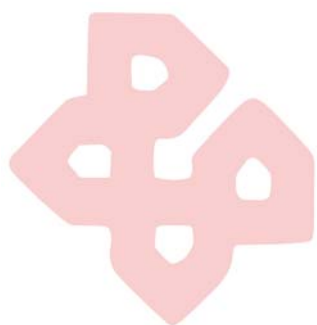
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PALESTINIAN CURRICULUM FROM AN ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE

El plan de estudios palestino desde una perspectiva israelí



Ashraf Mohammed Hasan Abukhayran

Al-Quds University (Palestina)

E-mail: ash73raf@yahoo.com,

akhayran@admin.alquds.edu, ashrafa@correo.ugr.es

Resumen:

Este artículo aborda el plan de estudios existente en los centros educativos de Palestina desde un punto de vista israelí. La realidad de la escuela y de los libros de texto palestinos son objeto de controversia y debate en Israel. Promueven una realidad y alienta otra mirada que es observada con recelo si no hay unas bases sólidas de acuerdo y respeto entre ambos pueblos. El artículo parte del derecho de cada pueblo a diseñar su plan de estudios. Del mismo modo, señala que es compatible el ejercicio de este derecho desde una identidad nacional propia con el trabajo activo por la comprensión y el conocimiento como bases para la confianza. El artículo indaga sobre las dos principales posturas que suscita fuera de Palestina: a favor o reconociendo el derecho palestino a diseñar su educación y materiales curriculares; o bien, en contra y recelando de estos materiales y de sus consecuencias. Delimita las principales argumentaciones que se esgrimen en el debate. Y concluye con un escenario de conocimiento e indagación para la mutua comprensión y respeto. Por lo que promueve un nuevo análisis del currículum y los libros de texto palestinos actuales, que será objeto de su tesis doctoral: "El Currículo Palestino y la Representación de la Identidad Palestina en el año 2010".

Palabras clave: Currículo/Pan de estudios, libros de texto, Identidad, Palestina, Conflicto, Jihad.

Abstract:

The article explores the Palestinian curriculum from an Israeli perspective. The reality of the school and the Palestinian textbooks are the subject of controversy and debate in Israel. Promotes and encourages a reality that is observed another look askance if no sound basis for agreement and respect between the two peoples. The article defends the right of every people to design their curriculum. Similarly, states that supports the exercise of this right from a national identity with the active work for the understanding and knowledge as a basis for trust. Inquire about the two main positions that arise out of Palestine.

The article studies the two main positions that arises out of Palestine for or recognizing the Palestinian right to design education and curriculum materials, or, against, and suspicious of these materials and their consequences. Identifying the main arguments put forward in the debate. He concludes with a scenario of knowledge and inquiry for mutual understanding and respect. It promotes a new analysis of the curriculum and the current Palestinian textbooks, which will be his doctoral thesis: "The Palestinian Curriculum and Identity Representation of Palestine in 2010".

Key words: Curriculum, textbooks, Identity, Palestinian Conflict, Jihad.

1. Introduction and Background

Palestinians and Palestine were part of the Ottoman Empire along with other Arabs and Muslims for almost four hundred years (1516-1917). They became under the British Mandate colonization since the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1948 Palestine was divided by the UN Council decision number 181 into two states: a Jewish one (54%) and a Palestinian state (46%) but as a result of the war Israeli state became (77%) of historical Palestine (Said, 2006). Israel as a state was established but no Arab or Palestinian one was formed. The remaining parts of Palestine to be named later the West Bank and Gaza Strip were annexed to Jordan and Egypt respectively since early 1950s. About 750 thousands Palestinians were uprooted and expelled from their homes and lands to become refugees. The situation continued like this until 1967 war when Israel occupied these parts besides the Golan Heights. Palestinian National Authority was established as a result of the Oslo Accords that was signed in 1993 between Israeli and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington (Abu Lughod, 1996).

The formal Palestinian education was neglected during the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate. There were few schools opened mainly and only for upper class children and the illiteracy rate was very high among males and females. Schools purpose was only to prepare Palestinians to serve the Mandate policies. Palestinian national identity was not a priority on the contrary it was fought and oppressed.

The Jordanian and Egyptian education systems including teachers training and school books were used in the West bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip schools respectively. Both education systems represented the Jordanian and Egyptian political entity and ideology and the conflict as well presented from their perspectives. This continued until 1967 when the Palestinian education system became under the control of the Israeli occupation authority. Military commanders used to be in charge of the Palestinian education system. Schoolbooks were censored and books were banned from schools (Farsoun & Zacharia, 1997; Adwan, 2001; Abukhayran, 2009).

Three types of Palestinian schools existed for Palestinian according to supervising authority: Governmental (public) schools that are run by the government, free from charges and open for everyone and they comprise about 72%, Private schools are run by churches, private persons or societies and pupils have to pay fees. They comprise about 8%. Finally UNRWA schools that were established in early 1950s and open for Palestinian refugees' children only. They are free from charges and comprise about 21% of the school system. The same schools system existed to date.

The Government Issue school books for all schools regardless of the supervising authority. It is a centralized system. Therefore, Palestinian pupils study the same school books in all schools regardless of the supervising authority. Palestinian during this period (Israeli Occupation) grew up learning about themselves and about the conflict from others' perspectives and much of their history was learned by family stories and oral history (Abu Lughod, 1996).

The Palestinian Ministry of Education was among the first four Palestinian ministries (health, social and tourism) to be established in 1994 as a result of Oslo Accords

“Upon the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, a transfer of authority from the Israeli military government and its Civil Administration to the authorized Palestinians for this task, as detailed herein, will commence. This transfer of authority will be of a preparatory nature until the inauguration of the Council. Besides, immediately after the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area, with the view to promoting economic development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, authority will be transferred to the Palestinians on the following spheres: education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism. The Palestinian side will commence in building the Palestinian police force, as agreed upon. Pending the inauguration of the Council, the two parties may negotiate the transfer of additional powers and responsibilities, as agreed upon” (Wikipedia, 2000).

The immediate task faced the ministry of education was the unification of the different education systems that existed in West Bank and Gaza strip and to author their own school books. For this purpose, the Palestinian Ministry of Education established the Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre (PCDC) in 1995. Authoring and preparing school books is not an easy job or task. It needs money, manpower, stability and takes time. The Ministry decided to continue using the Jordanian and Egyptian school books in the PNA areas (West bank-including East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip) until they will be able to prepare their own (Abu Lughod, 1996; Adwan, 2001; Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre, 2006).

The first Palestinian schoolbooks ever produced in history and used in Palestinian schools were in 2001/2002 for grades 1 and 6. The Ministry completed preparing school books for all grades only in 2006/2007 school year. The processes of writing and producing the school books were funded by international funds from different countries like Italy, Denmark, Ireland and the World Bank. This is the first time in history that Palestinian children started to learn about their history, society through school books published by Palestinians. Palestinian school books focused more on teaching their children their own history and trying to form a national identity for them. Also, Palestinian school books were produced during the Palestinian second Intifada (Al-Aqsa), where the Palestinians were under curfews, siege and the freedom of movements were very much restricted (Adwan, 2001; Abukhayran, 2009).

These are currently under review, strengthening and improvement to become a good resource for training of Palestinian citizenship of the XXI century. And it is precisely at this time to review and proposal for the challenge of conquering the future through education of the citizenry, when you need to see where one starts, face prejudice and an alternative dispute and propose relevant and capable to build confidence in all parties. It is dedicated to this work and the thesis that part.

2. Debate over Palestinian curriculum

The issue of the Palestinian curriculum has preoccupied the minds of researchers, thinkers and scholars. It has also led to the outbreak of a large scale controversy both locally and internationally. Following an unprecedented increase in that subject which surpassed all expectations, several studies and research papers both by Arab and foreign scholars were published, and they tackled this subject from different dimensions. Accordingly, the question raised is *“What is the Israelis perspective regarding the Palestinian curriculum?”*

The Palestinian curriculum caused a large scale of controversies in the Israeli security and civil milieus. They accused the Palestinian school books (especially the 1st and 6th grades) do not teach the notions of peace and coexistence with Israel, but plant the seeds of hate in upcoming Palestinian generations through their delegitimization of Israel’s existence, implicit seeking of Israel’s destruction, defamation of Israel, and encouraging militarism and violence. Israelis considered that the Palestinian schoolbooks are a hotbed of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic. As a result of these accusations, many donors stopped funding the production of the school books and analyses of Palestinian textbooks have been performed by various research institutions.

This paper focuses on presenting the findings and the perceptions of a sample of researches and studies done by both foreign and Israeli researchers on the new Palestinian curriculum.

3. Methodology

To enter this debate, there has been a major review of research on this subject have been financed and produced outside of Palestine, Israel and other countries (Abukhayran, 2009). This was made a selection of documentary sources, systematically searching databases and the network. The selection of these was made not by its position, but to address this issue in depth. After selecting the base documents, we conducted a systematic content analysis, using as a working program FileMaker text management and a system of categories emerging theoretical framework on "textbooks", "Civic Education", "national identity", and "Education for citizenship".

4. Studies and arguments against the Palestinian Curriculum

The common feature that unites the whole sector is mainly to blame textbooks with which they are instructed in Palestinian schools. They believe that these, far from instilling notions of peace and coexistence with Israel, planted the seed of hatred in future generations of Palestinians by denying the legitimacy of Israel's existence (this being the anti-Israel and anti-Semitism within the), seeking implicitly the destruction of Israel, vilifying and promoting the militarization and violence.

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP)'s (2001) ongoing research on how textbooks, exams, and other official course material in the Middle East portray the "Other" concluded that the Palestinian textbooks portray Jews and Israelis in a negative manner, fail to include Israel on the map and instead label all of it "Palestine", glorify violent forms of Jihad and martyrdom, and mention specific Jewish holy sites in Israel only once,

incompletely, and in order to explain its holiness in Islam. They claimed that Palestinian textbooks use terminology that is associated with war and violence and is likely to create prejudice, misunderstanding and conflict, such as:

"The demographic weapon" will play "a positive role in winning the Arab-Israeli conflict" (The Palestinian Society-Demographic Education, Grade 11 (2000), p. 29), and: "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, p. 20).

In an analyzed study to the content of the new textbooks for grade 3 and 8, Groiss (2001) pointed out that the Palestinian curricula encourage instigation and don't recognize Israel as a legitimate state but as an entity who usurped and occupied Palestine in 1948. The author claimed that the Palestinian curricula encourage incitement and use phrases which encourage hatred and fail to promote the values of peace tolerance and coexistence.

In another study Israeli (1999: 166) indicates that in the textbooks produced, sponsored or adopted by the PA in the years 1996-1998, anti-Jewish stereotypes, anti-Israeli and anti-Western statements of hatred seem as prevalent when compared with the textbooks obtained among Palestinian children during the years of Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza. The author argued that the Palestinian Authority not only negates its rivals but also positively imparts to its children the notions of Jihad (Holy War) and Istishhad (Martyrdom) in order to instigate them to sacrifice their lives on the altar of Palestinian convictions and ambitions. He quoted, "Know my son, that Palestine is your country, that its pure soil is drenched with blood of Martyrs".

Pina (2005) argued that Palestinian Authority (PA) education curriculum incites a younger generation of Palestinians to reject Israel, Judaism, and the achievement of peace in the region. Findings show that the PA textbooks often cite examples of anti-Jewish education materials and a lack of reference to or positive acknowledgment of the state of Israel. Besides, PA textbooks spread a culture of violence, which prizes martyrdom and jihad (or struggle) over peace and recognition of Israel.

The study of Meridor (2006: 1) argued that the examination of Palestinian fifth and tenth-grade textbooks for the 2004-2005 school year shows a continuing denial of the State of Israel's right to exist and a continuing cultivation of the values of armed struggle against Israel. The books contain incitement against the State of Israel and the Zionist movement, one of them even employing anti-Semitism. They quoted,

"A Political map of the Arab homeland in a fifth-grade geography textbook indicates Palestine while making no reference to Israel. As in previous years, the name of Israel once again does not appear in the textbooks examined, this being part of an educational policy that reflects a fundamental attitude denying the State of Israel's right to exist".

The first study was declared fully against the Palestinian curriculum was conducted by Marcus & Crook (2007). During their study established that the new 12th grade Palestinian schoolbooks make no attempt to educate for peace and coexistence with Israel. Indeed, the opposite is true: the teachings repeatedly reject Israel's right to exist, present the conflict as a religious battle for Islam, teach Israel's founding as an imperialism project, and actively portray a picture of the Middle East, both verbally and visually, in which Israel does not exist at all. The authors claimed that Israel does not exist in the maps printed in the Palestinian textbook,

“Maps of the region likewise teach children to visualize a world without Israel, as Israel does not exist on any map and its area is marked as Palestine”.

5. Studies and arguments for the Palestinian Curriculum

If we had fact-checked the above studies, and instead of relying exclusively on such a partisan sources, we would have found that the consensus of expert opinion on PA schoolbooks is quite different from what they suggest. Here is a sample of the findings of other researchers into the new Palestinian curriculum.

The findings of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information IPCRI (2005) study from a review of contents of the 4th and 9th grade textbooks revealed that there is no indication of any negative concepts against the Western Judeo-Christian traditions or the values related to them. The study pointed out that the textbooks address many issues that are related to human rights values. It emphasized that numerous explicit quotes are used to encourage students to respect human rights and civil society values. A good number of textbooks address the issue of human rights (in all its forms) and provide direct quotes from the holy Quran, human rights declarations, Islamic human rights declaration, and literary works. The textbooks deployed these quotes to reflect the necessity ‘to respect civil, political and religious rights, laws and rules’ and ‘they promote civil activity, commitment, responsibility, solidarity, respecting others’ feelings, respecting and helping people with disabilities, and so on. The study concludes that the textbooks offer basic sights of a good number of examples that ‘calls to openness, dialogue and interaction as part of the push towards multiculturalism and globalization within Palestinian society and amongst Palestinians’.

Regarding the new Palestinian textbooks, Jawabreh (2005) examines the civic education curriculum for eighth grade by surveying the teachers' opinions based upon the premise that teachers are the most qualified to assess the value and the successes of the textbooks as an educational tool to promote the values of human rights. Findings indicate that the teachers surveyed have emphasized that human rights concepts in the Civic Education textbooks for eighth grade are found to a great extent.

Abu Zahira (2004) finds that Palestinian curriculum reinforces the concepts of tolerance and equality. The Palestinian curriculum attaches significance to the importance of respect of religions, tolerance and coexistence. Besides, Palestinian textbooks support freedom and tolerance among nations and religions, and they call for tolerance and fraternity among humans, while dignifying man regardless of religion and nationality.

In another study Reiss (2004) addressed the Palestinian Civic Education textbooks. He pointed out that the Palestinian syllabus promote and contain the values of peace education and focusing on teaching human rights concepts. The author argues that the Palestinian textbooks cannot be considered a war curriculum. The new textbooks of Civics Education convey visions of society, in which tolerance of other religions, human rights, peace, pluralism, democracy and other values are much encouraged and fostered. The study concludes that there is no hatred or incitement against Israel, the Israeli people or Judaism. The textbooks do not contain anti-Semitic language. The author argues that these new civics education textbooks avoid hatred and incitement against the West. It also emphasizes many of the Western concepts: democracy, human rights, the individual rights, the education for peace and tolerance of all religions, the rights of women and children, the civil society and

the protection of nature... from a Western perspective the civics education textbooks therefore have to be highly praised indeed.

The findings of George Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (2004) which examined Palestinian textbooks on language, religious education, history and civics education concludes that the overall orientation of the curriculum is peaceful in spite of the harsh and violent realities in which schools operate, and there is no open incitement to hatred or violence and that religious and political tolerance is emphasized in a good number of textbooks and in multiple contexts.

The study of Firer & Adwan (2002) addressed the Palestinian and Israeli textbooks in a comparison study which shows that the books used in each society reflect the conflict that both are engaged; since it is a part of a wider societal mechanism to ensure that the conflict becomes part of the development of children's identities.

Nordbruch (2002) analysis of the Palestinian curriculum for the first and a sixth grade shows that the new Palestinian textbooks are a real attempt to promote the values of peace, coexistence and tolerance. The author pointed out that there is no direct instigation against Israel.

In a study done by Adwan (2001) conducted on the Palestinian history and civics textbooks for middle schools, it was pointed out that the Palestinian curricula reflect Palestinian life and reality, as well as the diversity within Palestinian society. The study confirmed that the Palestinian textbooks teach Palestinian students to respect human rights, justice, peace, equality, freedom, and tolerance, in terms of both self and others, and it encourages tolerance among religions and ask students to respect the freedom of religion and protect religious places as well.

Moughrabi (2001) analyzes the attempt by extremist Israeli groups to frame the issue of content in Palestinian textbooks in a manner that is consistent with their overall political agenda of discrediting the Palestinian Authority. The author claimed that these reports of incitement in Palestinian textbooks were exaggerated and false and had a detrimental effect on funding for new Palestinian textbooks.

In his evaluation of the Palestinian curriculum, Brown (2001) noted that the Palestinian National Education Textbooks for grades 1 and 6 were devoid of any anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli material, taking into consideration that a great deal of the harsh critics of the Palestinian curriculum and textbooks have had to rely on misleading and tendentious reports to support their claim of incitement and generally ignored historical context and used a prosecutorial style.

The study of Brown (2000) regarding the Palestinian Authority's newer textbooks states that the new books have removed the anti-Semitism present in the older books while they tell history from a Palestinian point of view, they do not seek to erase Israel, delegitimize it or replace it with the "State of Palestine"; each book contains a foreword describing the West Bank and Gaza as "the two parts of the homeland"; the maps show some awkwardness but do sometimes indicate the 1967 line and take some other measures to avoid indicating borders; in this respect they are actually more forthcoming than Israeli maps; the books avoid treating Israel at length but do indeed mention it by name; the new books must be seen as a tremendous improvement from a Jewish, Israeli, and humanitarian view; they do not compare unfavorably to the material my son was given as a fourth grade student in a school in Tel Aviv.

Discussion and prospects

To properly analyze the data must not forget the principle of indexicality (Parker, 2000), in which every act is related to a social environment where it takes place and, therefore, its meaning must be understood in the context and circumstances of where applicable. Words, these data and studies should be considered when they occur within the context and socio-political landscape from which are addressed. So, should temper conclusions and repair in such reports with a current view. They are what they are and say what they say, however, been a while and accuracy of current analysis, devoid of prejudice.

For starters, the Palestinians have been responsible for the Palestinian education system only since the signing of the Oslo accords of 1993. But they have their own textbooks from the 2006/2007 to the present. To which must be added that are under review for a new edition more relevant and adjusted to new times and challenges of the twenty-first century Palestinian society. As shown more interesting if it is the analysis of Palestinian textbooks with regard to national identity and civic education and citizenship.

Before that, Palestinian schools, and the subject-matter taught therein were the direct responsibility of the Israeli occupation authorities. And of course before the Israeli Occupation began, Palestinian schools were run by the Egyptian and Jordanian authorities who had occupied since 1948 large parts of those territories that were allocated to Arab Palestine at partition, which we now commonly call the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. So, until very recently, Palestinian education was in the hands of three foreign countries who, frankly, had no use whatsoever for an educated, articulate Palestinian populace and invested next to nothing in their education. Consequently, the school system that was dumped in the lap of the PA in 1994 was a disgrace and it was the first simple experience in an occupied society.

For all we know the current analysis (Abukhayran, 2009) the Palestinian curriculum do not has any anti-Semitic concepts, or anything else against the entity of Israel. No need to attack the new curriculum of the Palestinian Authority, since in reality not from a curriculum itself, but it appears in texts from Egypt and Jordan. Also, I think is the right of society to develop their own curriculum through its culture, norms, heritage, values and beliefs. Therefore, the Palestinian curriculum should educate their citizens within a framework of respect for human rights and, in addition to teaching the history of Palestine from a Palestinian itself. What we should not disturb others and should not be considered as dangerous for anyone.

The Palestinian schools books were produced in a particular political moment. Failed completely arose when the agreement of the rights of Oslo during the Second Palestinian Intifada and when Israelis and Palestinians were not yet able to reach a comprehensive peace agreement to end the conflict forever. However, border issues, Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of Palestine and finally, the water problem is being solved. Although other issues it remain outstanding. For now, Israeli occupation policies continued throughout the occupation and expansion of existing settlements, land confiscation and destruction of houses, imprisoning Palestinians and starting the construction of separation wall. This indicates that part of the issue is still dormant and can be controversial.

In this background, some of these studies were motivated by political reasons therefore lack the academic integrity and criteria. Those studies oriented by the concerns that Palestinian school books will help shape and form the Palestinian National identity that they fear or reject. Others studies, were done on a selective content without taken into consideration the general political contexts frames and treated Palestinians as a fully established state which is not. But, other studies were basically impressionists and not objectively did content analysis. In other studies, mistakes in translation and wrong conclusion were found. Besides, studies that were done by international were more objective than those done by Israelis or Israelis' institutes.

Basically, do not question the fundamental principles that guide the curriculum or content areas and curriculum. The main topic of controversy lies in the definition of Palestinian national identity, borders, history ... and other specific elements that have created pain and have been especially controversial and thorny throughout the conflict. They tell the story from a Palestinian point of view and reflect the reality of life and Palestinians as victims, as well as diversity in Palestinian society, taking into account their culture, norms, heritage, values and beliefs. And remain in the claim that the Palestinian curriculum should be taught the history of Palestine from their own perspective and not necessarily seen by the Israelis.

You have to advance real solutions and dignity for all. Thus, all these issues must be reviewed and addressed coldly and objectively, based on respect, tolerance and mutual recognition in new tests and new textbooks. However, it must also claim the right of peoples to develop their own curriculum and do understand that from their perspective.

Of course, this does not mean that Palestinian school books are perfect. They still reflect the conflict and suffering of the Palestinians as victims. They try to educate pupils on the importance of peace, negotiation and peaceful means to resolve the intractable and protracted conflict. This goal hit the near absence of political solutions. The continuing debate and paradox, and will continue to exist for some time.

In this scenario, I think that producing Palestinian school books in this situation is a great step forward and toward national building. They are under continual revision and improvement. They tend to observe the UNESCO criteria and to move toward decentralization mode in content wise but not in system wise. But we must not lose sight of the Palestinian school books, like any other country, are necessary and are not perfect, so they must be continually reviewed and improved.

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