

## **Palestinian Society – Population Education**

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### Introduction

The development of the awareness for one's interaction with society and its natural surroundings is the basic theme of the textbook *Palestinian Society – Population Education* published by the Palestinian Ministry of Education for the eleventh grades. Based on a decision taken by the Ministry of Education, the preparation of this textbook was intended to replace previous teaching materials which failed to adopt particular Palestinian perspectives. 'Population Education' is considered as a basic instrument to enable the pupils to analyze and deal with the various problems contemporary societies are facing. The conveyance of required methodology and knowledge to discuss prospects and limits of social development within the context of Palestinian society is the essential goal of this textbook.

Accordingly, the content of the book which was authored by Aziz ad-Duwayk and Ali Khalil Hamid addresses various facets of development related issues. Beginning with a first unit, the history and theory of population education is introduced to the pupils. The second unit offers a brief overview of the particular situation in Palestinian society and points to specific challenges. In the following units, 'Population and Health', 'Population and Environment', 'Environmental Pollution', 'Population and Development' and 'Women and Development' are dealt with as relevant aspects of social development within Palestinian society. Finally, a unit on 'Population and Values' elaborates on the determinants of social change and its dependence on common norms, values and patterns of behavior.

The extensive texts of these lessons entail detailed information about the addressed issues and offer insights into various controversies related to it. With each unit being followed by a brief 'outlook to the future', the units finally close with questions asking the pupils to apply the acquired knowledge to the Palestinian contexts.

### Unit One: "Population Education"

Reviewing the history of population education, the first unit of the textbook (p. 3-15) offers a brief introduction into the growth of public awareness for the social basis of development and change. Despite the only very recent importance in international politics, population education has since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century been an issue of increasing relevance on national

and regional levels. Beginning with the awareness for the decline of the birth-rate in industrialized and developed countries, population education became a task adopted by various governments and public institutions to support desired social changes and developments. Thus population education, as the textbook stresses, is in no way limited to developing countries, but reflects a basic need to influence problems of demography, environment and public health. Pointing to various international conferences under the auspice of organisations like the United Nations and UNESCO, the unit illustrates the increasing international attention given to the educational needs of social change.

However, the authors already stress in this context the controversial character and the potentially conflicting interests which are related to questions of change, development and educational policies. The introductory unit therefore points to the public debate which evolved around the 1994 UN-Conference in Cairo on 'Population and Development' and addresses the criticism directed against the conference's special focus on women's rights (p. 6f). Stressing the fact that population education remains a controversial issue within public debates, the authors illustrate the variety of definitions which aim at summarizing the basic concepts, goals and mechanisms of population education. In a comparison of definitions by UNESCO and various Arab countries, different focuses and stresses are rendered visible. (p. 7f)

## Unit Two: "The Population in Palestine"

This context-bound definition of population education is further emphasised in the second unit in which the context of Palestinian society is elaborated. (p. 17-37) "The study of the particularities of the population of whatever country is considered of highest importance for those responsible in the government and institutions"; their decisions necessarily have to reflect the specific political situation of the country. (p. 19) Accordingly, the history of its people as well as its contemporary characteristics with regard to demography in Palestinian society (geographical dispersion, basic demographical data related to fertility, distribution of ages, life expectancy, population movement etc.) are major aspects which are dealt with in this unit.

In this context, the authors aim at stressing the long-standing continuity of Arab Palestinian history. Since the dawn of history, the land of Palestine and its Arab-Canaanite inhabitants have been on the forefront of civilisation. (p. 20f) Despite numerous conquests by foreign

elements like the Mongols and the Crusaders, Palestine was repeatedly liberated and its Arab authenticity preserved. (p. 21)

Without reference to any predating Jewish presence in historical Palestine, the historical introduction into the particularities of the demography of Palestine mentions an increasing immigration of Jews especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, according to the authors, the first wave of Jewish immigrants arrived at the beginning of Ottoman reign and led to an increasing number of Jews settling particularly in Jerusalem. The policy of the British Mandate is then introduced as the main factor for an increasing Jewish immigration and a Jewish control over 77% of Palestinian lands after the war of 1948. The United Nations' resolution of 1947 in which the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state is declared, is finally presented as another step within these international policies against legitimate Palestinian rights and an important step to influence the demographical situation. (p. 21)

As a specific problem of Palestinian society, the dispersion of Palestinians throughout the world during the last century is a central topic of this unit. The conveyance of knowledge about the scope and the historical backgrounds of emigration and flight are obviously considered crucial aspects to be addressed to the students. Here, the influence of various political events (i.e. the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the Gulf war 1991 and the signing of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and Israel in 1993) is mentioned to illustrate the political context of demographical changes. Interestingly, in a brief overview of different patterns of emigration within Palestinian history, Jewish emigration to Palestine is again referred to in order to distinguish it from the Palestinian situation. Differentiating forced from voluntary migration, Palestinian migration in 1948 and 1967 is used as an example for individuals and groups being forced "to leave their lands as a result of wars and occupation". In contrast, voluntary emigration is exemplified with Jewish history and defined as "the moving of individuals and groups according to their own will from one administrative region to another, or from one state to another, without hate or direct or indirect administrative compulsion. This form of migration includes the collective migration to realize politically organized intentions and goals, as is the case for the emigration of the Jews of the world to Palestine." (p. 34)

Unit Three: "Population and Health"

The third unit of the textbook summarizes basic information about “Population and Health” and addresses questions related to the standards of health in Palestinian society. (p. 38-63) Here the potentials and limits of family planning are as well referred to as are the threats of different relevant diseases like Thalassemia and AIDS. Giving information about the complications resulting from specific problems encountered in Palestinian society - such as early marriages of girls and women as well as marriages among close relatives - the pupils’ attention is drawn to the importance of family planning within contemporary societies. Referring directly to the pupils, the unit also addresses the mental and social impacts of puberty as important challenges for family life and society. Various conflicts resulting from the mental changes faced by adolescence youth are illustrated with examples from typical behaviour patterns. In this context, the unit emphasises the importance of sexual education and parental guidance for the development of socially accepted norms and values. (p. 59)

#### Unit Four and Five: “Population and Environment” and “Environmental Pollution”

The following two units on “Population and Environment” (p. 64-89) and “Environmental Pollution” (p. 90-103) mirror the relevance of the environmental context of society and its potentials and limitations for social development. The dependence of the individual and society on the environmental system is rendered visible with regard to questions of water, energy and food supply. Similar to other units, the various particularities of Palestinian society are addressed in these lessons after a brief introduction to questions related to environmental science is given at the outset of the unit. Shifting the focus to specific forms of environmental pollution and its challenges for Palestinian society, the second unit then draws attention to problems related to, among others, water shortage and increasing air pollution and discusses options to prevent a further deterioration of the situation.

Despite the variety of environmental problems addressed by the authors, the negative impacts of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza-Strip are emphasised in this context as a major challenge for Palestinian society. In addition to pollution caused especially by Palestinian small scale industry, Israeli control over agricultural land (p. 74) and water (p. 79 and 82) are mentioned as important factors for the decline of the environment in the region. Consequently, the units end with demanding the pupils to “write a report about the influence of the Israeli occupation on the pollution of the Palestinian lands.” (p. 103)

## Unit Six: “Population and Development”

The sixth unit titled “Population and Development” (p. 104-135) finally shifts the focus to theoretical discussions about the desired developments and their dependency on specific social and cultural contexts. Here, questions about the ultimate direction and the intended goals of development are as well addressed as are the criteria by which the success of these changes can be evaluated.

Following a brief introduction into basic characteristics of world demography, the textbook emphasises the distinct meaning of ‘development’, which in contrast to ‘Westernization’ and ‘Modernization’ does not imply a guiding role of the modern European experience. (p. 108f) Referring to the roots of the Arab term *Tanmiyya* which is commonly used for development, the authors stress its connotation of ‘self-development’ and ‘renewal from within’. (p. 109) In addition, the authors insist on the relativity of developmental intentions and goals. With regard to the term ‘quality of life’, the textbook’s unit states: “The feeling of happiness differs from people to people, from individual to individual. For example: Some poor people feel happy and are thankful although they only own few things. In contrast, many people in the world feel desperate although they have access to material means.” (p. 110)

On this basis, various theories of social development are introduced. Pointing to different criteria - i.e. inflation, rate of national investment, standard of education and health –, basic indications which are commonly applied to determine the status of development are illustrated and exemplified for the Palestinian context. Accordingly, the unit closes with an overview of existing plans for social and economic development for Palestinian society. While a first Palestinian economic plan which was released following the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 proved insufficient, for it was based on the premise of an independent Palestinian state, a latest Palestinian plan for development was published for the period of 1998 and 2000. (p. 131-134) Summarizing the basic goals implied in the development plan, the pupils are confronted with the multi-level requirements for substantial social and economic change in Palestinian society.

## Unit Seven: “Women and Development”

Taking up several references from earlier units, the seventh unit is dedicated to the topic “Women and Development” (p. 136-153). The question of gender, the unit states, is of special

importance to determine the path and the goals of social development. However, the authors stress that aiming at equality for the two sexes does not intend to assume “biological equality of the two sexes, but equality in their treatment, in their protection of rights and their fulfilment of duties”. (p. 139) Opening the way for women into the decision making process, to bear responsibility and to achieve independence from men and society in questions of property and financial affairs is placed at the centre of social development.

The social basis of empowerment of women is discussed with regard to education, health, work, property and women’s role in the decision making process. Here, both the existing discrimination in various fields as well as potentials for change is referred to. Exemplarily, a brief description of female discrimination in schooling and education is contrasted with concrete steps to overcome these shortcomings. The improvement of the image of girls and women in textbooks and public media as well as particular educational support for girls is given as examples for measures to be taken. Accordingly, the discrimination in the professional arena and the broad restriction of women to agricultural and house-work are mentioned as examples for gender inequalities in central aspects of daily life.

However, the authors of the textbook especially emphasise the importance of women’s independence and equality in questions related to property and ownership. Pointing to basic discriminations of women in the fields of profession, income and heritage, the authors argue that these inequalities are largely due to “concepts and traditions which developed in Palestinian society, lacking an appropriate implementation of the [religious] laws (Ghiyab at-Tatbiq ash-Shar’i as-Salim).” (p. 148) As on a global level, these discriminations are finally identified as basic causes for the missing influence of women in decision making processes within Palestinian society. Referring to the most recent Palestinian Plan for Development, the unit closes with a summary of steps suggested by the Palestinian authorities to strengthen women’s role in society.

#### Unit Eight: “Population and Values”

Unit eight of the textbook which is titled “Population and Values” finally addresses the question of human behaviour as a basic source – as well as obstacle – for social development (p. 154-180). It is not only knowledge and skills that are determining man’s actions, but also dominant values and their implied judgement about patterns of behaviour. In this regard,

values are not only considered as of individual importance, but are described by the authors of the textbooks as reflecting and structuring the hopes and desires of any social system. (p. 157)

Despite the relative stability of values, both positive and negative, values are presented as subjects to change. It is thus the task of the individual to distinguish between positive – which should be encouraged – and negative values – which should not be supported – in an effort to strengthen positive developments within society. (p. 159)

The formation of positive values is consequently of special interest within the lessons of this unit. The influence of family, school and media is addressed here and discussed in their contribution to the development of a positive and coherent values system in society. However, especially with regard to media the authors do not only stress the role of implementing positive values, but emphasise the need for political supervision in an attempt to prevent the dissemination of rejected values, for example in the field of sexuality and consumption. (p. 161)

The values of Arab – and among them Palestinian – societies are traced back in this unit to pre-Islamic times. With reference to tribal structures of early Arab societies, the importance of Assabiyya, of bindings to the collective, is described as of continuous relevance in today's context. Despite the social changes, values like manliness, virtue, ambition, dignity, and the protection of women were as in other Arab societies preserved over the centuries. (p. 164)

Islamic values which are exemplified by Koranic quotes are finally said to have guaranteed the scope of human rights and freedoms in the value systems of Arab societies. (p. 166)

Following a brief overview over central aspects of Arab values systems, including work, education, the respect of the family, and the rights of women, the unit further elaborates on the particularities of Palestinian values. Resulting from the specific threats and challenges encountered by the Palestinian population, the authors point to the “sanctification of the land”, the “binding to the historical heritage”, “national unity” as well as to “pluralism” and “democracy” as specific values supported by Palestinian society. (p. 171) Despite their different political values, “Arab [nationalist] or Islamic, socialist, liberal or others”, “Palestinians share the value of the unity of the sons of Palestine, wherever they are”. (p. 162)

## Summary

Based on these premises, the textbook closes with an outlook on to the prospects and challenges of Palestinian society in its adoption to contemporary social, economic and

political requirements. The outcome of this ongoing “struggle between positive and negative values”, between the dominance of men and justice for women, between democracy and selfishness, between mythological and rational thinking, is described by the authors as a basic factor for future development. (p. 179)

In the light of the various challenges faced by today’s Palestinian society the textbook on Population Education aims at conveying basic knowledge about the state of society and the fundamentals of change. The relations of the individual within society and its environment are emphasised in the units and described in their impacts for the development of society. In addition to various general remarks about social development, the textbook offers detailed insight into the specific context of Palestinian society. Shifting the focus from ‘societies and social change’ to the particular Palestinian situation, the challenges of Palestinian society are analysed in their parallels and peculiarities.

On a methodological level, the textbook distinguishes through its general introductions to the units, in which the theoretical background and the existing controversies about the basic concepts are mirrored. The controversial character of concepts like ‘development’ and the varying definitions of the concept of ‘value’ are thus rendered visible.

Mirroring the discussions in international politics with regard to development and social change, the textbook places a special focus on environmental questions and the empowerment of women. Based on its relevance for social development (and its contribution to the resistance against the occupation), equality of women is frequently referred to as being a central goal of Palestinian society.

Notwithstanding the variety of challenges which are mentioned in the textbook, the continuous Israeli occupation of parts of the West Bank and the Gaza-Strip remains the central concern for the authors. As a basic obstacle for social development, Israel and its occupation of Palestinian lands are referred to in various units to illustrate specific obstacles of Palestinian society. The marginalisation of women, environmental pollution and educational shortcomings are here related to the influence of Israeli occupation. However, Israel itself - its politics, interests and history - is entirely neglected in this context. While some brief references to Jewish history are limited to negative depictions, the Israeli state remains entirely opaque in these units.

Despite this focus on the obstacles of social change related to the Israeli occupation, the textbook offers broad insight into additional factors of development and social change. Given the general introductions and the theoretical background in each unit, the pupils are granted a detailed overview of developmental issues and their application to Palestinian society.

Textbook analysed:

*Palestinian Society – Population Education*, Grade Eleven, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2000, 180pp.