

## **The New Palestinian Textbooks for National Education – A Review**

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The lack of a national narrative in the Palestinian educational system has long been a central concern among Palestinian educators. The introduction of a Palestinian perspective on Palestinian history and society was consequently considered one of the most crucial tasks during the development process of the new curriculum. Following the findings of the First Comprehensive Palestinian Curriculum Plan, authored by the Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre, the lack of any Palestinian dimension within the Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks was perceived as a problem that needed to be addressed as a central prerequisite for the realisation of a viable Palestinian society.<sup>1</sup>

National Education was introduced as a core subject in Palestinian schools in order to address the shortcomings of the old curricula. In addition to Civil Education and other subjects addressing questions of identity, values, traditions etc, National Education is considered as a basic means of forming the students' identity and encouraging their loyalty and faithfulness towards the Palestinian nation. The authors of the textbooks explicitly state that the teaching material aims at 'developing a conviction in the belief in God, in religion and Islamic values' and aims to 'plant and develop positive inclinations such as affection, loyalty and faithfulness towards the nation and the community [*Umma*]'. (National Education, Part 1, 2000, iv)

The following review of the textbooks developed for National Education in Palestinian schools will relate to textbooks for the first and second as well as for the sixth and seventh grades, which were published by the Palestinian Authority up until autumn 2001. While the textbooks for the first grades focus on questions of identity and the conveyance of general knowledge about norms and values, the textbooks for the second and especially for the sixth and seventh grades include detailed information about Palestinian society and its political, social, cultural and economic institutions. Palestinian history and culture as well as problems and challenges faced by contemporary Palestinian society are addressed.

### ***National Education, Grade One, Parts One and Two***

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<sup>1</sup> Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre (ed.): A Comprehensive Plan for the Development of The First Palestinian Curriculum for General Education. Ramallah: PCDC 1997

In the first grade, National Education is based on two textbooks that are considered as complementary sources during the first year of schooling. In addition to the previously mentioned goal to strengthen the students' national and religious identity and loyalty, these textbooks aim at the 'formation of a clear perspective towards oneself, towards one's family, one's school and one's society'. (National Education, Grade One, Part One, 2000, iv) The strengthening of values such as cooperation, team-work, respect for colleagues, neighbours and elders as well as the development of consciousness about one's own body and health are further goals intended to be achieved by these textbooks. Consequently, the two textbooks are divided into five units, each focusing on a specific aspect of the student's daily life and social experience. Shifting from the immediate surrounding of the family and house (Unit One) to the school (Unit Two), the neighbourhood (Unit Three), the town (Unit Four) and finally to the nation (Unit Five), various facets of the question 'Who am I?' (Part One, P. 8) are dealt with. The integration of the child into various social contexts and relations is thus illustrated on the basis of daily experiences encountered by the pupils. In this regard, these units are not limited to general information about the importance of the family, the school or the neighbourhood, but reflect different aspects of one's own identity and convey explanations about desirable patterns of behaviour and values within the respective context.

### *Methodology and Didactical Approach*

Corresponding with the average age of the students, the presentations remain limited to illustrations and short written explanations. In addition to introductory images that offer basic information about the issues under discussion, short questions encourage the pupils to talk about the illustrated scene and reflect on specific points of interest. For example, the applied methodological style is clearly illustrated in a reading on cleanliness.

Introducing the lesson with a full-page illustration with a clothes-line in the background and a mother with her two children, a girl and a boy, in the foreground, the declared goal of this reading is to 'develop an understanding among the pupils of the necessity to keep clean'. (Part One, p. 15) On the following page, this topic is specified with images relating to 'the hygiene of the body', 'cleanliness of clothes' and 'cleanliness of places'. (Part One, p. 16) After a discussion of these issues, the pupils are then asked to mark three examples out of six images for 'right' and 'wrong behaviour': a neatly/a scruffily dressed pupil; a boy dropping a can beside a dustbin/a girl throwing a can into a dustbin; a boy sneezing in the direction of another boy/a boy using a handkerchief. (Part One, p. 17) Following another exercise in which the

pupils are again asked to identify an example reflecting appropriate behaviour, the lesson closes with a request to the teacher to get the pupils to repeat the Islamic maxim 'Cleanliness is a part of faith.' (Part One, p. 18)

Methodologically, most readings are based on similar patterns of presentation. The parallel conveyance of information and values by visual presentations of 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour can be identified as a basic approach within these textbooks. The frequent introduction of quotes and maxims from Islamic traditions further supports the intention to convey and strengthen the pupils' acceptance of traditional norms and behaviour.

### *Content*

Following the intended goal to enable the pupil to reflect his or her own personality within their surroundings, the information given in the textbooks focuses on basic daily life experiences. In addition to information about the neighbourhood (the way to the school, the supply and role of different shops, the mosque and the church) and the role of various buildings and institutions, other units deal with family life (cooperation in the family), diversity of professions, the use of commodities such as a telephone, an iron and a TV, and the function of traffic lights.

The variety of living conditions that exists within Palestinian society is reflected in the representation of the pupils' social contexts. Illustrations of families of different sizes and the presentation of varying situations from family life allow identification with the images and the issues being discussed. In a similar way, references to towns, villages, refugee and Bedouin camps as specific communities enable the pupils to appreciate possible differences and to adapt the material to their own experience.

Interestingly, a similar diversity is reflected in the presentation of women and men of different generations. Although few illustrations can be understood as reinforcing the separation of the sexes, most images avoid any fixing of exclusive gender roles. Girls and boys as well as women and men are depicted in similar surroundings, potentially occupied with identical activities. While women above school age can be seen both veiled and unveiled, no girl of the pupils' age is shown veiled, with the exception of illustrations showing a boy and a girl during religious instruction. (Part Two, p. 13) In a similar spirit, the illustrations in the textbooks consistently mirror situations in mixed schools in which girls and boys share desks, lessons and activities.

Besides the question of gender, the relations between the religious communities in Palestinian society are of obvious importance within the textbooks. Despite a focus on Islamic traditions and Islamic sights in historical Palestine, Christianity is granted special recognition in the units. In several illustrations, mosques and churches are presented as neighbouring buildings serving similar roles for the two major Palestinian religious communities.

However, already in this early grade there is a special emphasis on the conveyance of a particular feeling of a Palestinian national identity. Already in reading three, Palestinian identity is placed at the centre of the lessons. Addressing the question 'Who am I?' with an illustration of a boy and girl each wearing a school-bag and waving a Palestinian flag, the teacher is asked to achieve the following goals: that 'the pupils remember their names; the pupils determine their ages; the pupils name their places of birth; the pupils determine their sex; the pupils recognise their nationalities.' (Part One, p. 8) Beginning with several wall-paintings, including 'Al-Quds [Jerusalem] is ours!' [Part One, p. 24]) and the showing of Palestinian flags in various contexts, Palestinian national identity is implied and stressed in most contexts. The illustrations of morning roll calls at school, of morning exercises and especially of the reading of the Koran and the singing of the national anthem before classes clearly show the importance of the national dimension as part of the individual identity that is discussed in the textbooks. Lessons on 'My homeland' (Part Two, p. 47-65), 'The form of Palestine' (Part Two, p. 53-54ff), 'The flag of my country' (Part Two, p. 55-56) and 'The hymn of my country' (Part Two, p. 57-58) elaborate on nationality and loyalty towards the Palestinian nation.

Similarly, already in this grade the pupils are confronted with basic information about key aspects of Palestinian national struggle and identity. Implicit references to Israeli towns with a Palestinian population such as Haifa and Akko ('Grocery Store Haifa' [Part Two, p. 9], 'Dairy Store Akko' [Part Two, p. 30]), and the passing mention of the refugee problem, can be understood as allusions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, offering frequent opportunities to address the obvious concerns and experiences of the pupils.

### ***National Education, Grade Two, Part One, 2001***

Adding to the information given in the first year of schooling, National Education in the second year puts a special emphasis on the pupils' connection to the land and history of Palestine, 'the land of Canaan, the land where the Prophets appeared, the scene of the glorious [Islamic] leaders and conquerors that left clear fingerprints on this land, its heritage and the

conscience of its people'. (Grade 2, Part One, 2001, p. iv) However, while the first unit of this textbook, titled 'Our land Palestine', deals with historical, geographical and social aspects of Palestinian society, unit two takes up once again the questions of social relations, norms and values, and informs about 'My relationship with others'. (p. 1)

### *Methodology and Didactical Approach*

Similar to the broader scope of topics and the more detailed information given in comparison to the first grade, the didactical approach is shifted from a visual to a more text-orientated presentation of the units. In addition to visual illustrations, short texts introduce the topics and explain the images shown in the units. Exercises in which the pupils are asked to fill in blanks and writing exercises related to the images reflect the increasing focus on writing and reading. The introduction of photography and more complex maps and graphs further support the development of analytical skills and knowledge.

### *Content*

The intended goal to strengthen the pupil's national awareness is clearly reflected in most of the units. In the introduction to the book and its first unit, 'Our land Palestine', which contains illustrations related to the Canaanite period, early Palestinian history is placed at the centre of the lessons. In addition to basic information about the historical importance of the Palestinian lands and their significance to civilisation, this unit elaborates in broader detail issues already raised during the first year of schooling. Characteristics of Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps are discussed, as are the services provided by the municipality. However, there is again a special focus placed on the conveyance of values and guidelines for appropriate patterns of behaviour in various daily life contexts. Teaching how to behave in society and defining correct behaviour are central objectives of the second unit of this textbook.

Palestinian history is explicitly presented in far-back reaching dimensions. The introductory reading on 'History of Palestine' is illustrated with an image showing 'A Canaanite family in Ariha [Jericho] 5,000 years ago.' 'Palestine', the text of the lesson reads, 'is the land of the fathers and ancestors. The Canaanite Arabs were the first inhabitants of Palestine.' (p. 4)

Following a short presentation of Canaanite achievements and towns founded in these times, a second lesson focuses on Palestine as the land of the Prophets. Abraham, Jesus as well as

Muhammad are referred to and linked to Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem as places of special religious relevance. (p. 8ff) On this basis, the declared goal of this lesson is to inform pupils about the links 'between Palestine and the divine religions'. (p. 8) Palestine, as it is pointed out with reference to the Koranic *Sura Isra*, is blessed by God. (p. 9) The religious importance of Palestine is further stressed by a third lesson in which Palestine is described as the 'land of the [Islamic] leaders and conquerors'. (p. 12) The conquest and reconquest of Palestine and especially of Jerusalem by Islamic leaders and their submission to Islamic rule are presented as the liberation of its people and, in the case of the struggle of Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi, as a defence of Palestine against the European 'Franks'. (p. 12ff)

The way in which Palestine belongs to the Arab-Islamic *Umma* (community) is finally stressed in a lesson on the Arab-Islamic character of Palestine. Showing Palestine at the centre of a map of the Arab world, the text of this lesson reads: 'The Palestinian people are part of the Arab-Islamic community. The Palestinians speak Arabic. The majority of the Palestinians believe in Islam, while some of them believe in Christianity.' (p. 16)

Shifting the focus from history to geography, the following units detail characteristics of different Palestinian landscapes, towns, villages and refugee and Bedouin camps. In this context it is noteworthy that any consideration of Israel as an existing state is absent. While the map of the Arab world mentioned above shows Palestine as stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Jordan (p. 16), the text of the lesson on 'Palestinian towns' reads: 'Jerusalem: Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine. There are other towns, for example: Gaza, Khan Yunis, Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus, Tulkarem, Jenin, Jaffa, Haifa and several others.' (p. 22)

In addition to towns and villages and the different institutions of the local administration, refugee and Bedouin camps are presented in the following lessons as examples of Palestinian social reality. Addressing the situation of Palestinian refugees, the textbook gives brief information about the background of these camps. A camp, the text reads, is 'a place where the Palestinian refugees who were forced to leave their towns and villages in Palestine settled. The refugees are determined to return to their homes.' (p. 36) Camps, the text continues, can be found both in Palestine and in other Arab countries.

Referring to the Bedouin, the textbook offers basic information about their type of housing and working lives. While deliberately depicting the Bedouin as 'distinguished by their bravery and cleverness', the text of the lesson discusses the flexibility and fickleness of the Bedouin lifestyle: 'Some of the Bedouin have begun to settle in permanent houses and to work in other professions.' (p. 40)

Interestingly, while the textbook reserves the entire second half for explanations about customs and values favoured by Palestinian society, another lesson on ‘Customs and Traditions in Palestine’ closes this unit on ‘Our land Palestine’. The introduction to this lesson reads (p. 42): ‘Every society has its customs and traditions, which it sticks to and which it encourages. The Palestinian society strives to strengthen some of them, for example: 1. cooperation between the people, 2. respect for elderly persons and helping them, 3. participation in celebrations and funerals.’

The issues of behaviour and participation in social life in Palestinian society are further developed in the second unit of the book. The pupils’ relations with their sisters and brothers, their parents and friends are addressed on various levels. Encouraging productive and fruitful cooperation between all members of the family, and the wider society, is the underlying goal of these lessons. Boys learn from their father, girls gain from their mother’s experience, sisters and brothers help each other with housework, friends get together to do their homework and to spend their leisure time together. Or, as it is put in one of the lessons: ‘We cooperate, we play together, and we talk together.’ (p. 48)

In this context, a lesson entitled ‘Equality for all’ further stresses the collective dimension of one’s own behaviour and work, which guarantees social esteem for the individual’s deeds: ‘The doctor, the teacher, the policeman, the farmer, and the cleaner fulfil their duties in loyalty and sincerity. We respect’, the text concludes, ‘[everyone] who does a useful job, whatever it may be.’ (p. 50) However, despite this clear focus on functional equality, which derives from the individual’s contribution to society, another dimension of equality is addressed in this lesson. Citing a Hadith reported by Bukhari, ‘[t]here is no discrimination between the Arab and the non-Arab, between the white and the black, only with regard to piety.’ (p. 51) Restrictions on individual equality, here, are reserved to God.

Again, lessons on ‘The culture of visits’, ‘Sports’, ‘Special occasions’ and ‘Religious and national holidays’ further add specific knowledge about how to behave while visiting or playing with friends, listening to parents or looking at an exhibition. In this regard, the concluding lessons on voluntary welfare work and its selfless and community-orientated ideas illustrate the underlying approach to society. Exemplified in the explanation of the Scout – movement, which is discussed in a lesson, a communitarian concept of the individual’s integration into society is encouraged: ‘The motto of the scouts is: We are prepared! The goals of the scouts are: 1. voluntary work, 2. cooperation, 3. cleanliness.’ (p. 61)

***National Education, Grade Six, 2000 and 2001<sup>2</sup>***

### *Methodology and Didactical Approach*

Contrary to the textbooks for grade one and two, the textbooks for grade six offer lengthy paragraphs and texts presenting information about the issues under discussion. The texts, tables, images and illustrations are reduced to secondary sources of information. The exercises and questions are increasingly connected to reading and writing activities, encouraging the pupils to use libraries and other sources to collect information about the topics. Each of the units is preceded by a detailed two-page summary of the goals in terms of knowledge, skills, and the awareness of the pupils' surroundings.

### *Content*

In common with the textbooks for grade two, the structure of these textbooks obviously reflects the twofold goals of National Education: to strengthen the pupils' identification with Palestinian and Arab society, and to convey basic knowledge about institutions, rules and customs that enable them to properly fulfil their social roles. Beginning with a relatively brief unit dealing with general characteristics of Palestinian society, an extensive second unit identifies major political, administrative, economic, social and legal institutions and summarises their roles and structures. Finally, a third unit titled 'Me and the others' again takes up basic questions about values and traditions in Palestinian society. As complementary parts of the narrative, these three units reflect a comprehensive version of the Palestinian national narrative. National identity and knowledge of the assumed characteristics of the Palestinian nation and society are the major topics within these lessons.

The first unit, 'Palestinian society', offers an overview of Palestinian society's political, cultural and geographical place within the Arab-Islamic world. Its first goal is to enable the pupils to understand the meaning of terms such as 'natural borders, Zionism, economic integration and colonisation. Secondly, to know the natural parts of the Arab nation. Thirdly, to know the geographical and human aspects that unify the [different] regions of the Arab nation. Fourthly, to know the particular aspects of Palestinian society that distinguish it from other Arab regions. Fifthly, to appreciate the problems that Palestinian society faces.' (p. 2) Accordingly, the brief introduction to the unit summarises specific goals that the pupils should be encouraged to achieve: '1. to be proud of Palestinian and Arab society; 2. to value the importance of Arab unity for the preservation of the Arab national entity and to confront

external threats; 3. to counter colonial aspirations in all their forms; 4. to support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state; 5. to take a strong stand against all reactionary elements.’ (p. 3)

Arab unity, which is based on geographical, historical, religious and linguistic factors, is discussed as a basic requirement for the preservation of Palestinian identity. (p. 6) However, the textbook stresses that despite being part of the Arab-Islamic world, Palestine can be distinguished on various levels from its neighbouring Arab-Islamic societies. Following a brief introduction of the term ‘society’, which is defined as ‘a group of people living in a defined geographic region with a distinct culture, a shared history’ with ‘traditions, customs and values that are special to it’ (p.13), the unit continues by examining how Palestinian society differs from the surrounding Arab societies. The features of Palestinian society are as follows: ‘1. Agriculture: 70% of the Palestinian people own farmland and rely on it for their daily livelihood [...]. 2. Nationalism [*Watani*]: Its history is one of battle and heroism. Palestinian society resisted against British rule and Israeli occupation and revolted several times. It produced thousands of martyrs and wounded people. 3. [Palestinian society] is educated: Palestinian people throughout their long history have focused on learning and knowledge as a weapon to counter the challenges of poverty, expulsion and dispersal [...]. 4. Pan-Arabism [*Qawmi*]: The flag of the Palestinian national movement is the Arab flag, its hymn is the Arab hymn, and Arab unity is the wish of the Palestinian people. 5. Tolerance: brotherly love and tolerance between Muslims and Christians prevail in Palestinian society. 6. Pride in its heritage: the national dress and traditional songs, which have been preserved by the people, are proof of their pride in their heritage. 7. Expulsion and dispersal: The Palestinian people were expelled from their land by the Israeli occupation of Palestine, suffered massacres and were forced to move to the surrounding countries.’ (p. 13)

In this context, the particular situation of Palestinian society is linked to special circumstances and challenges that are faced by the Palestinian national struggle. Adding to a brief table in which the dispersal of Palestinians is addressed (‘1. 1,972,000 West Bank, 2. 1,113,000 Gaza, 3. 1,094,000 Inner Palestinians [Israel], 4.) 4,419,000 dispersed Palestinians’ as of 1999 [p. 11]), the following lesson concentrates on specific problems of Palestinian society. The experiences under the British Mandate and of Zionist settlement activities preceding the war of 1948 become a central focus in these explanations. It is interesting to note that three images that are used to introduce the lesson suggest a basic link between the British Mandate, anti-colonial nationalist struggle and today’s Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. While the first picture shows ‘a group of revolutionaries of 1936’ against the British, an

additional map shows the number and density of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A third picture introduces ‘the Jihad fighter [*al-Mujahid*] Izz ad-Din al-Qassam’, who was killed in 1935 ‘while fighting against British colonialism.’ (p. 15), British rule, the establishment of the State of Israel and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – as well as resistance against them – are referred to as similar challenges in Palestinian history. Thus the pupils are to be enabled to understand the following ‘special problems’ of Palestinian society: ‘1. Colonialism: Palestine was exposed to British occupation after the First World War in 1917, and with the help of Great Britain to Israeli occupation in 1948. The Israeli occupation destroyed most of the Palestinian villages and towns, expelled the Palestinian inhabitants and forced them to leave their lands and villages. 2. Colonisation: Israel pursued a new policy in its occupation of Palestinian lands. It built agricultural, industrial and residential settlements. 3. Neglect of medical, educational and social services for the Palestinian people under occupation. 4. Israeli control over the water in Palestine. 5. The Palestinian economy is not independent and is influenced by the Israeli economy. 6. Judaisation of Jerusalem and dissolution of the Palestinian identity of its inhabitants.’ (p. 16f)

The implied Palestinian national narrative of a nation under permanent threat of cultural and political dissolution is finally related to historical examples through which options of resistance are made clear. Closing the unit, the pupils are asked to consult the library and to copy the poem *Red Tuesday* by Ibrahim Tuqan, which praises three ‘martyrs’ who were executed by the British authorities following violent clashes between Jews and Arabs in 1929 in Jerusalem and Hebron.

Shifting the focus from Palestinian history and its repercussions in today’s Palestinian society, the following unit presents a detailed overview of basic political, social and economic institutions and their roles in Palestinian social life. In addition to technical knowledge about the functioning of these institutions, the lessons’ goal is to convey and enforce basic values by which this institutional framework of society is guided. Democracy, equality of men and women, and personal liberties are some of the values mentioned at the beginning of the unit. (p. 20f) In the course of the unit, the short introduction to the history and structure of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) (p. 22ff) and the Palestinian National Council (PNC) (p. 26ff) is completed with more theoretical discussion of ‘The State’ (p. 29ff), ‘The Constitution’ (p. 33ff) and ‘The Separation of Powers’. (p. 36ff) In every lesson, the brief definitions of the concepts are linked to the specific situation of Palestinian society. Here, a

lengthy quote from the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of 1988 serves as an illustration of the characteristics of a state, its foundations and aspirations. (p. 32) With regard to the different administrative bodies – the courts and judges, and the economic and social institutions – the state’s role to provide its citizens with general services and to guarantee their rights (p. 30) is exemplified. The draft Palestinian constitution and the political system derived from it, which is described as a parliamentary democracy (p. 25), aim at securing for all its citizens personal freedom and security, freedom of opinion and expression and the right to constitute groups and political parties. (p. 34) With regard to the juridical system, these guarantees are further elaborated upon. Citing the constitutional project of the Palestinian Authority, the pupils are asked to discuss the following sentence: ‘The Palestinians are equal in front of the law and the judges. There is no discrimination on the basis of sex, colour, religion or political opinion.’ (p. 47)

Within the third unit, entitled ‘Me and the others’, equality and mutual tolerance are again placed in the centre of the lesson. The introductory summary of the implied goals explicitly states the importance of raising the pupils’ awareness of the dangers of fanaticism and of adopting a tolerant stance towards others. Values such as freedom and justice as well as traditions and changes in traditions are discussed in this context. (p. 64f)

‘Values’, according to the first lesson of this unit, ‘are ideals, criteria or ideas that define patterns of accepted behaviour in the society. They are binding to the individual in society, and those who depart from these values will encounter reproach or experience isolation in society.’ (p. 66) In this context, carelessness, corruptibility, hypocrisy, superstition and fortune telling, clan loyalty and tribalism are mentioned as rejected patterns of behaviour, whereas justice, equality and respect of others rank high in the list of desired values and norms. (p. 67)

There is an interesting focus in the textbooks on the relevance of tolerance in Palestinian society. An entire unit discusses this issue and is introduced by an image showing a friendly encounter between a Christian and a Muslim cleric – an issue already raised in earlier lessons of the textbook in which the pupils were asked to comment on questions such as ‘The image of a mosque and a church side by side: what does it symbolise?’ (p. 12)

Tolerance, the lesson explains, means to ‘accept the views of others, to respect their beliefs, ideas, traditions, and customs, even if they are different from one’s own.’ (p. 71) Islamic tradition and history are then presented in terms of a guiding principle towards others, especially Christians, who historically – according to the textbook – enjoyed tolerance and

security under Islamic rule. Christianity itself is described as a religion defending freedom and respect of human beings, and which calls for peace and understanding between peoples. However, despite the focus on tolerance, the limits of this concept become clear in different lessons in which implicit or explicit criteria for the exclusion of ‘outsiders’ are defined. In this regard, nationalism and the defence of national identity and national interests are the obvious criteria for inclusion or exclusion. Tolerance, one of the texts explains, governs the relations between ‘the national parties whose views are differing, but who meet in their goal – which is to serve the nation and the citizen.’ (p. 72)

A similarly functional argument in favour of difference and mutual tolerance is again raised in the context of habits and patterns of behaviour that are tolerated within Palestinian society. In a lesson on ‘Imitations and Inventions’, in which the stability and changes of traditions are addressed, an image of two young punks with extravagant hairstyles and striking clothes serves as the ideal illustration of ‘negative phenomena that our youths have adopted from youth of other societies’. Consequently, the pupils are asked to express their view on the problematic adoption of ‘phenomena that are foreign to our Palestinian society’. (p. 79)

Negative imitations are thus defined as ‘blind imitations of patterns of behaviour that have penetrated [our society] and which do not fit with our original Arab culture, customs and traditions. Examples are some foreign traditions with regard to dress and food, as well as lifestyles that contradict our values and customs.’ (p. 80)

Despite the focus on tolerance and equality, which is addressed in an entire lesson as well (p. 76ff)<sup>2</sup>, the implied concepts reflect ambivalent approaches to social difference and plurality. Here, tolerance and flexibility of values and norms are limited by their functionality within the context of Palestinian society. In this regard, a lesson on ‘Freedom’ adds to the impression of an underlying and overarching priority of national interest and identity. National liberation and the fight against occupation are thus described as integral parts of the desire to establish freedom as a basic value within society. (p. 73ff)

Similar to the other textbooks summarised above, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains – although omnipresent – vague in this textbook. Despite various references to problems caused by the conflict, any concrete information about Israel, its policies and interests, is missing.

Interestingly, the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel are mentioned only in passing,

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<sup>2</sup> In this lesson, the importance of social justice is stressed. Interestingly, in the edition of the textbook published in 2000, the pupils are asked to discuss a paragraph taken from the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in which social justice is declared to be a central goal. Among the few changes which have been made in the new edition of the textbooks published in 2001 is the omission of this exercise. (p. 78)

and not as a controversial historical event, but as a date. Referring to the PLO and the Palestinian Liberation Army, the lesson states that ‘after the signing of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel in September 1993, most of the forces of the PLA entered Palestine.’ (p. 23) The vagueness of the presentation of the conflict is also illustrated by deliberate allusions to ‘Palestinian towns’ that are located on territory that has been internationally recognised as part of the State of Israel. As in previous textbooks, Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa and Beer Sheva are referred to as being part of Palestine. Similarly, a map of the administrative structure of the Palestinian Authority fails to mark or identify Israel. (p. 42)

### ***National Education, Seventh Grade, 2001***

In addition to questions of national identity and national institutions, Palestinian history becomes a central concern within the National Education textbook for grade seven.<sup>3</sup> Going back to the earliest inhabitants of the region, the history of Palestine is developed up until the end of the British Mandate and the foundation of the State of Israel. Additional units on education in Palestine and the national cultural heritage of Palestinian society end with a detailed discussion of the prospects and challenges of tourism in today’s Palestine. Didactically, the authors of this textbook shift further towards the use of extensive texts and original sources of various kinds. There is increased use of abstract sources, such as diagrams, maps and timelines, which require the pupils to make use of specific skills and abilities.

‘Sights from the course of the nation’ is the title of the first unit of this textbook in which Palestine’s role in and interaction with the surrounding cultures and civilisations is presented. A timeline of ‘Palestine through the ages’ given at the outset traces back the history of Palestine to the Canaanite period around 3500 BCE. Among the subsequent inhabitants and rulers, the timeline mentions the Pharaohs, the Philistines, the Jews under the empire of David, the Phoenicians, the empire of Judah and the empire of northern Israel, the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Persians and Greeks, and the Romans and Byzantines. After the conquest of Jerusalem and the time of the four ‘rightly guided caliphs’ (*al-Khulafa’ ar-Rashidun*), the Umayyads, Abbasids, the Franks and the Ayyubids, the Mameluks and finally the Ottomans are named as respective rulers over Palestine. Following the British Mandate from 1917 to 1948, the foundation of Israel and Jordanian and Egyptian rule over the West

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<sup>3</sup> In the preface to this book, special thanks is expressed for their financial and technical support to the Italian and Belgian government. (p. III)

Bank and Gaza Strip since 1948, and their later occupation by Israel in 1967, the timeline indicates the establishment of Palestinian rule in 1994. (p. 3)

These various influences and interrelations with different cultures and civilisations are discussed further in the following lessons. The geography of Palestine between Europe, Asia and Africa is pointed out to illustrate Palestine's bridging role for the development of cross-cultural relations in the Old World. However, these foreign influences were not limited to early modern times, but continued with the invasion of Napoleon in 1798, the British occupation in 1917 and finally with the 'handing over of the land to the Jews' in 1948. (p.5) Taking up the information given in the textbooks for grade two, Canaanite history and its contribution to culture and civilisation is stressed again in this context. The invention of the alphabet and technical innovations in the construction of boats are some of the achievements of the 'Palestinian Canaanite people' that 'are distinguished for their love of adventure and discovery'. (p.10) The Canaanites are finally depicted as the 'first seafaring nation [*Umma*] in history'. (p. 11)

Shifting the focus to the time following the Islamic conquest of Palestine and Jerusalem, the next lesson stresses the Islamic influence and the importance of Palestine within Islamic history and tradition. The *Sura Isra* ', which in Islamic tradition is considered as a basic indication of Jerusalem's central religious relevance is quoted and discussed. Jerusalem, the lesson states, was the first *Qibla*, the direction of prayer, before Muhammad finally changed it in to the Kaaba in Mecca. In addition, the miracle of *Isra* ', the night ascendance of Muhammad, is said to have taken place at *al-Buraq*, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The lesson's text then continues by stating: 'The Muslims longed for the conquest of Greater Syria [*Bilad ash-Sham*] and especially of Palestine and [strived] for its liberation out of the hands of occupying Rome. These lands have become the remembrance of the history of the Muslims. Their religious emotions were bound to it. These lands were linked with the history of Islam, with its rituals and holy places.' (p. 13)

The so-called 'Pact of Omar', which in Islamic tradition is considered as a treaty formulated by the caliph Omar to define the relations between the Muslim ruler and the 'People of the Book', i.e. Christians and Jews, is finally introduced within this textbook as an historical 'example for the moral treatment' of people of other religions by Muslims. (p. 13) Without detailing the limits and conditions of this treaty, tolerance is again depicted as an important part of Islamic rule and tradition.

The successes of Salah ad-Din, who liberated Palestine and Jerusalem from the Crusaders during the second half of the 12th century, are referred to in a following lesson to illustrate another episode of Islamic history in Palestine. His struggle with the ‘Franks’ and his liberation of Jerusalem are presented as glorious examples for resistance and for unity against outside aggressors. (p. 16ff)

The history of Palestine under British control, which is addressed in the last lesson of this unit, finally offers the most concrete information about the Arab-Israeli conflict and its political and historical background. The introductory text for this lesson is taken from a highly controversial encyclopaedia published by the Egyptian intellectual, Abd al-Wahab al-Missiri, who has gained popularity in the Arab world during recent years for his writing on Jewish history and religion. Intending to give basic information about the history of Jewish immigration, the text reads: ‘The first wave of Jewish settlers arrived in Palestine from Russia in 1882. The second wave [followed] in 1905, and the arrival of Jewish groups to Palestine continued till 1948. Their goal was to take possession of the Palestinian lands and to take over – after their expulsion and extermination – the place of its original inhabitants. This led to the appearance of the Palestinian question, the case of the Palestinian people, who are exposed to attacks and expulsions. While it might have been expected that the Palestinian people would have perished or surrendered to the attacks and the expulsions, contrary to all expectations, they did not perish or submit to the repression, but continue to resist against the settlers in order to stress the legitimacy of their existence on these lands.’ (p. 20)

This interpretation of an entirely colonially motivated Jewish immigration to Palestine is further emphasised by various references to assumingly unconditional support by British colonialism. The Balfour Declaration that is reproduced in the lesson then illustrates the joint British-Zionist project, which was opposed by Arab and Palestinian resistance. (p. 21) A brief reference to the UN partition resolution of 1947 and its popular interpretation by the historian Arnold Toynbee (‘Someone who did not possess gave something to someone who did not deserve.’ [p. 22]) further emphasises the claimed illegitimacy of the foundation of Israel in historical Palestine. The struggle and death of ‘martyrs’ such as Palestinian leader Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni and others finally serves to ask the pupils to reflect on biographies and fates of popular resistance fighters and implicitly to recall their potential relevance in today’s context. (p. 23)

The two following units on ‘Education in Palestine’ and ‘Heritage’ take up the expressed view by the authors of the textbook that knowledge about their cultural heritage provides

basic information about the history and conditions of the Palestinian people. Heritage, the authors state in the preface to the book, is ‘the mirror that reflects the historical events and circumstances that the Palestinian people lived through.’ (p. iv) Accordingly, Palestinian national identity is considered to ‘be distinguished through its strong roots and origins in the Palestinian lands since ancient times’. (p. 26) The remembrance of this history and the recalling of its achievements thus allow the strengthening of pupils’ national identity and encourage their interest in Arab-Islamic history. Again, the mutual influences between the inhabitants of Palestine and the surrounding cultures and their positive effects are emphasised in these lessons.

In this regard, the educational innovations and achievements under Canaanite and Islamic rule are presented as a major contribution to the development of civilisation and culture. Religious institutions and schools as well as the role of Jerusalem as a religious centre and the Koran as a written source of knowledge are mentioned in this context to exemplify the importance of education within Palestinian history and heritage.

The underlying narrative of permanent threats to Palestinian identity and heritage is thus mirrored in these lessons. The importance of culture and folklore for the preservation of the ‘Palestinian personality’, (p. 44) especially under foreign occupation, is finally linked to discussions of assumed threats of a dissolution of Palestinian identity. An entire lesson is dedicated to raising concerns about ‘Attempts to dissolve Palestinian heritage’, which are identified with efforts to cause material, intellectual and cultural dissolution, and the Judaisation and Israelisation of traditional Palestinian songs and clothes. (p. 54f) One of the exercises in this lesson asks the pupils to discuss the following quote taken from a resolution of the Islamic Organisation for Education, Science and Culture: It is necessary ‘to work seriously to preserve the cultural identity of the Palestinian people against the Zionist attacks and the continuous efforts to eliminate Islamic culture.’ (p. 57)

Adding to these elaborations on the richness of Palestinian culture and history, the last unit on tourism in Palestine gives a brief overview of relevant religious and geographical sights and places. Pointing to various forms of tourism – cultural, therapeutic, recreational and religious – the lessons convey geographical information about Palestinian towns and landscapes. In addition, the economic importance of tourism is discussed in detail. Summarising basic information about the structure of tourism, the origin of tourists and the problems faced by the Palestinian tourism industry, the pupils are informed about a relevant branch of the contemporary Palestinian economy. In this context, again, the influence of the Arab-Israeli

conflict is mentioned by detailing serious problems faced by Palestinian tourism companies that are caused by restrictive measures taken by the Israeli authorities. (p. 78)

The aim of these units to free pupils from sentiments of hatred and to encourage 'positive dialogue' (p. iv) is mirrored in the various references to examples of cultural exchanges throughout history. However, the striking absence of any relevant information on Palestine's connection to Judaism and the Jewish religion and the entirely negative depiction of recent Jewish history finally negate any Jewish and/or Israeli claims or rights in the region.

### ***Summary***

The narrative of the Palestinian nation, its particular history and identity, is the declared intention of the authors of these textbooks on National Education. Taking up the approach to Palestinian history as a history of constant threats, Palestinian society appears to have been challenged through the ages by foreign attempts at destruction and submission. The defence and preservation of national identity and characteristics against these attempts is the implied goal of National Education. The conveyance of this message and the encouragement of pupils to discuss and adopt different patterns of resistance – ranging from propagating folklore traditions to appraisals of militant resistance – is implied in most of the units, their texts and exercises.

However, there is an additional focus on the institutional framework of today's Palestinian society. The legal structures guaranteed by laws and declarations and the political, social, economic and cultural institutions are discussed in detail and explained, along with their respective roles within Palestinian political and social life.

Desired patterns of behaviour and relevant values and norms are addressed in various units of these textbooks. The binding of the pupils to these values as a fundamental means for the functioning of society and as a guarantee for the preservation of Palestinian culture is thus pursued by various means. Implicit and explicit indications of social sanctions caused by any deviation from the canon of accepted values are used in several lessons to reinforce the acceptance of the given traditions and customs. Despite the frequent emphasis on equality, tolerance and difference within Palestinian society, the underlying limits of this communitarian approach to society and pluralism are made clear by its constant submission to functionality and national interest.

In this regard, the implied self-perception can be summarized as a homogeneous society with a rich historical background and longstanding traditions. Despite the fact that exchanges between cultures and civilisations – and their positive impacts – are frequently referred to, Palestinian society appears to be a unified community. However, despite all the distinguishing features that are mentioned in these textbooks, Palestine forms a central part within the Arab-Islamic world. The complexity of the Arab-Islamic and the Arab-Christian dimension in this model of identity becomes visible in the various attempts to define the core and the limits of a shared Palestinian identity. The image of a constant external threat that was challenged by early Muslim conquerors as well as by the martyrs of the recent past serves as a unifying force within these interpretations of society. The warning of occupation – be it by the ‘Franks’, the British or by Israel – and its implied threats creates the image of a negative ‘other’ that reinforces the call for unity and loyalty towards the Palestinian nation.

The denial of any legitimate rights to Jews living in the region and the consistent neglect of the historical compromise between the PLO and Israel achieved under the Oslo Accords extends these struggles against external threats into the context of daily life for pupils today. However, the textbooks generally refrain from addressing the concrete challenges of contemporary Palestinian society since they do not provide relevant information about the conflict, the conflicting interests or progress towards their resolution to date. Despite various indications of major problems of Palestinian society – the increasing popularity of extremist groups, the rise of unemployment, ecological problems and so on – substantial information about these challenges are missing. Instead of addressing these challenges, calls for unity and the promotion of the individual’s function in society are placed at the forefront.

Textbooks analysed:

[State of Palestine, Ministry of Education:](#)

*National Education*, grade 1, vol. I, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2000

*National Education*, grade 1, vol. II, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2001

*National Education*, grade 2, vol. I, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2001

*National Education*, grade 6, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2000

*National Education*, grade 6, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2001<sup>2</sup>

*National Education*, grade 7, Experimental Edition, Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2001