

Palestinian Geography Textbooks

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6th grade: Human Geography, Principles of Human Geography

Human Geography (Al-Jughrafiya al-Bashariyya) consists of 107 pages including 2 short introductions, the first written by the Curricula Centre (*Markaz al-Manahij*) – see the content of the introduction by the Curricula Centre in the volume *Jughrafiyat Filastin (The Geography of Palestine)*, and the second written by the authors of this provisional school book (*al-Mu`alifun*). The book contains maps (11), pictures (49), tables (8) and one table of data. At the end of the book there is a bibliography, which lists 16 books: 14 in Arabic, 1 translated into Arabic, and 1 in a foreign language.

The introductions

The first introduction is written by the Curricula Centre, which is responsible for its content and revision. The same introduction is published in the book *The Geography of Palestine (Jughrafiyat Filastin)* written for the 7th grade. The Curricula Centre of the Ministry of Education of the State of Palestine considers this school book as a ‘national project’ (*Mashru` Watani*), which was achieved due to the common efforts of educational scientists and authors representing ‘most of the sectors of the Palestinian society’. We read in the introduction that ‘the development of the curricula’ as a ‘strategic goal’ under the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has been successful and ‘unites the curricula of the two wings of the homeland - the West Bank and Gaza Strip’. To achieve this goal, the language usage was revised, and explanations and photographs were added to the book on the basis of ‘notes from the field’. The Curricula Centre asks ‘the leadership of educational scientists throughout the homeland’ for ‘advice’ for further improvements on the future ‘permanent books’.

The second introduction is written by the authors. They describe the structure of the book and ask the pupils for active participation in their learning process to be achieved through the knowledge chain which is part of the framework of the book. Each lesson has an introduction (*Muqaddima*), which includes photos, tables and maps to help the pupils to apply theoretical aspects to practical situations and also to make them familiar with an atlas. The authors want to avoid a mere recalling of facts learned by heart. The discussion and study materials are to

be used as a starting point for further analysis and debate, which will be initiated by the teachers to motivate their students.

The cover of the book

The book cover shows an aerial photograph of the continents showing the Middle East at its centre. Underneath the photo there is an image banner showing people gathering at a theatre.

Structure of the the book

The contents are divided into 2 chapters (*Fasl*) with 5 units (*Wahda*) and 19 lessons (*Dars*). The first chapter has 3 units and 10 lessons and the second chapter has 2 units and 9 lessons. The 5 units differ in size, the first has 2, the second 6 lessons, the third unit has only 2 lessons, the fourth has 3 lessons and the last unit has 6 lessons.

Each unit begins with an introduction on two pages; a coloured drawing, related to the subject, takes up one-third of the two pages. The unit introduction is a kind of summary for the pupils in which they are informed about what they are supposed to learn intellectually (*Fikri* or knowledge) about the subject, the skills (*Mahari*) involved and what is involved on the emotional (*Wajdani*) level.

The lesson that follows the introduction usually has four or more pages and starts with 'Let's look at the following pictures/photos' (*Nata`ammal as-Siwar al-Atiya*). There are various photos that deal with the topic of the lesson. The next section begins with 'Let's look at the following and give an answer!' (*Nata`ammal fima Ya`ti wa Nujib*), and is illustrated with a small figure. The figure points to the main topic of the lesson, which is written in coloured letters, and to the relevant information. In the test section (*Akhtabir Nafsi*) the students have to recall everything they have learned in the lesson and in the activity section (*al-Anshita*) they have to apply their newly acquired knowledge to their environment, e.g. 'I collect, I go on visits, I search for, etc. The small cartoon also appears in the test and activity section.

The first chapter is about geography in general, then deals with its particular branches with a focus on Human Geography, which is the main topic of this book. In general, geography is divided into an ecological and a human branch and the latter is divided into the subjects of demography, settlement, economy (trade and industry) and politics. The first chapter deals with demography and settlements and the second chapter with economy and ecology. Political matters, e.g. 'the study of political borders and the relationship between states' (p. 8) are

mentioned throughout the book but there is no unit dealing with politics alone. The second chapter describes the economy, including the structure of trade and industry, and shows how demography is related to the natural environment.

Contents of the book

This book is simply written and easily intelligible, with plenty of photos and maps to motivate the pupils to discuss and get involved with the subject of the book. The book tries to impart positive values, for example, promoting ‘neighbourly relations between the bordering (neighbouring) States’ (*Ta`yid Husn al-Jiwar baina ad-Diwal al-Hududiyya al-Mutajawira*) (p. 3), and anti-racist values, such as ‘all people belong to humankind and no one should suffer discrimination on the grounds of different attitudes or cultural differences’, and [people should] ‘confront incidences of racist or discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of colour or race’ (p. 11).

Religious values are often imparted, sometimes as a clear message and sometimes subliminally integrated into a text – which can be seen as a socio-political trend in Palestinian society and the whole Middle East. Koranic quotations are listed in relation to the subject dealt with, for example when dealing with demography and ‘mankind’ in general (see *al-Anshita*, p. 15), or the subordination of the environment to the authority of man (p. 58). Another Koranic quotation refers to natural resources such as water (p. 32). A general religious explanation is given for the ‘hunter-gatherer age’ (*Marhalat as-Said wa al-Itiqat*), where it is described how God has subordinated (*Sakhara*) ‘all elements around mankind for the sake of his life and to continue living’ (pp. 88-89).

There is also a strong reference to religion when describing the ecological system which, according to the authors, is ‘an elaborate and balanced system created by God’ (p. 82).

Pictures also indicate this religious trend, for example, they show three different kinds of Palestinian settlements: on the edge of a hill, in a valley and next to a river – each supplemented with a mosque in different positions (p. 47). Even the date ‘*Miladi*’, which means AC, or after the birth of Christ, reflects a religious meaning when it says ‘after the birth of the Messiah, Peace be upon Him (*mundhu Milad al-Massih `alayhi as-Salam*), (p. 20).

Palestine is rarely mentioned except in the test and activity sections of the lessons. The reader might be confused by the meaning of the word “Palestine” in the following sections of text since it is unclear exactly which area of territory is being referred to: “the inhabitants of

Palestine belong to the Caucasian race” (see *Akhtabiru Nafsi*, p. 19), or these activities: “I discuss with the other students the importance of agriculture in Palestine” (see *al-Anshita*, pp. 69, 74, 77), “I visited one of the Palestinian factories, and will write a report about the visit”, or “I will draw a map of Palestine”.

The Palestine/Israel conflict is another important subject of this textbook. There is no definition of Palestine, territorially or demographically. Some information about the territory is given on a map (p. 53), which shows Mandatory Palestine (1921-1947) in Arabic, excluding all the changes that occurred before or after 1921, such as those outlined in UN Resolution no. 181/1947. The conflict appears clearly in relation to demographic aspects and the forced evacuation (*at-Tahjir al-Qasri*). According to the text, population growth or decline can be explained as natural or unnatural, and the latter includes ‘voluntary emigration or forced evacuation’ (*Hijra Taw’iyya aw Qasriyya Ijbariyya*), (p. 22). The reasons given for emigration are mainly ‘wars’, for example ‘the Palestine War’, during which ‘a large number of Palestinians’ were ‘forced to leave their country’ (*mithla Harb Filastin allati Hajjarat ‘Addan Kabiran mina al-Filastiniyyin kharija Ardihim*). In the test section the pupils have to underline the right answer for the reason for the following :

The emigration of a huge number of the sons of the Palestinian people at the year 1948:

1. *voluntary emigration*
 2. *forced evacuation*
 3. *the wish to study*
- (p. 24)

This arises again in connection with ‘the wars of 1948 and 1967’, which are mentioned as a reason for ‘forcing the inhabitants to leave their old settlements and move to new places, forcing them to live in overcrowded conditions in small areas (p. 33).

There is also another question to be answered with ‘yes/no’ in the test section concerning migration as ‘the main reason for an increase of the numbers of Jews in Palestine’ (p. 23). The Israelis are referred to as ‘the Jews’ (*Al-Yahud*), which is also the case on the map of Palestine (p. 53) - a clear indication that the authors wanted to avoid mentioning the antagonists by their nationality.

Within the concept of ‘don’t forget!’, the pupils are asked in the lesson about agriculture to give an example for ‘some kinds of crops produced in Palestine’. Under the activities section, they are again requested to ‘ask my Grandfather or Grandmother about the sorts of crops which were planted 50 years ago’ and also about the ‘agricultural instruments used at that time...I compare these with those that are used now’ (pp. 66-69).

This positive approach towards the subject does not blur the shocking facts also given in this textbook in the discussion of population density. It shows that 1,873,476 Palestinians live on 5,646 km² in the West Bank, a population density of 332 inhabitants per square kilometre, but 1,022,207 Palestinians live on 371 km² in the Gaza Strip, which means a population density of 2,755 inhabitants per square kilometre, according to data from 1997 (p. 36). In the test section there are questions about ‘the reasons for the high population density in the Gaza Strip’, and the students have to choose an answer to the question (*Akhtabiru Nafsi*, p. 37):

One of the following areas is characterized with a high population density.

Which one?

1. The Negev desert

2. Gaza Strip

3. Al-Khalil Mountains

This seems to require pupils to recall the information about the forced evacuation or emigration (*at-Tahjir*).

Conclusion

Despite the revision of the book, mentioned in the introduction of the Curricula Centre, it needs even more editing to take into account religious and political considerations and circumstances. The quotations from the Holy Koran could alienate the Christian pupils, who were obviously not taken into account when this book was written. A balanced religious message in the form of quotations could help to impart the positive universal values mentioned in the introduction of the first unit: ‘all people belong to only one race, and nobody should be discriminated against on grounds of ideological or cultural differences’ (p. 11).

A revision is also needed to take into account political considerations because avoiding any mention of the antagonist does not concur with the aim to ‘support good relations between the bordering (neighbouring) states’ (p. 3). It clearly draws attention to the Palestine/Israel conflict. The reason for negating the antagonist might be some kind of helplessness and does not encourage the teachers nor the pupils, who need accurate information about their borders and neighbours.

7th grade: The Geography of Palestine

The Geography of Palestine (Jughrafiyat Filastin) consists of 83 pages, starting with two short introductions, one written by the Curricula Centre (*Markaz al-Manahij*), and the second written by the authors (*al-Mu'allifun*) of this provisional (*at-Tajribi*) educational book. The book includes 12 maps showing the continents, the Arab World, Greater Syria (*Bilad ash-Sham*) and historical Palestine during the time of the Mandate, 1921–1947 (that is, all of Palestine, before UN Resolution No. 181/1947). *Jughrafiyat Filastin* also contains photographs, showing Palestinian cities and places during the time of the Mandate. A bibliography, mainly of Palestinian and Arabic sources used by the writers, written in Arabic only is attached.

The introductions

The introduction by the Curricula Centre is identical to the one in *Mabadi al-Jughrafiya al-Bashariyya* (for grade 6).

The second introduction is written by the authors of the book. It was their intention when writing this book 'to provide the teachers with a tool for teaching and the pupils with a framework to learn the geography of our homeland (*Jughrafiyat Watanina*)'. This has been achieved with the help of 'extensive knowledge about the land and the people of Palestine'. This knowledge is to be imparted by simply written texts including 'human and patriotic considerations' to make 'the concepts' easier to understand for the pupils.

The cover of the book

The front cover of *Jughrafiyat Filastin* shows a photo of Jerusalem with a panoramic view from the Mount of Olives, passing through the Old City with the Omar Mosque to the high buildings of West Jerusalem. On the back you see a map of historical Palestine under the Mandate with its historical Arabic names, entitled 'Natural Map of Palestine' (*Kharitat Filastin at-Tabi'iyya*) and on the right-hand side you see a small photo of a wild animal.

Structure and contents

Jughrafiyat Filastin consists of 2 chapters, 9 units and 19 lessons. The first chapter includes 4 units with 15 lessons and the second chapter 5 units with 14 lessons. Each lesson consists of 4 sections: an educational text section (sometimes titled *Nass Ta'limi*), followed by a summary

(*Mulakhas Ta'limi*), a test section (*Akhtabir Nafsi*) and an activity section (*al-Anshita*). The text section usually starts with 'Let's read the following' or 'Let's look together at... and give an answer to...', with the main information in a bold typeface and illustrated by maps, figures and/or photographs. The summary repeats information already provided but sometimes adds some new information as well. Two lessons, no. 6 (p. 16) and no. 9 (p. 26), begin with quotations from the Koran, the holy book of the Muslims, from a text directly referring to the contents of the lessons (climate and plant life). The third part of the lesson is a test section (on a green background) titled 'I test myself' where the pupils have to recall the educational text or its summary in a manner such as: "I define..., I explain..., I write or compare..." etc. In the activity section, which is the fourth and last part of each lesson, the pupils have to apply their knowledge in a practical and simple way, e.g. 'I draw a map, I write a report, I make a trip to, I collect...' etc.

The first chapter (the first 15 lessons, pp. 1-45) deals mainly with the location, geological characteristics, the climate, water resources, flora and fauna, and types of fish of historical Palestine.

The second chapter (the last 14 lessons, pp. 46-81) deals with the agricultural regions and production, live animal stock breeding and the main problems for agriculture today and also in Mandatary Palestine. Another part is about minerals, energy resources, economic areas and their importance, and the main communication roads and their history during the time of the Mandate. The last lesson, lesson no. 29 (pp. 76-81), is entitled 'Palestinian cities' (*Mudun Filastiniyya*) and shows the main cities of historical Palestine with their Palestinian and Arabic names, thus keeping the memory of them alive.

As mentioned before, *Jughrafiyat Filastin* deals mainly with the area of *historical* Palestine during the Mandate and it does not include any of the territorial changes that have taken place until now; the geographical zone in which Palestine is located (see map no. 3 p. 4) is shown as '*Bilad ash-Sham*' (Greater Syria). According to this description, the territory of Palestine in its entirety covers 27,027 km² (p. 4) and that means that the book deals with the area during the Mandate including that of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Throughout the book the concept of '*Watanuna Filastin*' (Our Homeland Palestine), as it is called in the introductions and in the lessons, is referred to using various expressions, for example, for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are referred to as: 'the two wings of the homeland' (*Janahay al-Watan*), 'the places where we live' (*Manatiq Suknina*), 'the place of residence' (*Makan al-Iqama*), 'the places in which one finds one's residence' (*Amakin Tawajidihi*), 'our homeland' (*Watanuna*), 'the land' or 'the territories of Palestine' (*Ard*

Filastin and *Aradi Filastin*), as well as ‘Our Homeland Palestine’ (*Biladuna Filastin*). These names are repeated throughout this ‘provisional educational book’.

Expressions like ‘the homeland’ and ‘the exile’ (*al-Watan wa ‘sh-Shatat*), ‘the territories of the year 1948’ (*Aradi ‘Am 1948*), ‘the rest of the Palestinian territories’ (*Baqi Manatiq Filastin*) are mentioned to avoid citing the name of the antagonist, Israel, and to avoid dealing with it.

The demographics section deals with the Palestinian population (the Palestinian People – ‘*ash-Sha ‘b al-Filastini*’) and the main demographical changes that have taken place mainly in Palestinian territory. According to the figures issued by the Central Bureau of Palestinian Statistics, Ramallah 2000, the Palestinians are settled in the area of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the territories of the year 1948 and in exile (*ash-Shatat*), and number 8,797,333 (p. 42). The Palestinians are divided into those who are settled in the West Bank (64.7%) and those settled in the Gaza Strip (35.3%). Later on the settlements are split up in urban areas (53%), rural areas (31%) and refugee camps (16%), (see figures 3 and 4, p. 43).

The reasons given for emigration are natural emigration (*al-Hijra at-Tabi‘iyya*), socio-economical (*Iqtisadiyya wa Ijtima‘iyya*) and political (*Siyasiyya*). The latter describes how the Palestinians suffered from ‘forced evacuation’ (*at-Tahjir al-Qasri*) at the end of the wars of 1948 and 1967 (*fi A‘qab Harbai ‘Am 1948 miladi wa 1967 miladi*), (p. 36).

The only reason given in the book for the high birth rate among the Palestinians is ‘early marriage’, which ‘leads to the high fertility rate of the Palestinian woman’ (p. 35). However, ‘early marriage’ is not the main reason, but can be considered as a manifestation of traditional family life among the Palestinians. Another reason is growing illiteracy in the countryside and the use of large families as ‘a demographical weapon’ in areas of conflict such as Palestine/Israel (as has been said by some Palestinian and Israeli Jewish politicians), (on the Palestinian demography see Hilal 1990, Kurpaj 1999; on the Israeli demography see Anson 1996).

The religious particularity of Palestine (*al-Khususiyya ad-Diniyya li-Filastin*), (pp. 72-74) is shown here in relation to ‘the Islamic and Christian holy places’ (*Muqadasat Islamiyya wa Masihiyya*), (p. 76). The map of Mandatory Palestine with ‘*Al Quds ash-Sharif*’ (Revered Jerusalem) in its centre appears twice in lesson 6 (p. 18) and lesson 7 (p. 20), which can be

interpreted as a political message, emerging from a new religious trend in Palestinian society and the whole Middle East. Lesson 6 (pp. 16-19) and lesson 9 (pp. 26-27) show this religious trend clearly, as they are headed with Koranic quotations concerning climate and wildlife in general. An indication of that religious trend can also be seen on p. 7 – ‘I test myself’, where the pupils have to ask themselves about the cause of the time difference between the (Muslim) call to prayer (*al-Adhan*) in *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem) and *Ar-Rabat* (in Morocco) to demonstrate the different regions of the latitude.

A negative aspect in this book concerns wildlife in Palestine. This lesson tries to turn the attention of the pupils to the animals in Palestine, and classifies them as being ‘useful’ (*Mufid*) or ‘causing damage’ (*Dar*), (see lesson 12, p. 32), which is a rather problematic way (not only pedagogically) of classifying animal life. This classification (‘useful’ and ‘damaging’) is recalled under the test section, ‘I test myself’: ‘I recall five Palestinian wild animals that are useful to human beings and I recall five Palestinian wild animals that cause damage to human beings’ (p. 33).

The book ends with data about the communication roads (see lesson 28) from ‘the old times’ to the Middle Ages and throughout the Ottoman Empire (especially those relating to the developments between 1865 and 1906 in Jaffa and Haifa, then skating over Mandatory Palestine in two lines to give some information about the opening of Gaza Airport (2000) and the ongoing preparations for the opening of Gaza Harbour on the Mediterranean Sea. The pupils then have to use the map of Palestine to recall harbours on the Mediterranean Sea, such as Acre, Haifa and Gaza, and to recall airports, such as those of Gaza and Jerusalem – see ‘I test myself’ (*Akhtabir Nafsi*), p. 75.

The last lesson (lesson 29) deals with the main ‘Palestinian cities’ and shows them during the Mandate without any notes on the current situation. There is Jerusalem (*Al-Quds*), Haifa (*‘Arus al-Karmil* - Bride of the Karmel) and Jaffa (*‘Arus al-Bahr* - the Bride of the Sea), which are listed together with Hebron, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Nablus, Gaza, Safed, Beer Sheba as well as Jericho (pp. 76-80). This shows the intention of the authors to deal with the entire homeland in the book.

Conclusion

After examining this provisional geography book for the 7th grade I have come to the conclusion that the authors of this book are politically motivated and are trying to impart a clear message to the pupils. The content deals with the 'land and people of Palestine' during the British Mandate (1921-1947) and not with Israel/Palestine today. Since there is such suffering in all areas of life, there is no recognition of the antagonist. I think that when writing this book, it was taken into consideration that the refugees living in the refugee camps (16% of all Palestinians living on the West Bank and Gaza Strip alone) and in exile, which is the majority of the Palestinians, could not agree upon such recognition of the antagonist, even in a schoolbook, as long as there are no reparations or even an official apology for what they lost, namely their homeland.

To justify such a paradigm with the argument that 'Israel does not yet have any officially recognized borders', or that 'the [Israelis] have their own names for the West Bank: Judaea and Samaria or the Judean Mountains', is not a strong enough argument to hold back facts, data and information urgently needed to teach the pupils to deal with reality and to progress the socialization process in their own society.

It would be better for all to give examples of the reality of the situation by showing how Palestine has been losing its territory throughout the years of the conflict by adding maps, demographic statistics and pictures, or to teach the reasons why Palestinians have been forced to live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip alone. Even data about demography, water resources, settlements in the 1967 occupied territories, the shrinking of agricultural land, etc., are absent from this book but should be honestly told without any hesitation in order to 'make concepts easier', just as the introduction promises.

The period when this 'provisional' book was revised (2001-2002), was a difficult time for the re-examination of the concept of the 'homeland' on both sides, not only on the Palestinian side. I think the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and also the teachers were under pressure not to give away one inch of their 'dream', as long as Israel was 'expanding' its territory, despite the harsh conditions of the second Intifada.

This book does not include any anti-Semitic language but neither does it include any steps towards reconciliation on the basis of the Oslo Agreement (1993). While both sides should not give up their dream, they should acknowledge the reality, which means that they should not forget about their dream of '*Ard Filastin*' and '*Eretz Israel*', but accept a State of Palestine (*Dawlat Filastin*) and the State of Israel (*Medinet Israel*) through a just, acceptable and permanent solution for both sides.

8th grade: Environmental Geography

Environmental Geography (Jughrafiyat al-Biy'at) is a provisional educational book. According to Uthman Sharkas, member of the Palestinian Educational Commission of the Curricula Centre (*Markaz al-Manahij*), unfortunately, some pages in some books of this first provisional edition happen to be white due to a printer's error. Therefore, the following pages of chapters, although mentioned in the table of contents, are missing: Spain as an example of the Mediterranean climatic region (pp. 62-63); the tundra climatic region (pp. 66-67, 70-71); the introduction to 'the environments of the Islamic World' including 'the concept of the Islamic World' (pp. 74-75).

It includes 91 pages with two introductions. The first introduction was written by the Curricula Centre and the second by the authors. At the end of the book there is a bibliography, which contains a list only of Arabic sources.

The introductions

The first introduction is from the Curricula Centre, which seems to be used with some modifications as an introduction for all the geography books I have reviewed.

The second introduction is from the authors of the book, in which they reveal their intention to 'create educational and moral orientation' in addition to 'accountable geographical knowledge' and 'human values' to 'facilitate an understanding of the climatic regions of the world' and to motivate the pupils 'to protect them'.

Structure of the book

Jughrafiyat al-Biy'at includes 2 chapters divided into 7 units, which are divided into 21 lessons. The first chapter (pp. 2-50) consists of 4 units, of which the first one deals with the environment in its relation to human beings. The topics of units 2 to 4 are climatic regions, such as the equator, the tropical savanna and the desert. The second chapter (pp. 51-90) contains another 3 units, which deal with the Mediterranean region and the tundra, as well as the climatic region of the 'Islamic world'. Each unit consists of 3 lessons of 3, 4 or more pages each with an educational text, pictures, maps as well as tables of data. Each lesson

includes two tests under the headlines 'I test myself' (*Akhtabir Nafsi*) and 'the activities' (*al-Anshita*).

The book is written in a very simple and informative way. The 24 maps and the 37 pictures and data tables are used to support the text, which is divided into coloured and non-coloured parts to attract the pupils' attention.

Cover of the book

On the front cover of the book you can see a picture of a part of the world around which several small pictures of different climatic regions are arranged.

Contents

Environmental Geography (Jughrafiyat al-Biy'at) begins as a secular educational book, and ends with a topic that cannot be regarded as secular, namely that of '*Biy'at al-'Alam al-Islami*' (the environment of the Islamic world). The religious trend, which dominates other books, such as *Human Geography* (6th grade), is not as strong in this book.

The secular beginning of the book is made evident by addressing 'the schools of thought' (*Al-Madaris al-Fikriyya*) in the first unit, which deals with 'the environment and human beings' (*al-Biy'a wa l-Insan*). Here, different views concerning the 'historical stages of the development of human beings' are quoted without any critical comment. 'The schools of thought' reflects on a group of humanistic-oriented theories that try to explain the creation of the world. The supporters of such different schools are to be read and followed as they argue for their views in lessons 1 and 2 of that unit. Thereafter the pupils are asked to recall the information or to write a report on subjects related to the units by using not only the schoolbook but also 'external literature' (see, pp. 3-10).

The same procedure can also be found in two examples for a climatic region, such as the equatorial climatic region that is inhabited by the Zandi. The Zandi live in the south-west of the Sudan and around Central Africa. Their environment and culture is revealed in combination with a short description of their faith, 'an idolatry religion' (*Diyana Wathaniyya*) and other elements of a natural religion spread among the Zandi, who believe in the effect of

the 'evil eye' (*al-'Ayn ash-Sharira*). The pupils are consequently requested to give an answer and a reason whether or not they can share the Zandis' belief in 'the evil eye' (pp. 22-23).

Unit 7 begins with two white pages, which carry only the numbers of the pages (see pp. 74-75). The unit deals with 'the environment of the Islamic world' (*Biy'at al-'alam al-Islami*) in 3 lessons, and according to the table of contents, the two pages should have included the definition of the 'concept of the Islamic world'. There seems to be a problem with the term 'Islamic world' as an environmental climatic region and also as a geographical region; we can imagine the problems that would arise if we tried to define Europe, North and South America as a 'Christian world' or as a 'Christian climatic region'. Here, an expression such as 'Islamic, Christian or Judeo-Christian cultural region' might be suitable for the subject.

Difficulties arise when an apparently religious-political entity tries to blend a political cause with a religious self-portrait or vice versa in order to present itself as a religious community or maybe as a political party with a religious orientation under permanent attack, or as a victim of political machinations. Here we can find a parallel example in Israel, which defines itself as a 'Jewish State'¹ and represents itself as the centre of "World Judaism", forcing the Palestinians to search for their own national identity as a counterbalance to the Israeli state. But the Palestine/Israel conflict is not to be understood on religious, but rather on national grounds.

The third lesson of unit 7 (see *al-Anshita*, p. 15), showing Pakistan and Nigeria as examples of 'the environment of the Islamic World', could be taught along with the other geographical climatic regions in other units dealing directly with different climatic regions. There is no need to give the subject any religious colour.

The Palestine/Israel conflict is another subject apparent throughout the text dealing with the desert, the Mediterranean climatic region and clearly with that of the 'environment of the Islamic world', in which the antagonist, in this case Israel, is neither shown on the map, nor mentioned in the text. Palestine is shown on the maps (see map no. 10, p. 52, and map no. 15, p. 76) as the territory of Mandatory Palestine (1921-1947). Thereafter, Palestine is considered as a part of *Bilad ash-Sham* (Greater Syria), a traditional Palestinian method to avoid mentioning the name of the antagonist. The description of the desert is that of *Bilad ash-Sham*, or *Badiyat ash-Sham* (the Syrian Desert). The Mediterranean climatic region is to be

found in *Bilad ash-Sham* – in Palestine as well as in Syria and in Lebanon (pp. 52-53); the mountains are those of *Bilad ash-Sham* (p. 57); the coasts including Gaza and Jaffa are also those of *Bilad ash-Sham* (pp. 8, 13, 52).

Palestine as a whole is considered here as a part of ‘the Islamic world’, the density of the Muslim population is shown as more than 80% (see map no. 15, p. 76). The suggestive question in the activities (*al-Anshita*) (p. 81) about the name of the state (*Dawla*) in which Nablus, Jerusalem and Safed are located, can lead us to the conclusion that it deals with Mandatory Palestine and not with the Palestine of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Conclusion

The Palestine/Israel conflict dominates the subject of the Palestinian curricula, especially that of geography. In geography, mostly old names will be used until ‘the national problem’ is solved. The religious aspect is incorporated into the subject in order to imitate the antagonist – Israel as a Jewish State – and also to present a supra-national religious self-portrait to help to overcome political problems. It is difficult to give any advice on how to write a geography book about a disputed homeland. However, a solution to the conflict is absolutely inevitable for the benefit of both peoples.

Textbooks analysed:

State of Palestine, Ministry of Education: *Al-Jughrafiya al-Bashariyya, Mabadi al-Jughrafiya al-Bashariyya (Human Geography, Principles of Human Geography)*, 6th grade, Al-Bireh, Ramallah, Second Provisional Edition 2001

State of Palestine, Ministry of Education: *Jughrafiyat Filastin (The Geography of Palestine)*, 7th grade, Al-Bireh, Ramallah, Second Provisional Edition 2002

State of Palestine, Ministry of Education: *Jughrafiyat al-Biy’at (Environmental Geography)*, 8th grade, Al-Bireh, Ramallah, First Provisional Edition 2002

Additional Literature:

Hilal, Jamil. In: *Journal of Palestine Studies (JPS)*, 4 (1990): 133-152

Kurpaj, Jusuf. In: JPS, 38 (1999): 56-79

Anson, Jon and Avinoam Meir: Religiosity, Nationalism and Fertility in Israel. In: European Journal of Population (EJP), 12 (1996)
