

Civic Education in the Palestinian Curriculum – A Review of the New Textbooks

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1. Introduction

The new Palestinian Curriculum includes *Civic Education (Tarbiyya Madaniyya)*, which is taught continuously from grade one to grade nine. Complementary to *National Education*, *Civic Education* aims to develop the students' awareness of the requirements and rules of society. The role of the individual as part of society and its various substructures, and his rights and duties, are at the core of this subject. The goal is to help to 'build an individual personality within the framework of civil society that respects plurality', practises democracy and appreciates a plurality of opinions. (Grade 8, Introduction) Beginning in grade one with basic information about the necessity of communication and social interaction and ending with complex questions related to human rights and the balancing of conflicting individual interests in society, the new textbooks for the subject *Civic Education* cover various aspects relevant to the concepts of citizenship and civil society today.

Civic Education overlaps with other subjects taught in primary and secondary schools. History, geography, Islamic and Christian religion, and particularly *National Education*, include material that is mentioned in some form in the units of *Civic Education*. While no clear-cut distinction is possible, the *Civic Education* curriculum focuses on general information about society - to a certain extent, information about *any* society - and the transmission of values and norms relevant to life in society. In contrast to *National Education*, in these textbooks the goal to strengthen the student's knowledge and self-perception as part of a *Palestinian* family, a *Palestinian* school and a *Palestinian* nation is not central.

While concepts such as civil society and citizenship are applicable not only to the Palestinian context but also to other national curricula, *Civic Education* nevertheless requires explicit references to the particular social reality encountered by the students. In light of the state of Palestinian society, the textbooks place a considerable emphasis on the specific situation encountered by Palestinian students. The fragmented society, pressing economic and social challenges, and in particular, the crucial problems related to the state of occupation and the ongoing conflict with Israel, make it necessary to include lessons and exercises that examine the context of Palestinian society:

‘Some of the social and humanitarian problems in Palestinian society are similar to those in other societies. Maybe the most important of the problems suffered by these societies are those related to oppression and exclusion from economic life and development.’ (Grade 9, p. 40)

Using various references to ‘universal’ concepts such as human rights, democracy and gender equality, the textbooks try to link these concepts to the context of daily life for Palestinian students. *Civic Education*, the authors state in their introduction to the textbook of grade 9, is essentially based on practice and experience: ‘Values will not take root in the students’ minds if they are not practised daily at home, on the street and in school.’ (Grade 9, Introduction) Methodologically, this goal is mirrored in the declared intention to place the student at the centre of the lessons, to ‘give a bigger role to the student’ (Grade 2, Introduction).¹ Consequently, questions and discussions about daily situations encountered by the students are frequently used by the authors to encourage the students to apply the textbook information to their own personal situation.

2. Content

The variety of topics and questions addressed in the reviewed textbooks notwithstanding, the structure is strikingly similar in all grades. Beginning with information and exercises that focus on the identity of the individual, over the course of the school year the units shift to more and more abstract questions related to the position of the individual in society. In grades 8 and 9, the students are introduced to the complex mechanisms of civil society and to various facets of citizenship and its relevance as a medium for political participation.

a) *The Individual and the Family*

The daily experience of the student is the reference point for most lessons related to *Civic Education*. Based on the student’s social relations within his family, among friends and within school, general information about the functioning of society and its implied rules and mechanisms is imparted. In fact, the student’s experience within his family is explicitly presented as an image of life in society itself: ‘My family is an image of my society.’ (Grade 8, p. 3)

¹ With regard to didactics and methodological questions, see the review prepared by Andrea Zempel: Palestinian Textbooks for Civic Education, Grade 1-3 (www.gei.de). The textbooks which are reviewed here echo the problems that have been identified earlier. It is important, however, to note relevant improvements related to the quality of the given information, the diversity of exercises and the use of primary sources in the more recently published textbooks.

However, throughout the textbooks, individual interests, opinions and actions are placed in the context of social interactions. The student's identity as a member of a family and relationships with his relatives are used to highlight the underlying values and rules on which this network of social relations is built. 'The responsibilities of the members of the family' (Grade 8, p. 6), 'The health of the family' (Grade 8, p. 9) and 'Family life involves understanding and partnership' (Grade 4I, p. 3) are just some of the units that stress the role of the family and its assumed portrayal of society. Selfless contributions to the family, giving assistance to friends and others, as well as mutual help and support, are depicted by the authors of the textbooks as a necessity (see for instance the unit 'We work together', Grade 2II, p. 2 onwards) and as an important characteristic of Palestinian society.



Mirroring the development of a child and the gradual expansion of his social environment, the textbooks allude to supposed structural similarities with the shaping of both family and society. The process of learning how to live happily within the family is described here as an introduction to society, so 'that when he [the student] has... grown up, his family will have grown up with him, and society will have turned into his extended family, and the nation into his wider home.' (Grade 6, Introduction) Again, the family and its implied patterns of social life appear to illustrate the prospects and limits of individual behaviour within society.

It is stressed in the textbooks that in contrast to patriarchal family patterns which were characteristic of past societies in Palestine, Palestinian society today – including the Palestinian family – has undergone fundamental changes. Reflecting the self-image of a modern society, the authors of the textbooks stress the process of social change and modernisation that has revolutionised the underlying values of social relations. In contemporary Palestinian society, democracy is said to have replaced patriarchy as the guiding ideal for social relations:

‘Palestinian society, like other societies, strives to strengthen the partnership between the members of the family in democratic decisions which will take into account the needs, desires, interests and ideas of all of them. This will strengthen the social bonds within the family and deepen the mutual responsibilities among its members.’ (Grade 8, p. 3)

Even though the textbooks emphasise the existence of social bonds, an entire unit is dedicated to the problem of corrupt intervention in support of relatives and/or friends in employment, politics and other fields of life. *Wasita*, or the use of personal relationships to obtain advantages, is explicitly referred to as a major problem in Palestinian society. (Grade 5, p. 48 onwards) In this context, the use of social bonds as a tool to bypass legal regulations or procedures normally required to achieve a certain goal is considered an obstacle to the achievement of justice within society.

The dependence on one’s family, however, is described in the textbooks as a precondition for the well-being of the individual. The provision of emotional care and basic material needs as well as instruction in values, rights and duties are depicted here as central tasks of family life. (See for instance the lesson ‘Why do people live in families?’, Grade 6, p. 6 onwards.) The fulfilment of this function as a material and emotional basis for the individual’s life is then linked to the successful adoption of various roles and responsibilities by all members of the family.

Cooperation in and contribution to the family are fundamental duties which the individual has to take on. In this context, the statement that ‘[t]he [respective] model of the family mirrors the state of Palestinian society in the past, present and future’ (Grade 8, p. 3) is an important argument for the historical flexibility of these roles and functions. Pointing to the increasing number of Palestinian women that are employed in professions outside the context of the family, the traditional roles of women, and consequently also of men, have undergone substantial changes:

‘[I]n modern societies a woman’s role is no longer simply to be a ‘mother and wife’, tied to the home. Instead, women have become equal partners to men; they participate in productive work and contribute to the development of society’. (Grade 8, p. 6)

The attempt to reflect these changes is an obvious characteristic of the textbooks. The presentation of women and men in their respective activities breaks away from traditional gender roles and mostly avoids depictions of women which could be seen as strengthening patriarchal structures. The particular emphasis on cooperation within and contribution to the family is shown in illustrations dealing with housework, education and employment, in which men and women, and to a large extent children, are presented as equal parties. A precondition for democracy within the family, according to the textbooks is:

‘[e]quality between the individuals of the family. There should not be any discrimination with regards to rights and duties between the husband and the wife, between the son and the daughter or between the first and the second son, as everyone has to fulfil the role that he has been assigned to and which he is capable of undertaking.’ (Grade 7, p. 40)

It is important to note that this equality, or balance of rights *and* duties within family and within society is explicitly given a moral dimension. It is not by one’s own choice or decision that the individual is integrated into the social network provided by family/society, but an outcome of both natural affiliation and moral obligation. As ‘a pious son of one’s family’ (Grade 4I, p. 6), the fulfilment of roles is an ultimate duty not only through the force of necessity, but also because of the existence of primordial bonds.

In this regard, the question addressed to the students ‘Why is the home considered to be the best place for children?’ (Grade 4I, p. 11) relates to the family not only as a unit of reproduction, but also as a natural source of security. It is interesting to see that the contrast between the house/family and the ‘street’ – which is identified as a place of insecurity – is also applied to society as such. Outside of one’s quasi-natural social bonds the individual is, according to this concept of relationship between the individual and society, exposed to material and emotional risks.

b) Difference and plurality

The general focus on a diversity of social roles is mirrored in the emphasis placed on individual differences related to identity (nationality, skin colour, language, gender, religion etc) and social reality (profession, education, intelligence, ability, age, home environment etc). Despite differences in personal background, ‘respect for the human being, the acceptance of “the other” and respect for pluralism’ are introduced as some of the basic values guiding

modern civil societies. (Grade 9, p. 2) However, as in the case of social roles, social pluralism is not only depicted as valuable per se, but also appears to be justified mainly for its positive impact on the effectiveness and productiveness of society.

The underlying concept of a natural binding to community that is reflected in this emphasis on social roles and obligations ('Every one of us has a role', Grade 2II, p. 4 onwards) is applied not only with regard to the context of the family or school but also to profession ('Society's need for a diversity of professions', Grade 7, p. 19) and to society as well:

'The difference between individuals makes them cooperate. A human being cannot live alone; he must work together with others. In Palestine, we differ with regard to many things but we remain children of Palestine, as the children of one single family.' (Grade 4I, p. 21)

On a political level, the textbooks again place great emphasis on the pluralistic character of Palestinian society. In exercises, the textbooks engage the student in discussions about contemporary problems through exercises in which they adopt the distinct political views represented by political parties. With reference to a draft of the Palestinian constitution, the students are asked to analyse the content of one of its articles:



Illustration 2: „We come to know others“, grade 2II, p. 19

'We'll discuss article 11 of the draft of the Palestinian constitution, which reads: "The Palestinian political system is a parliamentary democracy that is based on political pluralism. It guarantees rights and freedoms to minorities and does not discriminate with regard to their rights and obligations. It guarantees their protection and respect for them according to the law [Shari'a]; this is in the greater interest of the Palestinian people and its national unity." ' (Grade 8, p. 29)

Interestingly, the pluralistic character of Palestinian society is not (only) seen as an outcome of conflicting interests and needs. It is also explained historically as a result of conquest and immigration. As ‘a land of diversity and pluralism’,

‘[i]n the past four thousand years, conquering and wandering nations of various cultures and religions passed through Palestine. Either they grew up in the country or they were sent there [...]. All of them left cultural and civilisational marks that interacted with each other and which gave contemporary Palestine its form as a land of religious, philosophical, cultural and political diversity and plurality.’ (Grade 8, p. 40)

It is important to note that even though the textbooks relate positively to primordial bonds as a basis for individual existence, the authors explicitly distinguish between family and tribalism, clanship and confessionalism. Loyalties to tribe and clan are depicted in an entire unit as problematic with regard to questions of equality and rights (see below) and are described in another context as an obstacle for effective political pluralism. Here, political parties are introduced as a necessary ‘substitute for groupings based on religious affiliation and tribal belonging.’ (Grade 8, p. 28)

c) Rights, duties and the importance of work

The importance of a functioning society is paralleled by an emphasis on rights and freedoms that are granted to the individual. Despite frequent references to human rights and its various expressions in international laws and declarations, the textbooks frequently link rights to the fulfilment of duties. Although the provision of knowledge about individual rights and freedoms and how to defend them is central to the books, some units tend to present rights and freedom as benefits bestowed by society.

The idea of an unconditional existence of rights is reflected in the unit ‘Our rights’, which is part of the textbook for grade 4. The text of this unit states that ‘every human being living on earth’ (Grade 4II, p. 4) has rights. Among other rights, personal security, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and opinion, access to education and the right to religious freedom are presented as irrevocable rights that should be guaranteed to everyone without discrimination.

In a similar spirit, the textbooks for grade 5 focus on ‘Children’s rights’ (Grade 5, p. 2 onwards) as a specific obligation of society. Children’s rights to education, equal treatment and protection from harm are presented in these lessons as deriving from widely accepted sources. While one of the texts names the ‘monotheistic religions’ (Grade 5, p. 4) as sources, other references can be found to the Declaration of Human Rights and international conventions adopted by the United Nations (see also Grade 7, p. 38). The examples given to illustrate potential violations of rights include physical violence perpetrated by parents as well as the violation of the child’s right to education. As in other contexts, early marriage of girls is explicitly singled out here as a form of parental offence against children. (Grade 5, p. 11)

Important are the more detailed discussions of human rights provided in grades 7 and grade 9. The texts included in these units distinguish between collective and individual rights and summarise several specific rights related to political participation, culture and social justice (see Grade 9, p. 27 onwards). For obvious reasons, it is in this context of human rights that the impact of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is – implicitly – raised. Although evidently related to the conflict, these references to different forms of violation of rights caused by the occupation are limited to brief sentences and examples; neither Israel nor the Israeli army are explicitly mentioned. However, as in one example of a military car blocking a street, a reference to Israel is clearly implied. (Grade 4II, p. 3; see also the reference to the Geneva Convention in Grade 9, p. 28)

In contrast to these units, in which rights are described as indivisible and irrevocable, most units directly link the existence of rights to the assumption of obligations. This is evident for instance in a phrase summarising the content of one unit: ‘In exchange for the rights I acquire from my society, I have obligations towards it.’ (Grade 4I, p. 18)

This linkage between rights and duties is particularly visible in the textbooks’ elaborations on waged and voluntary work. For example, two out of the three units of the textbook for the second term of the third grade are dedicated to the social participation of the individual through work. While the first unit deals with voluntary work as a service to the community, the second unit provides information about the different professions required to guarantee social reproduction. Work is presented here as ‘a right and a duty’ (Grade 3II, p. 12) that has to be carried out.

Another unit that is entirely dedicated to the importance of work stresses that work is not only an obligation as a means of reproduction. In fact, work is presented here as a human necessity per se:

‘The possession of great wealth is no justification not to work. Man has to work because his dignity is measured by his work, not by his wealth. For it is work that supports the development of [one’s] senses, the development of [one’s] thinking, and guarantees human existence. It is work that supports the acquisition of additional qualifications and the enrichment of the national heritage.’ (Grade 7, p. 14)

The importance given to the field of work in human life is also exemplified by the emphasis which is placed on women’s rights in waged work and the measures required to guarantee their equal treatment. In addition to general information about employees’ rights with regard to labour conditions, payment and job security, the insistence on rights of female employees is presented here as an important part of the international struggle against the discrimination of women. (Grade 7, p. 26) Similarly, a general call for the active participation of children through voluntary work and mutual support among citizens is paralleled by several references to the risks related to child labour and the early interruption of schooling. (See for instance Grade 4II, p. 9.)

d) Civil society and democracy: institutions and social structures

The participation of the individual within society is considered in the textbooks to be a basic characteristic of human societies. In this context, Palestinian society is not limited to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip but includes the Palestinian population that is ‘dispersed in many countries of the world’. (Grade 7, p. 2)

Individual participation in the community is seen as a duty that contributes to the public good and interest. A civil society thus mirrors the need to organize and structure the individual’s relations vis-à-vis others on the one hand and the state on the other hand.

In the light of an ongoing controversial debate in academia about the definition of the term ‘civil society’, the authors of the textbooks implicitly opted for a state-centred approach to civil society and its institutions. In one of the various units on civil society, the introductory unit for grade 7 offers the following definition:

‘Civil society is represented by a complex [system] of institutions and organisations that assist the government in its work. These institutions and organisations are parties, organisations, trade unions, clubs, cooperatives, universities, schools and, in addition to municipal authorities, different educational institutions. Civil society is called “civil” because the membership [in it] exceeds [the limits] of the family, the clan or tribe. The citizens are equal members of civil society, irrespective of [their] family, gender, colour or religion.’ (Grade 7, p. 4)

This function of civil society as a mediator between the individual and the state notwithstanding, civil society is not only perceived as an institutional basis that can guarantee people’s rights but also as an expression and a means of loyalty towards the community. The textbook for grade 9 thus states:

‘A functioning civil society is a democratic society in which the individuals and groups participate in the decision-making process. The main motivation to participate is the individuals’ feeling of belonging. For instance, we feel a bond with our family, our school, the place we live in, our nation, the Arab nation and with humanity. [...] The feeling of belonging makes the citizen part of the whole, it makes him able to give, to work for the interest of the community.’ (Grade 9, p. 8)

In another unit entitled ‘Partnership in the construction of the civil society’, the introduction confirms this emphasis on the social bonds within this concept of community: ‘Man perceives himself as part of the social, economic and political network which is a necessity for furthering personal interest. Personal interests can only be furthered by belonging to society in this way.’ (Grade 9, p. 14) Personal interest is seen not so much as protection against injustice or oppression, but rather as the successful development of the individual within the context of the community.

The acceptance of responsibility for one’s own surroundings is thus a central concern of the textbooks. Various units focus on the citizens’ responsibility for the preservation of public places and property. Similar to the frequent references to the need for mutual solidarity and help for those in need, various texts and exercises stress the students’ obligation towards the community and public interest. (See for instance the unit ‘Public interests and their

preservation’, Grade 5, p. 34 onwards.) One reading gives the example of the bonds between the individual and the community and explicitly, in the words of a father to his daughter, to one’s nation: ‘[I]f we want to build a beautiful and advanced nation that we can be proud of in the outside world, we have to protect it, because it belongs to all of us.’ (Grade 5, p. 36)

In addition to this focus on civil society as a basis for a communitarian organisation of social relations, the textbooks offer basic insights into the various organisations that defend human rights. Especially with regard to problems of domestic violence and discrimination against women, disabled people and children, these organisations are presented as important guarantors of security and justice. Since ‘domestic violence is a social, and not a private problem,’ (Grade 8, p. 52) as one text states, students are clearly encouraged to consider contacting human rights and other non-governmental organisations that deal with social exclusion and violence if the need arises.

In a noticeable shift of emphasis in comparison with textbooks for earlier grades, the textbook for grade 9 adds an additional perspective on the issue of solidarity and mutual respect. In its introduction to the basic values of civil society, the textbook explicitly discusses the concept of human dignity as a dignity per se. While in other contexts the acceptance of and the respect for the ‘other’ is ‘rationalised’ by references to hygiene or zealous work (see for instance Grade 4I, p. 27 and Grade 7, p. 7), such a precondition of mutual respect is not supported in these lessons. In contrast, the authors of this textbook ask the students to note that:

‘[h]uman dignity does not mean dealing with others out of pity or out of love for charity. Rather, human dignity means that every person has a right to a decent life, irrespective of his colour, gender, age, physical or mental ability.’ (Grade 9, p. 4)

Taking up other references to the plurality of society and the variety of interests within it, this textbook emphasises democracy as a guiding value for social relations, civil society and the state. ‘Among our rights and the rights of others’, the textbook states, ‘is the right to differ in our opinions about difficult social problems. It is not acceptable to force the opinion of the political, cultural, religious or ethnic majority onto the minority within society.’ (Grade 9, p. 6)

In various contexts, the textbooks relate to the importance of values as a basis of society. In one dialogue between a teacher and a student, a basic definition of values and their relevance within society is given: ‘Values, Wafa, are a noble moral code that guides our behaviour and our deeds. We are called upon to follow these values by religion and society. These values will grant us respect and esteem.’ (Grade 4I, p. 25) In another unit of grade 7, this definition is further elaborated:

‘Values are a collection of principles that unite [people] and in which the individuals of a specific society believe. From these values, the norms, customs, traditions and conventions that are followed in society are derived. These values must be respected and appreciated by all children in society.’ (Grade 7, 10)

It is interesting then to note that the list of values following this definition begins with ‘to strengthen the belief in god’ and ‘love of the nation’ as guiding values of society. Only afterwards are values such as freedom and equality mentioned.

The textbooks include units that discuss forms of political participation as a means to influence the decision-making process. As early as grade 4, the students learn about the

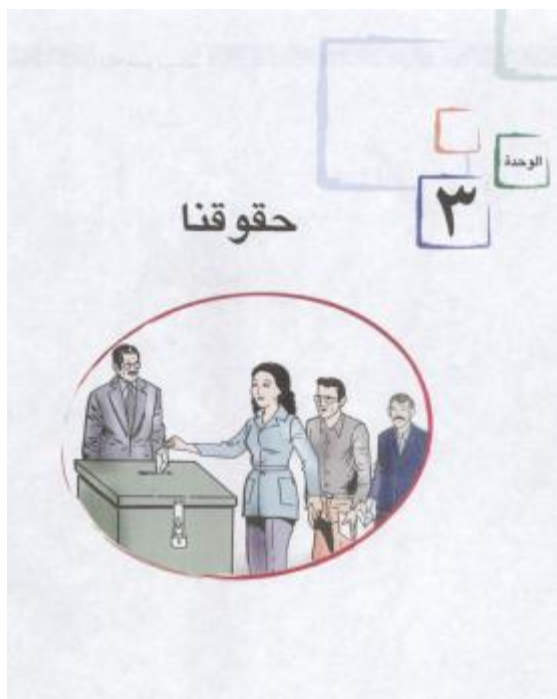


Illustration 3: „Our rights“, grade 4II, p. 2

importance of students’ councils and the significance of elections. (Grade 4II, p. 11) As in the frequent references to ‘democratic’ participation within the family, quotes from the Palestinian constitution in which the Palestinian state is described as a parliamentary democracy stress the overall importance of democracy and the respect for other opinions as guidelines for social interaction.

Beginning with grade 6, but with a particular emphasis in grades 7 to 9, the importance of democracy is discussed in great detail.

Governmental and non-governmental institutions, political parties, trade unions, media and also the constitution and laws in general are

mentioned here with information about their function within society. Here as in previous units a special emphasis is placed on the importance of these institutions as guarantors of equality. With regard to laws, 'the lack of discrimination between citizens' (Grade 8, p. 17) is considered to be the cornerstone of a just society. Thus the prevention of discrimination is the duty of every citizen. Another duty of the citizens 'who decide about the laws and who have the right to change them' (Grade 8, p. 20) includes the defence of the constitution and laws. The transparency of government and administration is of central importance in order to allow the citizens to control governmental decisions and policies. (Grade 9, p. 11)

The description of the mechanisms of Palestinian society that is given in the textbooks clearly focuses on a state of harmony and mutual understanding. Presenting the compatibility of individual interests as the norm and conflicting interests as the exception, in only a few cases do the textbooks allude to conflict and contradictions between the rights and interests of citizens, and between the citizens and the state. While general information indicates that individual freedom is limited by the rights of others and the interests of the community, such divergences of interest are rarely elaborated upon in detail. In one of the rare references to the legal limitation of rights, this problem is vaguely addressed. The textbook for grade 8 raises the issue of political demonstrations that require prior approval by the authorities and the prohibition of the widespread practice of shooting in the air during celebrations. The students are asked to discuss the conditions under which these limitations of personal freedom could be considered justified, or not. (Grade 8, p. 41) In a more abstract way, but essentially dealing with the same question, the same textbook relates to the limits of personal freedom not against the state, but vis-à-vis others. Here pluralism and diversity of culture, and implicitly of lifestyle, are presented as a necessary, though limited, characteristic of modern societies:

'With the development of modern societies which are constituted by different languages, ethnic groups, religions and colours, pluralism and difference must be safeguarded. However, these differences may not contradict the general cultural characteristics of society. It is important to know that culture is the way of life chosen by a group of people that serves their various needs. This culture might not serve other persons who live under different circumstances.' (Grade 8, p. 32)

The impact of this concept of culture becomes obvious in a reference to media and the necessary limits to the freedom of expression. Dealing with modern means of communication,

a unit of the textbook for grade 7 addresses some potential dangers for society. These threats from the media are not defined in terms of violations of law, but in terms of a threat to an assumed cultural consensus; they might harm ‘values, culture and ideas that we consider important’. (Grade 7, p. 28)

f) Challenges to Palestinian society

The general information which is given in the textbooks is complemented by a set of additional units that deal with specific issues related to Palestinian society. While these units include one unit about tourism in Palestine and the society’s approach towards it (Grade 3II, p. 26 onwards), most of these lessons focus on crucial problems potentially encountered by students in their daily life.

The textbooks offer various examples of different forms of violations of children’s rights and ways to prevent them. In an extensive unit in the textbook for grade 8, the social context of domestic violence against women and children is dealt with. Here, physical as well as

psychological violence is mentioned and described in its consequences for the victims. (Grade 8, p. 42 onwards) It is important to note that there is a strong emphasis on the fact that domestic violence is not bound to specific social groups or strata. Violence, it is stated, is ‘not connected to specific religions, races, cultures or economic conditions. It may be committed by the rich, the poor, the educated or the uneducated, in rural or in urban areas.’ (Grade 8, p. 49)



Illustration 4: „Is kinship a substitute for the law?“, grade 5, p. 52

Despite the outspoken objection to all forms of domestic violence, the textbooks include some information that could be seen as trivialising its impact. In one of these paragraphs, the students are informed about the psychological stress that perpetrators of violence may suffer. In a question addressed to students, this is directly linked to the suffering of the victim: ‘It is said that those who commit violence suffer from the same consequences as the victim. How?’ (Grade 8, p. 47)

The examples of violence are used by the authors to emphasise again the negative impact of clanship. Referring to incidents in which victims of violence tried to seek justice through the mediation of the extended family or the clan, they clearly object to any kind of informal methods of achieving 'justice'. (Grade 8, p. 53) In an entire unit in the textbook for grade 5, for example, the phenomenon of *A'sha'iriyya*, or tribalism, is presented as being in direct conflict with the system of law. (see G5, p. 52)

As mentioned earlier, what is most striking in the textbooks is the lack of any direct reference to Israel or the Israeli army where 'specific Palestinian problems' are discussed. However, it is in the units that deal with violence that some of the very few references to the ongoing occupation can be found – although only in unspecified references to 'the occupation'. For instance, in a question offering information about how to avoid violence and how to act if someone does experience violence, the students are asked: 'What role do the occupation and its practices play in exacerbating the phenomenon of violence?' (Grade 8, p. 56) As in other cases, instead of elaborating on the specific problems caused by the conditions of occupation, occupation here appears to be a general obstacle for the development of societies.

3. Conclusion

The information given in the reviewed textbooks covers a variety of social relations and aspects of social and political life. As such, these subjects are linked to the context of the students and their daily experiences. The life of the student within his family and immediate surroundings is at the core of various units. The family is explicitly portrayed as a basis and as a laboratory for society and community; it is a vehicle that is used to explain and to transmit knowledge about more complex social relations, about participation and democracy, and in the end, about citizenship and the functioning of civil society.

This comparison between the family and society offers several advantages and supports the transmission of knowledge and values. At the same time, this comparison is at the basis of a communitarian vision of society developed in the textbooks. Society is depicted here as a natural community bond created by hereditary ties between its individuals. The democratic rules on which Palestinian society is based are thus valid not only within the public sphere but in interpersonal relations between parents, and between parents and their children as well.

However, given the substantial differences between the structure of society and the family and, even more importantly, between the concept of citizenship and the biologically based membership of a family, the perspective which is presented in the textbooks is open to question.

Reflecting this communitarian vision, one of the most striking characteristics of the textbooks is the special emphasis on work and the individual obligation to contribute to society. In these textbooks, work is depicted not only as a necessity for human society, but as an obligation per se. Hence, human dignity and respect are in many units linked to the fulfilment of various social obligations towards the community. This concept is also echoed in the emphasis given to the balance of rights and duties, with individual rights dependant on one's acceptance of duties. This idea is also evident in several rather brief explanations of the limits of plurality and the supposed dangers of cultural influences considered to be in conflict with the dominant culture of Palestinian society.

The implied vision of society obviously reflects the immediate desire to strengthen the mutual links between the members of Palestinian society and to contribute to the development of viable structures of a civil society. The frequent allusion to a natural belonging to a distinct Palestinian community, based on an image of society as one's 'extended family', can be considered as a testament to the fragmented state of society and the challenges it faces.

It is noteworthy that the more complex textbooks for older students, particularly for grades eight and nine, include information that does present alternative approaches. Instead of using the family to illustrate smooth social relations, these textbooks do not hide the conflicts within society, and present methods for coping with these challenges. In these units, society is not so much about emotional bonds and common interests, but about conflict and its resolution. Instead of focusing on shared identities and quasi-natural relations, here the students are challenged to adopt and justify positions. It is at this stage that the harmonious image of Palestinian society that is presented in earlier textbooks might be questioned by the students.

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