

TEXTBOOKS IN ISRAEL & PALESTINE

SUMMARY

There are currently politicised and high-profile allegations levelled at both Palestinians, and UNRWA, about textbooks used in Palestinian schools.

There has been more scrutiny about textbooks used in Palestine than anywhere else in the world. What has been consistently found through this scrutiny, is that there are very rare examples of any material that could be characterised as incitement.

What has consistently been found in multiple academic studies, is that both Palestinian and Israeli textbooks profile their own narrative, and not the narrative of the other side. This is consistently found in how history is understood, how geography is taught, and how the 'other' is portrayed.

It is vital therefore, to receive the allegations in their context, that is from partisan organisations that systematically seek to undermine the work of UNWRA.

HISTORY

The allegations considering these textbooks have their genesis in 1998 in a report by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP), now Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, or IMPACT-se.

IMPACT-se is organisation based in Israel who reportedly have close links with the Israeli settlement movement. This organisation continues to produce reports, most recently in 2019.

There were two articles published in 2001/2 comprehensively critiquing the methods of CMIP.

The first article was by US Middle Eastern law and politics academic, Professor Nathan Brown, who remains one of the key commentators in the area. His article [*Democracy, History, and the Contest Over The Palestinian Curriculum*](#), states:

The Center began operation by issuing its first report in 1998 on Palestinian textbooks that might best be described as tendentious and highly misleading.

...The Palestinian curriculum is not a war curriculum; while highly nationalistic, it does not incite hatred, violence, and anti-Semitism. It cannot be described as a "peace curriculum" either, but the charges against it are often wildly exaggerated or inaccurate.

The other article Fouad Moughrabi's piece [The Politics of Palestinian Textbooks](#) (which can be downloaded [here](#)), which thoroughly examines the allegations, and states that:

the report was based on innuendo, exaggeration, and downright lies. Indeed, the real message of CMIP's campaign against the textbooks is that peace with the Palestinians is impossible, that Israeli settlement in the occupied territories must go on, that force is the only language that Palestinians can understand.

REPORTS ON PALESTINIAN & ISRAELI TEXTBOOKS

Following the early CMIP report, there have been multitudes of reports about Palestinian textbooks, with varying degrees of academic rigour and im/partiality. The following are some of the key reports that have either been highly rigorous or have had significant political impact.

The titles have hyperlinks to the sources.

VICTIMS OF OUR OWN NARRATIVES?

PORTRAYAL OF THE "OTHER" IN ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN SCHOOL BOOKS

2013

Sponsored by:

Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. Research led by **Professor Bruce Wexler** of Yale University. Funded by a grant from the United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor awarded to A Different Future

Method:

Independent review of 3000 Palestinian & Israeli textbooks. This appears to be the largest ever study conducted in this area, with high levels of academic independence, and includes both Palestinian and Israeli textbooks.

Findings:

- That Israel has been producing textbooks for over 60 years, but Palestine has only been producing their own text books since 2000;
- Dehumanising or demonising is *rare* in both Palestinian and Israeli books;
- Both Israeli and Palestinian books present "unilateral national narratives" that show the other as an enemy;
- Information about the other's religions, culture, economic and daily activities is inadequate or absent;
- Negative bias in presentation of the other is significantly more pronounced in Israeli ultra-Orthodox and Palestinian schoolbooks than Israeli state books.

Recommendation:

The report recommended: *that the Israeli and Palestinian Ministries of Education each establish a committee of Ministry staff and community experts to review current and future books in light of the study findings and prepare a plan of action based upon the review. Additional steps will be*

necessary to facilitate similar processes regarding the books of the Israeli Ultra-Orthodox communities.

Critique:

While there has been reports of critique of the methodology of this study, these have come predominantly from the Israeli Government themselves, or Dr. Arnon Groiss, who is the Co-founder and Director of Research for IMPACT-se, an Israeli led partisan organisation.

PALESTINE IN ISRAELI SCHOOL BOOKS: IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA IN EDUCATION

Numerous academic publications by **Professor Nurit Peled-Elhanan**, lecturer in Language Education at Tel Aviv University.

Book: [PALESTINE IN ISRAELI SCHOOL BOOKS: IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA IN EDUCATION](#), Released April 2012.

“the textbooks used in the {Israeli} school system are laced with a pro-Israel ideology, and that they play a part in priming Israeli children for military service. She analyzes the presentation of images, maps, layouts and use of language in History, Geography and Civic Studies textbooks, and reveals how the books might be seen to marginalize Palestinians, legitimize Israeli military action and reinforce Jewish-Israeli territorial identity.

Chapter: [The denial of Palestinian national and territorial identity in Israeli schoolbooks of history and geography 1996-2003](#), in *“Analysing Identities in Discourse” (2008) Dolon & Todoli (eds).*

“The analysis of 10 Geography and History schoolbooks share a common ideological ground regarding the perpetuation of Jewish territorial and national identity. This identity relies heavily on the denial of any meaningful life in the Land of Israel or Palestine, other than the Jewish one”.

Article: [Legitimation of massacres in Israeli school history books](#), in *“Discourse in Society” July 12, 2010, Sage Journals.*

“The article argues that Israeli mainstream school books implicitly legitimate the killing of Palestinians as an effective tool to preserve a secure Jewish state with a Jewish majority, and suggests that this legitimation prepares Israeli youth to be good soldiers and to carry on the practices of occupation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.”

Article: [The Representation of 'Others' in Israeli Schoolbooks: A Multimodal Analysis](#), In *“CICE Hiroshima University, Journal of International Cooperation in Education”, Vol.14 No.2 (2011) pp.115-130*

“ both non-Jewish 'minorities' and Jewish 'ethnicities' are represented, both verbally and visually, in a racist manner, as stereotypes and not as individuals. Palestinian citizens and those who live under a military regime in the Palestinian occupied territories are presented – if at all - as vile, primitive and dangerous. Jewish 'ethnicities', which include mainly Arab-Jews and Ethiopian Jews, are represented in an 'anthropological' way, mostly as under-developed 'sector'. “

US STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT OF UNRWA REVIEW

(primary source not available to access, [media report relied upon](#))

In 2018, an internal US State Department report refers to a UNRWA review of textbooks used in its schools.

Method: Review of 7,498 pages of textbooks used in UNRWA schools.

Findings:

- No cases of incitement;
- 203 issues on 229 pages (3.1%) of examples of material that did not comport with UN values of tolerance, neutrality, equality and non-discrimination, and human rights relating to race, gender language and religion.

SCHOOLBOOKS OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (PA):THE ATTITUDE TO THE JEWS, TO ISRAEL AND TO PEACE

September 2017

Co-sponsored by:

The Middle East Forum, & Simon Wiesenthal Center – two partisan groups.

About the Middle East Forum:

Their President, [Daniel Pipes](#), is widely regarded as Islamophobic and racist. Daniel Pipe's visit to Australia last year was sponsored by AIJAC but was widely protested by other more progressive Jewish voices. The Middle East Forum supports the work of Geert Wilders, who visited Australia with the anti-Islamist group the Q Society, and about whom the then Immigration Minister stated had offensive views.

About the Simon Wiesenthal Center

Widely criticised for being unmoderated in their critique, including by the [German Jewish roof body](#), a [US Jewish commentator](#) in The Atlantic.

Method: Review of 201 textbooks used by the Palestinian Authority in UNRWA schools.

Findings:

2017: "The findings of this research show that the PA schoolbooks' attitude to Jews, Israel and peace is based on three fundamentals: De-legitimization, demonization and indoctrination to violent struggle instead of peace".

Response by UNRWA:

A recent report about the Palestinian Authority textbooks being used in UNRWA schools is inaccurate and misleading. They indicated that 178 of the 201 books reviewed are not even part of the curriculum. For the books that were in the curriculum, additional complimentary educational material will be provided by UNRWA to the schools.

Released April 2019.

Sponsored by: Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, or IMPACT-se (formerly Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP)). Please refer back to the history section regarding the partisan nature of this group.

Method: Unclear.

Findings: *Unfortunately, the main findings of our reports analyzing the new Palestinian curriculum showed them to be more radical than those previously published, with a clear deterioration in content that meets UNESCO standards. In contrast to previous curricula, this new curriculum deliberately omits any discussion of peace education or reference to any Jewish presence in Palestine before 1948. Most troubling, there is a systematic insertion of violence, martyrdom and jihad across all grades and subjects in a more extensive and sophisticated manner, embracing a full spectrum of extreme nationalist ideas and Islamist ideologies that extend even into the teaching of science and mathematics.*

Result:

The EU is undertaking an independent review about Palestinian textbooks. [Response to a Parliamentary Question confirmed](#): *the study would be carried out by an “independent and internationally recognized research institute” with the aim of “identifying possible incitement to hatred and violence and any possible lack of compliance with UNESCO standards of peace and tolerance in education.”*