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Palestinian education and the 'logic of elimination'

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ABSTRACT

Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories has sought to, and continues to, influence the Palestinian education system in a number of ways. In this article I seek to demonstrate that these interventions should be conceptualized and theorized as an extension of the 'logic of elimination' that Patrick Wolfe has previously ascribed to settler colonialism.¹ These specific interventions in the educational field, I suggest, should be understood in the wider context of the Israeli colonialist project. In engaging with the development of the Palestinian education system in the post-1967 period, this article traces direct and indirect forms of educational influence and sketches the outlines of Palestinian resistance.

KEYWORDS

Education; Oslo agreement; Palestinian curriculum; resistance; settler colonialism

Introduction

For Palestinians, the word 'occupation' brings to mind a physical apparatus that is imposed by barbed wire, checkpoints and the so-called 'Separation Wall'. Closer reflection however reveals that physical imposition is just one way that the occupation sustains itself – like all systems of political oppression, it ultimately aspires to the control of the mind, and indeed it can only be said to be fully complete when its pernicious values are internalized by its victims. It was in precisely this sense that Grande spoke of the colonization of the native mind.²

In this article, I wish to introduce the proposition that the continued absence of a distinctively Palestinian education system should not only be understood as a product of capacity limitations, whether material or human, but should instead be understood in the wider context of a deliberate political project that seeks to suppress a Palestinian national narrative and get rid of the native.³ This concern had, it should be noted, preoccupied Zionists even before the establishment of Israel.⁴ As Sayegh observes, 'Zionist colonisation of Palestine was essentially incompatible with the continued existence of the "native population" in the coveted country'.⁵

The 'logic of elimination' that Israel applies is, as Wolfe notes, 'not invariably genocidal'⁶ and it is produced through different methods.⁷ Badarin, for example, presents Israeli settlements as 'essentially eliminatory'⁸ and Hilal suggests it is part of a peace process that effectively denies the *Nakba*.⁹ Colonial power is deeply rooted and structural, and this explains why it appears as a 'structure not an event'.¹⁰

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In Palestine, this 'logic of elimination' has been repeatedly applied to Palestinian education, in the full knowledge that this is one of the essential resources that Palestinians must draw upon in order to resist occupation. Elias Nasrallah's autobiography recalls that Palestinian education was an immediate priority for the colonizers of Palestine. He presents Israel's arrest of teachers who were accused of being 'fighters' as being part of 'a strategy that targeted the society'.¹¹ Measures applied by the colonizer that increased closures and student dropout rates were not unfortunate or unintended consequences, but were instead part of a deliberate strategy.¹²

In addition to situating this logic in historical context, this article will also consider the controversy that has surrounded Palestinian textbooks. In my presentation, I seek to make it quite clear that what is at stake is not the upholding of values of objectivity and neutrality but rather the desire – which is barely concealed – to disallow or delegitimise Palestinian resistance. In the worst instances, the relevant actors appear to be motivated by a desire to legitimise occupation and render it as an acceptable form of governance. Just as the name of 'peace' was indelibly stained by the experience of the 'peace process', 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' have been damaged, perhaps beyond repair, by the self-perpetuating textbook 'controversy'.

This controversy is also instructive because it demonstrates the extent to which Palestinians are expected to abide by an alien framework of reference that gives the lie to an entirely false 'universalism'. Furthermore, they are expected to register and express themselves in a language and predisposition that has little or no relation to the everyday experience of occupation and dispossession. Finally, this controversy is also instructive because it highlights the (at times utterly perverse) extent to which Israel's apologists are willing to distort and even deform reality.

In situating this artificial and fabricated farce in a wider colonial context, I place Israel's attempts to control Palestinian education in historical, political and, perhaps most crucially of all, colonial, context. I argue that these interventions are part of a conscious and deliberate attempt to deny the legitimacy of resistance to occupation. Since its establishment, Israel has exerted control over Palestinian education, imposed an Israeli curricula on Arab schools, and applied discriminatory measures that negatively affected Palestinian students' achievement and progress.¹³ However, it is not these measures but rather an entirely fabricated textbook controversy that preoccupies international observers. A perverse double standard is at play when the interest of these observers in Palestinian education only extends as far as the priorities and preoccupations of the occupying power.

Before Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, the two Palestinian territories operated separate education systems: in the former, Jordanian teaching materials and textbooks were used while in the latter, Egyptian educational materials were applied. In the years after 1967, the Palestinian educational system came under the control of the Israeli military administration, and as a direct consequence, it remained underdeveloped and lacked required resources. Israel was however not entirely disinterested, and textbooks and expressions of Palestinian national independence were censored and teachers were subject to security surveillance.

After the Oslo Accords came into effect the Palestinian Ministry of Education partnered with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) to develop a Palestinian curriculum. It also established the Palestinian Curriculum Development Center (PCDC), which it would henceforth supervise. International donors such as the

Italian Ministry of International Cooperation and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) lent their support to this undertaking.

In the pre-Oslo era, Palestinian education was undermined by budget cuts, human resource shortcoming and poor teaching facilities in the pre-Oslo period.¹⁴ Even after Palestinians formally assumed responsibility for their own educational arrangements in 1994, the effects of colonial power persisted. The Palestinian Authority's (PA) ability to alter this state of affairs was severely undermined by its continued dependency upon external donors and its alignment with external agendas and priorities.

This dependence was essentially a subset of a wider set of relations inaugurated by the Oslo Accords. Under the 1995 Oslo II Agreement, the West Bank and Gaza Strip were divided into three separate administrative areas – Area A was run by the Palestinian Authority; Area B was jointly administered; and Area C was subject to continued Israeli military control. This arrangement meant that Palestinian population and land were fragmented and, as a consequence, exposed to the direct and indirect influence of the Israeli occupiers. Needless to say, the Israeli army needed to encourage to exert pressure and did so on various occasions, both through closure and other punitive measures.¹⁵

The arbitrary division of the OPT therefore further enhanced the power of the occupying power, as Palestinians were all too aware. However, international donors infrequently acknowledged this wider political context, and appeared to believe that Palestinians should 'work around' these restrictions, as if they were minor inconveniences rather than the logical by-product of a colonial strategy that sought to enhance Israel's control of the territories. A reality of arbitrary detention, confiscated land and flagrantly abused human rights was thus disregarded so as to perpetuate a sham peace process.¹⁶ This pretence even extended, as we will later see, as far as the self-serving illusion that Palestinian youngsters were radicalized by the contents of school textbooks, as opposed to an everyday reality that appeared to deny their very existence and even right to exist.

In the aftermath of the *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, Israel intensified¹⁷ its control of the West Bank by imposing additional checkpoints and roadblocks. Up to 2,500 Palestinian schoolchildren were detained without access to education, and concomitant impacts on their psychological health and well-being inevitably resulted.¹⁸ In the period 2000–2005, 576 Palestinian students (K-12) and 32 teachers were killed by the Israeli army.¹⁹

Palestinians residents of East Jerusalem were later negatively impacted by the construction of the 'Separation Wall', which cut thousands of Palestinians on the West Bank side off from their families and livelihoods. In 2011, it was estimated that around 3,414 students²⁰ were separated from their schools by the wall and army checkpoints.²¹

Children who were still technically residents of East Jerusalem experienced great challenges and difficulties when they attempted to access their poorly resourced schools.²² Around 5,000 Palestinian children were not registered with schools, and around 2,300 students wanted to find schools but were unable to do so.²³ Declines in the number of students and teachers occurred as a result. The university sector was also impacted by similar problems. For example, Al-Quds University has four campuses, and students are only able to enter three of them if they possess a permit.²⁴

In the period 2003–2004, 1,152 West Bank school days were lost to curfews and closures.²⁵ This partially explained the high drop-out rate, which included a high number of female students.²⁶ The situation in Area C is even worse. In some cases, children and

teachers have to walk five kilometers and then pass through the 'Separation Wall' to attend school.²⁷

In Area C of the West Bank, the construction of schools remains restricted and subject to the whims of Israel's permit regime. In 2017, Israel demolished a school in a village near Bethlehem that the EU had helped to construct. The European Union Representative and EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah issued a statement that condemned Israel's actions and called on it to respect international law. In March 2018, Israel demolished 26 EU-funded classrooms near Jerusalem.²⁸ In the Jordan Valley families were forced to purchase a bus to transport their children, and even paved the bus route in order to ensure their children's safe passage. Israeli soldiers then demolished the road and set up checkpoints. Such incidents are not exceptional in this part of the West Bank and are in fact part of everyday Palestinian experience.

In both Area C and East Jerusalem, Israel exerts pressure on Palestinian education and educators with the intention of forcing displacement. This targeting operates at both collective and individual levels. As in the pre-Oslo period, prison sentences are vindictively used to disrupt the education of students, and it is no coincidence that school demolitions tend to occur at the beginning of the school year.²⁹ Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that student drop-out rates remain high and the only real surprise is that it is not even higher.³⁰ Hanibal Abiy Worku, the Norwegian Refugee Council's Country Director for Palestine, asks the question which these vindictive and spiteful measures demand. 'What threat do these schools pose to the Israeli authorities? What are they planning to achieve by denying thousands of children their fundamental right to education?'³¹

In comparison to the situation in the Gaza Strip, which has been blockaded since 2007³², these obstacles appear as mere inconveniences. In 2014, 80% of municipal schools and 93% of UNRWA schools operate on a double shift basis.³³

During the 2009 Operation Cast Lead campaign, 280 (out of a total of 641) schools and 14 (out of a total of 15) universities suffered infrastructural damage.³⁴ In the 2014 Israeli bombardment of the Strip, families were forced to take refuge in schools and widespread psychological trauma was experienced as a result – in 2014, the UN estimated that hundreds of thousands of Gazan schoolchildren require psychological assistance and support.³⁵

Colonial designs and interventions

Israel's direct interventions within the Palestinian education system should be considered and evaluated as an extension of colonial practices. Albert Memmi observes that, in endeavoring to create a spurious legitimacy, the colonizer falsifies history, 'rewrites laws' and 'extinguishes memories'.³⁶ The Israeli colonizer cannot achieve this by him/herself and must directly enlist the participation of Palestinians. As Memmi observes,³⁷ enrollment in the colonial education system engenders a permanent sense of duality within the colonial subject, along with a sense of dislocation from him/herself and those around. Assaf argues that the diminished commitment of Palestinian students and associated behavioral problems could be in large part attributed to a narrow and restrictive curriculum that is divorced from Palestinian culture and indeed.³⁸ Current pre-university education provision in the West Bank quite clearly fails to meet the requirement of Grande's 'critical pedagogy', [which] aims to understand, reveal, and disrupt the mechanisms of oppression imposed

by the established order, suturing the processes and aims of education to emancipatory goals'.³⁹

In addition to the clear absence of this 'critical pedagogy', the prospect of social transformation and renewal is further curtailed by the fear and uncertainty created by Israel's surveillance.⁴⁰ These restrictions constrain Palestinian history, memory and narrative, with the consequence that Veracini's logic of exclusion is enabled to work to its full effect. The history of the colonialization of Palestine clearly brings to light the operation of an exclusionary discourse that has sought to limit expressions of Palestinian national identity.⁴¹ Denial is therefore an ongoing corollary of settler colonialism, and is the subtle undertone that underlies its awe-inspiring achievements. In common with other colonial states, Israel seeks to relinquish 'claims to land and rights' and considers the past to be a closed chapter.⁴²

Fanon recognized that the native was not merely assumed to be incapable of appreciating ethics but was instead taken to be the very negation of this concept.⁴³ Albert Memmi similarly notes that the colonialist's rejection of colonial subjectivity is anticipated by his/her degraded condition.⁴⁴ However, the crucial development occurs when this sense of degradation is internalized by the native and he/she 'learns his/her place'. According to Fanon:

Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture which has been transformed into instinctive patterns of behavior, to recognize the unreality of his 'nation', and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure.⁴⁵

For the Israeli government, it is therefore imperative to perpetuate Palestinian underdevelopment. If Israelis were not comforted by this feature, then they would inevitably experience cognitive dissonance as a result. Dispossession is, to this extent, an essential corollary of dehumanization.⁴⁶ In direct opposition to the so-called 'civilising mission', colonial practice therefore perpetuates economic underdevelopment and, in so doing, finds an additional rationale for its own perpetuation. Grande makes a similar point in relation to Native American education:

[It] was never simply about the desire to 'civilize' or even deculturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources.⁴⁷

This again reiterates that colonialism is, at least partially, a psychological construct and is closely tied up with the 'logic of elimination'⁴⁸ that Wolfe has previously ascribed to settler colonialism. In addition to unravelling and applying this distinctive logic, colonial power also endeavors to construct a (entirely spurious and unfounded) moral hierarchy on the shaky foundations of Liberal conceit and hypocrisy.⁴⁹

Veracini, in further clarifying his intended interpretation of the exclusionary logic, invokes a 'narrative transfer'.⁵⁰ This concept relates an arrangement in which 'it is rights – not bodies – that are transferred, and indigenous peoples become the subject of a transfer that does not necessarily displace them physically'.⁵¹ This presentation of a subtle and insidious power clearly recalls Michel Foucault and, more specifically, brings to mind a (colonial) subject constructed within and through narrative, representation and symbol, who is constituted within a power and knowledge apparatus.⁵² As we will

later see, Foucault's work also has a clear relation to spurious and self-serving Israeli attacks on the lack or wholesale absence of objectivity in Western academic institutions.⁵³ From a Foucauldian perspective, such attacks are intended to sustain existing power relations;⁵⁴ in offering the illusion that they seek to deny or exclude power, they actually extend and perpetuate it.⁵⁵

A history of Israel's interventions in the Palestinian education sector

Up until 1994, almost every aspect of Palestinian education, including the construction of schools, professional development of teaching staff and the teaching of pedagogy, was subject to Israeli oversight. Israel even appointed Palestinian teachers on the basis of 'good' conduct.⁵⁶

The following sections divide into three parts. My aim is to explain Israel's interventions within Palestinian education in different political contexts in the aftermath of the 1967 War. The first part references the first twenty years of the occupation and the various types of control Israel exerted over Palestinian education. The second part engages the events of the First Intifada, when Israel began to apply a range of punitive measures. The third part engages with the post-Oslo Period. A following sub-section then considers how the allegation of incitement has been co-opted to marginalize Palestinian perspectives and narratives of struggle and resistance.

On 9 August 1967, just two months after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip began, the Israeli government issued Military Orders 91 and 107. The first transferred Jordanian jurisdiction to Israel and the second banned 55 books (in subjects as diverse as Arabic, History, Geography, Philosophy and Sociology) from being taught in schools.

Military orders resulted in the banning of 78 (out of a total of 121) books that had previously been issued by the Jordanian Ministry of Education. These military orders complemented the range of restrictive measures that Israel imposed in its own 'borders'.⁵⁷

Palestinian teachers, in calling for a protest strike, argued that this was a direct attempt to obliterate their culture and religion. These protests persisted in the face of forced school openings, the prohibition of meetings and direct warnings to teachers.⁵⁸ Economic incentives (such as additions to existing salaries) were also offered, although it is important to recognize that this economic component did not approach the scope or significance of the OPT's current neoliberal project.⁵⁹ However, the unity of the strike action was already showing signs of fraying, as educators expressed their concern that schoolchildren and their families might be forced to relocate to Jordan.

Just prior to the picking of olives in October, Moshe Dayan, Israel's Minister of Defence, threatened to prohibit the export of this essential economic resource unless the strike was called off. Dayan also took the opportunity to remind the Mayor of Nablus and other assembled dignitaries that he was prepared to 'eliminate people' if Israel's security was threatened⁶⁰ (Bashour, 1971). In responding to the ongoing strike, the notables⁶¹ established a technical committee.

The committee was informed, during a meeting with representatives of the Israeli prime minister, that the Israelis had changed the curriculum and that they would be permitted to examine it.⁶² Tellingly, this 'concession' did not extend to Jerusalem, which Israel regarded as part of its sovereign territory (Israeli school textbooks renamed Jerusalem as

'Yerushalayim').⁶³ Palestinian schools within the Holy City were permitted the 'choice' of choosing between the changed curriculum and the official version which the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture had prepared for Arab schools. Many Palestinians within Jerusalem subsequently took the decision to enroll their children within private schools.

In return, the committee asked for imprisoned teachers to be released and for the threatened redundancy of Palestinian teachers to be dropped. Both proposals were eventually accepted by the Israelis and the schools reopened in early November. The new curriculum was imposed upon all schools within the West Bank (government, private and UN) in early November 1967, although exceptions were made for the teaching of foreign languages and religious studies within private schools, who were allowed to choose between the altered textbooks and the Israeli curriculum.

More radical elements within the Palestinian teaching profession expressed their dissatisfaction with this compromise and established the Jordanian Union in the West Bank. This underground organization rapidly established a presence within West Bank schools and came to assume a prominent role in the organization of demonstrations and strikes. Many of its members were arrested and then subsequently deported.

Military Law 345, which came into force in 1969, provided Israel with full control over Palestinian schools.⁶⁴ Military Order 845 later extended this control to colleges, and they were only permitted to continue if they possessed temporary permits.⁶⁵ This measure enabled Israel to close Palestinian schools and universities in response to collective Palestinian resistance.

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East) conformed with Israeli requirements by ceasing to use the banned books. Without consulting the Jordanian authorities, it then issued note books that included the UNRWA logo. When UNRWA raised the issue with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation), it appointed external experts to examine school textbooks in use in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon.

The external experts issued their final report in late February 1969. It objected to history, geography and religious studies textbooks on the grounds that they denied the existence of Israel and also incited violence by using words such as 'liberation' and 'return'. In citing the report, UNESCO's general director recommended the cancellation of 19 books. Israel, for its part, rejected this decision and Jordan objected that the cited textbooks clearly distinguished between Jews and Zionist and claimed that Israeli textbooks had not been subject to a similar examination.⁶⁶ UNRWA, meanwhile, continued to use the notebooks and supplementary materials.

In addition to banning books outright, Israel also sought to change the contents of school textbooks by removing references to Arab unity, resistance and Zionism were deemed to be unacceptable. Historical events (the liberation of Arab countries from colonial/foreign rule), statements of fact ('people in Arab countries speak Arabic') and evidence of progress (references to established Arab universities) also incurred the wrath of the censors.⁶⁷

Immediately after 1967, Levi Eshkol, the-then Israeli prime minister, established a 'Professors Committee' of Israeli academics, who conducted interview-based research with Palestinians in order to identify how to suppress resistance and encourage migration.⁶⁸ A recently declassified document shows how these academics used Modernization Theory to obstruct Palestinian efforts to modernize.⁶⁹

In this first period, the 'logic of elimination' took the form of direct military orders that imposed Israel's educational preferences; repression of strike activities; and the banning and editing of sensitive materials. The strong measures that Israel introduced showed that it clearly recognized the importance of the Palestinian education system and its potential contribution to Palestinian resistance. In its initial stages, the application of the logic was quite crude and involved direct intervention. However, the engagement of both UNRWA and UNESCO was significant as it anticipated the internationalization of the issue and more, specifically, the mobilization of international actors and constituencies around the problematisation of Palestinian education.

In the First *Intifada* (1987–1993), Israeli interference within the Palestinian education system became even more intrusive. Arbitrary arrests, closures and curfews became a feature of everyday life, and impacted on around 310,000 students. Around 1,194 West Bank schools were closed by military order for a total of 9 months in 1988 and for a total of 8 months in the following year.⁷⁰ Israel banned any efforts by educator to find alternative means of education. Mahshi and Bush observe:

In 1988, government schoolteachers within the Ramallah were summoned to a meeting with the Civil Administration in which they were reminded that any attempt to provide education to students was illegal and, as such, would be understood to provide grounds for immediate dismissal.⁷¹

Even when schools (including elementary schools) were open, lessons were inevitably interrupted by curfews.⁷² The Israeli authorities showed that they had no shame when they issued a security pretext to 'justify' the closure of kindergartens and elementary schools.⁷³ A Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC) report found that public unrest (e.g. widespread demonstrations) more often broke out in response to Israeli security measures, and when schools were closed.⁷⁴ Palestinian contributors to the report said they believed these measures were introduced with the aim of retarding Palestinian educational and social development and reinforcing the Israeli occupation.⁷⁵

Higher education was heavily impacted by the Israeli measures. While universities ostensibly enjoyed a degree of independence, they were subject to extensive harassment and repeated closures. The expansion of infrastructure was obstructed, professional development was impeded and essential teaching materials were censored. International staff were also required to sign a 'loyalty oath', which renounced support for the PLO or other organizations committed to Palestinian liberation. In addition, they also worked under perpetual threat of deportation.⁷⁶

Despite being deeply impacted by ongoing Israeli violations, Palestinian institutions of higher education have played a prominent role in mobilizing Palestinian resistance. This contribution has been apparent since the First *Intifada*, when Bir Zeit University emerged as an important center of Palestinian resistance. During the First *Intifada*, Palestinians responded to school closures by providing popular education. Teachers demonstrated considerable innovation in designing and teaching an alternative curriculum that sought to instill a capacity for critical thought and a sound understanding of Palestinian society.⁷⁷ The alternative curriculum sought to provide Palestinian students with resources that would enable them to confront their immediate circumstances.⁷⁸

The universities similarly sought to instill critical thought, a contribution that was of particular importance as the wider Palestinian education system so frequently fails in this

regard. Bir Zeit University made cultural studies and philosophy mandatory subjects, and both functioned alongside its established Women's Studies program. In addition, its students were also required to complete 120 h of community service prior to graduation.

Gabi Baramki, a former president of Bir Zeit University, recalls how the military government became increasingly obsessed with Palestinian reading lists. Books that were ordered from abroad, on subjects as diverse as Arabic literature, Archaeology and History, were confiscated even before they reached their destination.⁷⁹ Students were also quite frequently arrested the day before their *Tawjihi* (high school graduation) exam. This sometimes resulted in the loss of a whole year's education and in some cases forced the affected individual to drop out from the higher education system.⁸⁰ The popular committees assumed responsibility for providing education, along with other essential social services. When underground classes were held in churches, community centers, homes and mosques, the Israeli authorities criminalized these activities and threatened those found 'guilty' with up to ten years' detention.

Participation within both education and higher education was inevitably impacted. High-achieving students saw their performance levels decrease while the overall level of participation was substantially impacted by high drop-out rates.⁸¹ Closures meant that teaching schedules became increasingly cluttered and student behavior and morale deteriorated.⁸² These Israeli actions derive from a settler colonial mindset that seeks to break Palestinian resistance and control the population. In resisting, the Intifada leadership stressed the role of the popular committees in helping to 'raise educational standards'.⁸³

In the First Intifada, the 'logic of elimination' took the form of the direct repression of the Palestinian education system. Educational opportunities were directly restricted, and participation dropped as a direct consequence. As during the first period, Israel's activities remained quite crude and directly repressive, and even extended to the criminalization of educational activities. Israeli efforts in this regard were given further impetus by the growing revolutionary significance of Palestinian further education, and the emergence of Palestinian universities as centers of activism.

In the post-Oslo era, the Palestinian curriculum has been extensively criticized by pro-Israeli groups and politicians.⁸⁴ For these critics, the Palestinian acceptance of a liberal education curriculum should be a precondition for further funding.⁸⁵ The recent 'Peace to Prosperity Plan', the most recent innovation in the defunct project of neoliberal statebuilding, emphasizes that education should promote a 'culture of peace' and stresses that textbooks should omit material that could create hostility or mutual hatred.⁸⁶

In 2004, Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, accused the Palestinian education system of inciting hatred towards Israel and Israeli citizens. Both Benjamin Netanyahu (Sharon's successor as Israeli prime minister) and The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP)⁸⁷ later made similar claims.⁸⁸ The textbook issue has become politicized to a hitherto unimaginable extent, and some observers have claimed that future negotiations should be made conditional on future Palestinian progress.⁸⁹ Hilary Clinton, in her first campaign to become a member of the US Senate, argued that all future aid to the Palestinian Authority should be preceded by changes to textbooks across all grades.⁹⁰ Palestinians insisted that the curriculum should reflect their own heritage and traditions. Abu Lughod et al observe:

The basic philosophy of the proposed curriculum which intends to transmit relevant knowledge, values and skills is rooted in the Palestinian consciousness of its national heritage, its long significant history and its national affiliation with the land of Palestine and with Arab national culture.⁹¹

There was also the question of what precisely the curriculum should address. Ali Jarbawi, one of the founding members of the PCDC, asks:

Which Palestine should we teach? Is it historical Palestine over its whole geographical area, or is it the Palestine that will emerge out of the political agreements signed with Israel? How to deal with Israel? Is it only a neighbour state or one that was established on Palestinian land?⁹²

In the post-Oslo era, the logic of elimination has become more 'hands-off'. The establishment of the PA and its development of a Palestinian national curriculum has shifted the emphasis away from the direct control of Palestinian education to indirect influence. Now that Israel no longer retains the ability to exert direct control in the form of closures or other military measures, it has instead sought to produce indirect influence by working through external intermediaries. This feature was admittedly apparent in the first period, but in the post-Oslo era it has taken different forms and assumed new dimensions. The emergence of Palestinian textbooks as a distinctive concern, which has generated grossly disproportionate levels of international engagement, attests to the comprehensive internationalization of this logic. The following sub-section will now discuss this development in more depth.

Palestinian textbooks: an ongoing controversy

Far from abating, this controversy has recently gained new momentum, and textbooks issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Education for the schoolyear 2017–2018 were strongly criticized by US pro-Israel lobbyists and interest groups.⁹³ The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) claimed that the curriculum demonized Israel and denied its existence, insisted upon the right of return to an exclusively Palestinian homeland and promoted martyrdom.⁹⁴ After evaluating the report and meeting with Marcus Sheff, IMPACT-se's chief executive officer, the European Parliament passed an 18 April 2018, bill that makes the distribution of any future funding conditional on a Palestinian commitment to promote 'European values' of freedom, peace and tolerance.⁹⁵

Setting aside the questionable nature of these claims, this controversy serves to reiterate the gross imbalance that is an intrinsic feature of the peace process. In 2012, Nurit Peled studied 16 Israeli textbooks that encompassed Civil Studies, History and Geography. She found that these textbooks presented Palestinians as primitive and uncritically reproduced the myth of terra nullius. Moreover, when the massacres of 1948, carried out by Israeli armed actors, are acknowledged, they are held to be necessary for the establishment of Israel.⁹⁶ Professor Daniel Bar-Tal's 1998 study of 124 Israeli textbooks also found that Arabs were presented in highly unflattering terms.⁹⁷

In the face of intense political pressure, foreign donors have been forced to re-evaluate existing funding arrangements, and some commitments have been rescheduled as a consequence.⁹⁸ The US Consulate General in Jerusalem, meanwhile, funded an investigation that was conducted by the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI).⁹⁹

Although the IPCRI made a fleeting gesture to even-handedness by committing to investigate Israeli textbooks, it soon became clear that the three reports on Palestinian textbooks (which covered the periods 2000–2001 (grades 1,2,3,6,7 and 8), 2003–2004 (grades 4 and 9) and 2004–2005 (grades 5 and 10)) would be complemented by a single report on Israeli textbooks (covering the year 2004) whose ultimate purpose remained unclear (it was not even clear if it would be presented to the US Consulate). The first report was entitled ‘Analysis and Evaluation of the New Palestinian Curriculum: Reviewing Palestinian Textbooks and Tolerance Education Program’ (Report I) (March 2003)¹⁰⁰; the second report was entitled ‘Analysis and Evaluation of the New Palestinian Curriculum: Reviewing Palestinian Textbooks and Tolerance Education Program’ (June 2004)¹⁰¹ and the third report was entitled ‘Recommendations for Palestinian Textbook Reform’ (November 2004).¹⁰² The single evaluation of Israeli textbooks, meanwhile, was entitled ‘Examination of Israeli Textbooks in Elementary Schools of The State Educational System’.¹⁰³

The debate around the reports is instructive because it provides insight into the intersection between actors, and their coalescence around a shared concern with the integrity of the Palestinian education system and its relation to, or detachment from, wider peace-building priorities. While the authors were ostensibly independent, their conclusions were ultimately only sustainable insofar as they were aligned with those held by influential actors and interests. Even the terms of reference (see preceding paragraph) were partial and quite clearly framed in relation to a prior agenda and set of priorities.

In the current paper, I do not wish to discuss the internal bias within these investigations.¹⁰⁴ Rather, I instead propose to focus upon the question of incitement, with the intention of demonstrating how this links into Wolfe’s ‘logic of elimination’. I suggest that the proposition that Palestinian education should be detached from the material realities of occupation is in many respects a denial of Palestinian narratives of resistance and struggle and, by extension, a denial of the Palestinian right to exist.

A Palestinian Ministry of Education letter directly challenged the CMIP’s claims¹⁰⁵ and a 2004 report by two Belgian education experts claims that there was no evidence to support the initial accusation.¹⁰⁶ Chris Patten, the European Union’s (EU) Commissioner for External Relations during period of 1999–2004, refers onlookers to a report from the EU Heads of Mission, which found the allegations to be baseless. In a tone of clear exasperation, he lamented the fact that ‘[t]he story comes back again and again and again with the regularity of clockwork’.¹⁰⁷

Nathan Brown offered an equally strong rebuttal. He observes:

The CMIP reports read as if they were written by a ruthless prosecuting attorney anxious for a conviction at any cost. Exaggerated rhetoric, charges of anti-Semitism and racism, and denial of the significance of existing changes in the curriculum will hardly convince anyone further improvements are worth the effort.¹⁰⁸

It is first important to note that the team that engaged with the first report to the US Consulate included both Palestinian and international educators, along with specialists in specific subjects. However, the latter two reports did not identify the reviewers. It is only clear that no international educators participated in the drafting, editing or writing of the reports. It is unclear whether Palestinians contributed to the review or whether the Palestinian ‘point of view’ that is referenced in the report is hypothetical.¹⁰⁹ This is a

vital question because the first report on Palestinian textbooks clearly establishes that Palestinian textbooks were assessed by an Israeli educator.¹¹⁰

The first report stated that its intention was to establish a 'multicultural and global education' that would build upon the PA's five-year plan for the reform of the Palestinian educational system.¹¹¹ But such appeals to objectivity and peaceful intent were not without potential complications. Edward Said's account of objective knowledge is instructive. He refers to:

[A] knowledge always denying its complicities in the historical circumstances of its production (and reproduction), always proclaiming its openness, its fairness, its objectivity, even as its agents and agencies undertake real projects of racist war, genocide, economic oppression, intellectual domination, and manipulative construction.¹¹²

The first report was conducted by an Israeli reviewer who identified and assessed problems that arose when the textbooks were read from an Israeli perspective. A Palestinian and international team were then asked to read the same textbook while taking these observations into account.

The reports accept that democracy, peace and respect for other cultures and universal human rights are recognized by the Palestinian textbooks. However, this was held to be insufficient because they did not directly refer to Israelis or Jews. Similarly, while references to peace and respect for other cultures, ethnic groups and religions are approvingly noted, they are ultimately deemed to be problematic because no direct reference is made to Jews. The second report makes it clear that omission is deemed to be equivalent to denial ('[t]his lack of reference is perceived as tantamount to a denial of such a connection, although no direct evidence is found for such a denial').¹¹³

The second report initially acknowledges that the curriculum does not incite hatred or violence against Israel or Jews but then qualifies this by acknowledging that some readers may interpret calls for 'liberation' as a form of incitement ('unless one considers the calls to liberate the Palestinian land/territories as instances of incitement').¹¹⁴ However, this overlooks the fact that 'liberation' could be achieved through peaceful means (including the peace process) and that the use of violence is not explicitly justified or even referenced.¹¹⁵ In addition, the report does not distinguish between 'incitement' of violence towards Israel and Israel and 'incitement' of violence against the occupation. In this regard, it is actually contrary to international law, which reiterates that those who live under occupation are entitled to resist through *any* means.

The report complains that Palestinian geography textbooks refer to cities such as Acre and Jaffa as part of the homeland and fail to indicate the state of Israel on any maps. In addition, it also expresses concern that the discussion of Jerusalem does not directly refer to Jews or its claimed status as Israel's capital.^{116 117} It then proceeds to object to the fact that the occupation, settlers and Zionists are presented in less than glowing terms, and registers its dissatisfaction with the premise that the Zionist state is a source of Palestinian suffering.

The second report appears to acknowledge the problematic nature of some of these claims. For example, it focuses on what it actually in the text rather than what is absent. It observes: 'No evidence was found of direct calls for the destruction of Israel. Except for calls for resisting occupation and oppression, no signs were detected of outright promotion of hatred towards Israel, Judaism, or Zionism'.¹¹⁸ It

originally appears that the report distinguishes between resistance to occupation and violence against Israel. However, it subsequently clouds this distinction by claiming that criticisms of Israel's actions in the OPT could be construed as a more general criticism of Israel. Even worse, it then claims that any justification of resistance to occupation activities (including home demolitions, flagrant human rights violations and land confiscation) might be interpreted as a call for the liberation of historical Palestine.¹¹⁹

The third report focuses upon the region's history and geography, and concerns itself with how belonging and place are discussed in relation to both Israel and Jews. It disapprovingly observes:

In the treatment and coverage of the history and geography of the region, the new textbooks continue to show some elements of imbalance, bias and inaccuracy. In some textbooks the Arab's exclusive claim to the ancient history of the region is emphasized and several passages include references that reflect a continuous Arab presence in the greater Middle East region, with a noted lack of reference to the historical and contemporary presence of the Hebrews/Israelites/Jews in the region.¹²⁰

While it accepts that the curriculum does not incite hatred against Israel and Jews, it finds fault in the lack of positive affirmation. However, when it claims to find this feature in Israeli textbooks, it stretches credulity to its outermost limits. It takes the mere presence of children with and without skullcaps to be proof of tolerance.¹²¹ In approvingly noting how Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Pigs take the perspective of the Wolf into account, they claim that the need to perceive single events from different perspectives has been sufficiently demonstrated.¹²² While both claims are conceivably true, they are also the products of considerable interpretative labors. This clearly contrasts with the Palestinian textbooks, which were assessed against explicit and direct references. The third report¹²³ also expresses concern that the refugees' dream of a return to their homeland is not sufficiently qualified. However, no such concern was expressed when the significance of Jerusalem for Jews was discussed.¹²⁴

The reports conclude that the textbooks evidence a clear bias, especially when discussing the history of Jews within the Middle East. However, the first report acknowledges that when Jews are mentioned, they are always referenced in positive terms; the second report, in criticizing the absence of Jewish history, actually commends the textbooks' treatment of modern history.¹²⁵

In the post-Oslo period, the 'logic of elimination' was applied to the Palestinian education system, with the intention of making Palestinians acquiesce to Israel's colonial project.¹²⁶ However, this project was not advanced through the imposition of unilateral demands but rather through the device of neutrality. As Abu-Saad notes, this device is 'determined from the perspective of the dominant standpoint alone, in absence of an analysis of the power relations it is used to describe or disguise'.¹²⁷ As he notes, the dominant group can only assert this demand because 'it had ignored, rejected, and silenced the differing perspectives of those over whom it had power'.¹²⁸ The textbook controversy demonstrates how settler colonialism perpetuates dispossession by denying the very existence of Palestinians.¹²⁹

Conclusion

This article has set out the range of repressive measures that the Israeli authorities have applied to Palestinian education in the aftermath of the 1967 war. In the pre-Oslo era, these interventions directly impacted upon class scheduling, the parameters of the Palestinian curriculum and infrastructural development. In the post-Oslo era, when the PA assumed responsibility for the creation of a Palestinian curriculum, influence was instead exerted indirectly, through a discursive structuring that sought to create a climate in which the Palestinian education system was subject to increased suspicion. Israel also continued to use force and targeted educators, educational institutions, students and teachers.

It would be a profound error to view these interventions through a sectoral lens, and to specifically focus on their immediate implications for education policy. Rather, as this article has repeatedly reiterated, they should instead be interpreted with reference to concepts and theories of settler colonialism. In developing this insight, I have suggested that the controversy which surrounded the Palestinian curriculum and textbooks should be interpreted as an extension of Wolfe's 'logic of elimination' and Veracini's 'logic of exclusion'. The targeting of Palestinian education should not be viewed in isolation of Israeli expansionist policies that are focused on building colonial settlements and pushing Palestinians into cantons.¹³⁰

The textbook controversy is significant because it sought to narrow the terms within which Palestinians were entitled to think and act. While calls to be 'objective' and 'neutral' initially have an almost intuitive appeal, they lose this appeal when they are studied in finer detail: closer inspection reveals that they are deeply interpolated in existing power relations and are intermeshed with established local and international interests and agendas. The textbook issue simultaneously functions as a distraction from the objective reality of occupation and a denial of the fact that it even exists. It is in this latter respect that the controversy is entirely consistent with the logic of exclusion.

Given the daily reality of occupation, in which material force is routinely deployed against a civilian population, in clear violation of international norms and laws, it seems almost perverse that international actors see fit to engage in extended discussions of whether 'Little Red Riding Hood' has been surreptitiously co-opted into Palestinian struggle or if the 'Three Pigs' have unwittingly become apologists for terrorism. However, this is to overlook the scope and intended influence of colonial power, in addition to the importance of education within colonial strategies.

Both the controversy and the wider peace process are underscored by a deeply pernicious 'double standard', in which Palestinians are expected to uphold requirements and obligations that do not apply to the opposing party. While the concept of a 'process' might be assumed to imply a degree of equanimity, this is quite transparently not the case, as the terms of the negotiations are refracted through established power relations and are, as a consequence, strongly colonial in character. In both the textbook controversy and the broader peace process, the demands that are imposed on Palestinians are disproportionate, unilateral and arbitrary. Even worse, however, they are advanced under the appearance of equanimity and a disinterested concern with 'objectivity' and 'neutrality'. The controversy which surrounds Palestinian teaching materials is instructive precisely because it explicitly brings out the double standard in which the oppressor is granted

the same rights as the oppressed. Palestinians are required to distort and even disown their history and narrative in the name of 'peace'.¹³¹ During the Oslo negotiations, Uri Savir, the lead Israeli negotiator, expressed precisely this sentiment when he encouraged his Palestinian counterpart to forget the past and 'focus on the future'.¹³² Under these circumstances, 'peace' takes on an Orwellian significance and works in the service of an unsustainable status quo.

Resistance finds renewed impetus and purpose within oppression. This is the key lesson to which settler colonialism must continually blind itself. In the Palestinian context, Israel has sought to restrict Palestinian education through a variety of interventions, both direct and indirect. In acting thus, it has implicitly acknowledged the potential of education as a driver of social change and transformation. Ultimately, however, it continues to inspire forms of popular resistance rooted within formal and informal education. This is the essential paradox that Israeli colonialism can scarcely grasp, much less overcome.

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