

Palestine: Reframing Palestine in the Post-Oslo Period

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Introduction and conceptual framework

The Oslo Accord signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1993 brought to the world the Palestinian Authority (PA). This political body was meant to rule the areas within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip Israel evicted under the terms of the peace accord. The PA assumed roles and responsibilities in almost every sphere of life but was constantly monitored, criticized and curbed by Israel and the international community when it was alleged it exceeded its powers and ambitions. One of the most contested areas was education. Before that period, Palestinian education was under the control of Jordan in the West Bank and under that of Egypt in the Gaza Strip. In 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Palestinian education came under Israeli military control.

Immediately after the first textbooks were produced by the PA, they were condemned by official Israel and its friends in the United States as texts of incitement that undermined the peace process. The controversy that has surrounded the Palestinian curriculum touches upon themes and concerns that go well beyond the relatively confined field of education policy. As the subsequent engagement demonstrates, the development of a Palestinian curriculum evoked questions and concerns that correspond as much to the study of politics as to that of education. The question of education, far from being an uncontroversial or self-evident concern, was, in the Palestinian context, a politicized issue from beginning to end.

The battle over the orientation of the textbooks produced by the PA transcends a factual debate about truth: namely whether or not the books do incite against Israelis and Jews. It exposes the failure and internal contradictions of the peace process between Israel and Palestine in general and that of the Oslo peace agreement in particular. Through a closer look at this issue one can appreciate the irrelevance of the peace process as a means of reconciliation between the two sides. The Israeli and international reaction to the textbook issue and the Palestinian response to it indicate the gap between two basic narratives and the framing of the origins, essence and ways of solving the conflict in Israel and Palestine.

In this chapter we are particularly interested in the criticism directed at the textbooks coming from the Israeli–Palestinian Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI), an allegedly liberal Zionist non-governmental organization (NGO), which even has Palestinian membership in it. Through the examination of this particular criticism we can relate it to a more general conversation about two possible perceptions of the relationship between power and education.

It seems that in this case two different perceptions of power are at play. The power of education over politics appears as a perception held by those criticizing the Palestinian textbooks, and the power of politics over education is the one we expose as lying behind the criticism, including when this power is exercised by an outfit allegedly promoting peace and co-existence. This second form of power is familiar from Foucault's deconstruction of the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault 1991). The power in this second sense is not imposed directly but through a discourse of peace and democracy that denies the right for a Palestinian narrative in the name of these two noble ideals. Since part of the pressure was also articulated in the name of enlightenment and progress one can also see at play the power of cultural hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, in the attempt to silence a Palestinian educational voice in the name of cultural superiority, modernity and scholarship.

We are also examining this critique while recognizing a possible alternative way in which an NGO devoted to peace and reconciliation could have engaged with a Palestinian attempt to produce an educational narrative in the wake of the Oslo Accord (for instance by offering a Gadamerian fusion of horizons and creating a bridging narrative, rather than destroying the narrative of the occupied and dispossessed).

But above all, the inability of even a liberal Zionist NGO, with Palestinian members in it, to respect or even tolerate a Palestinian input in a future educational narrative for the sake of peace, is the inevitable outcome of the nature of the Zionist project in Palestine. Zionism, even in its liberal manifestation, is a settler colonialist movement and, as recent research has adequately shown, this ideological perspective informs its approaches to the native population and their national desires. As will be explained in this chapter, Zionist settler colonialism was able to impose politically and economically its will on the disempowered Palestinian leadership in the Oslo Accord – it failed to do so in the realm of education.

The Israeli criticism of the Palestinian textbooks focused on those sections that represented the Palestinian national narrative. This narrative was hardly visible in all the other aspects of the Oslo Accord. While the PLO was willing to surrender to an Israeli dictate in the overall political framework of the accord, this surrender could not easily be translated into a 'tamed' textbook that would have been acceptable to Israel and international observers.

Economically and politically, the post-Oslo reality was shaped by Israel's absolute control in every aspect of Palestinian life, even in areas which were allegedly ruled by the Palestinian authority (Area A and parts of the Gaza Strip, according to the Oslo II agreement). This left the Palestinian Authority in control of less than 40 per cent of the West Bank. Areas A and B were fragmented into more than 200 cantons, bisected by roadblocks, checkpoints, settlements and eventually the Separation Wall built in 2002. The Oslo Agreement, as an interim agreement, left the issues of Jerusalem, the

Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlements and border to the final phase within five years. Final status issues remain unsolved to the present time and the Israeli settlements are creating facts on the ground and compromising the possibility of establishing a contiguous Palestinian state with full sovereignty.

However, in the field of education, Israel found itself unable to exercise such power directly – hence the criticism from the Israeli official spokespersons. As we shall show in this chapter, the condemnation of the Palestinian Authority's attempt to allow its narrative to be fully displayed in its textbooks and curricula frustrated Israeli liberals and left Zionist NGOs and activists who assumed that the political and economic surrender was an act of peace that should have led the Palestinian educators to give up on their national narrative as part of the Oslo Accord.

The educational battle raged between the official Palestinian educational agency, committed to the Oslo Accord, and the most ardent supporters of the accord in Israel, NGOs like IPCRI, which we examine here more closely. This dispute exposes the gap between the framing of Palestine between the two sides of the conflict and it unpacks the charade of the Oslo Accord. The Israeli–Palestinian Centre for Research and Information was established in 1988 as a joint venture of Palestinian and Israeli peace activists, but in essence it was a front organization for the Zionist left in its search for a two-state solution.¹ It is a non-profit think tank that, in its own words, 'combines research with peacebuilding actions and advocacy across Israel and Palestine'.

Following the Oslo agreement, IPCRI was integrated into the 'People-to-People' (P2P) programme stipulated by the accord to support from below the diplomatic effort from above (Article VIII of Annex VI of the Oslo II Agreement): 'The two sides shall take steps to foster public debate and involvement, to remove barriers to interaction . . .'. The P2P activities were entrusted into the hands of Norwegian organizations assisted by funds from the European Union, USAID and Canada Fund, and other sources (Endresen 2001: 13; Hanssen-Bauer 2000: 35–40).

The bi-national nature of IPCRI should not mislead us. The hegemony in this outfit, as in all the Israeli–Palestinian NGOs springing up after Oslo, was Israeli. The impulse was noble: to advance reconciliation and co-existence through neutral venues which were supposed to be free from stereotypes and prejudice. But the political asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis was reflected also in the relationship with the NGOs, as can be gleaned from Yifat Maoz's excellent analysis of them in 2000. The dominance of the Israelis was not only seen in joint NGOs but also in the overall imbalance between NGOs on both sides. The Israeli NGOs were more competent than the Palestinian ones. The Israeli side was more experienced in proposal-writing and seeking funds than its Palestinian counterparts, and this gave the Israelis a privileged position with the funding agencies (Maoz 2000). This dominance was recognized by the Norwegian P2P Programme Coordinator:

When the People-to-People Programme began, Israelis dominated the dialogue in terms of the number of organisations involved, organisational efficiency, donor access, proposal writing, and willingness to [enter into] dialogue.

Endresen 2001: 22

The alleged reason for leaving monitoring projects such as textbooks in the hands of Israeli NGOs was their professionalism. However, in reality, it was the same balance of power that dictated Israel's conception of peace to the Palestinians in the Oslo Accord that granted monopoly to the Israeli NGOs in the examination of textbooks.

The accord as a declaration of principles and as an expanded Norwegian and American exercise in reconciliation, as manifested in the P2P framework, did not attempt to bridge between two national narratives, or concerns and aspirations; it was an Israeli dictate to the occupied Palestinians, sanctioned by the Norwegians and the Americans and presented as a genuine peace treaty. It was in the field of education that the dictate was resisted (as it would be militarily, but unsuccessfully, resisted in the second Intifada in 2000 and with a greater measure of success, still to be seen, by the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip since 2006).

The framing reflects also two opposing conceptualizations of the conflict itself. The peace NGOs in Israel, such as IPCRI, view the conflict as one raging between two national movements. The two movements in this perception are very different in essence and quality. One is a European modernized force, Zionism, and the other, the Palestinian one, a more primitive form of nationalism working within the framework of an 'Arab' or 'Islamic' political culture. Therefore in every aspect of a reconciliation effort, the advanced side generously concedes some land, some rights and authority to the less reliable, developing national movement. This means that educational products such as textbooks have to be supervised and coached by Israelis devoted to the peace process. While the balance of power forced the Palestinian leadership to accept grudgingly, and probably wrongly, the Israeli imposition on their security, foreign policy, economy and social development, the Palestinians seemed to draw a line when it came to educational matters.

Geographically the liberal Israeli version frames Palestine as consisting of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip alone whereas in the Palestinian narrative Israel and the occupied territories are Palestine. In the liberal Israeli narrative demographically the Palestinians are only the people who lived in the occupied territories, whereas in the Palestinian one they include the Palestinians in Israel as well as the Palestinian refugees and exilic communities.

In the Israeli liberal view the narrative in post-Oslo textbooks should not dwell at all on the past, while at the same time it should recognize the ancient Hebrew past of the land and acknowledge the Holocaust. The texts were also expected to recognize Zionism as a national Jewish movement. The Palestinian narrative, as it appeared throughout the years and made its way into the textbooks, views Zionism as a settler colonialist movement that brought a catastrophe over the Palestinian people in 1948, in the Nakba, for which the Zionist movement would have to be accountable and the State of Israel responsible either in the form of compensation or of repatriation of the Palestinians who were expelled by Israel from the land in that year. The liberal Zionist narrative blamed the Palestinian and Arab leaders for what it described as a voluntary flight of the Palestinian population and absolved Israel from any responsibility for the deed.

Finally, the liberal Zionist narrative does not recognize the legitimacy of the Palestinian armed struggle and defines it as pure terrorism. The Palestinian narrative

considers Palestinian resistance over the years, including after Oslo, as part of legitimate anti-colonialist struggle. The fact that the Palestinian leadership, the PLO, accepted the need to lay down their arms and negotiate and even accept a Palestinian state only in parts of Palestine does not negate the above framing of the land, its people and their struggle.

In every respect the Israeli narrative won the day on the ground, but failed to make an impact in the field of education. Conceptually, this imbalance raises some empowering references to the possible role of education among the world's most disempowered national movements and provides inferences as well to what the theoretical literature defined as feeble resistance. A way of navigating through an unwanted reality to empower, even slightly and even temporarily, and quite often individually, the sense of dignity, independence and liberation. In fact, we argue that the liberal Zionist NGO spearheading the criticism on the Palestinian textbook in the period under review included Palestinian members who joined it not because they accepted the Zionist narrative but because an Israeli-dominated NGO provided some freedoms otherwise absent in the lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories in the post-Oslo reality.

So which Palestine was supposed to appear in the Palestinian textbooks in the post-Oslo era? As Ali Jarbawi, one of the leading members of the Palestinian curriculum team put it:

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?

Palestinian Curriculum Development Center 1996: 454

The Palestinian mission

The Palestinian Authority (henceforth PA) first assumed formal responsibility for Palestinian education with its establishment in 1994. The creation of a Palestinian curriculum, an undertaking which touched upon questions of content, teaching methodology and the application of teaching materials, was a crucial stage, in both a symbolic and a practical sense, in the development of a Palestinian education system. As such, a Palestinian Curriculum Development Center (PCDC), in collaboration with UNESCO, was established, and mandated with the responsibility of developing teaching material with a strong emphasis upon the specificity of Palestinian culture, history and identity. It was committed to the basic chapters in the Palestinian national narrative as they appeared in the PLO's Declaration of Independence from 1988. That document accepted the partition of Palestine as a possible solution but stressed the need to recognize it as a necessary evil for the sake of peace, and one that does not alter what happened in history or the affiliation of all the Palestinians to the whole of Palestine. The PCDC was committed to promoting critical thinking and pedagogy

alongside the national consciousness and orientation (Palestinian Curriculum Development Center 1996; Moughrabi 2001; Brown 2002).

The PCDC was willing for the curriculum to reflect the era of peace and reconciliation following the Oslo agreement. However, since the signing of the Oslo agreement the political reality was far from being peaceful and Palestinians faced grave predicaments on a daily basis. Israel continued building settlements in the West Bank which isolated Jerusalem, fragmented the West Bank and broke the connection with the Gaza Strip. According to Khalil Tufakji, Director of the Maps and Survey Centre, Orient House in Jerusalem, 'The Palestinian areas were being gradually transformed into agglomerations encircled by settlements and bypass roads' (2000: 54).

The situation deteriorated after 1996, following the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister. In September 1996, Netanyahu started to construct a tunnel beside the Al-Aqsa mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. For the first time since the signing of Oslo II (1995) there were bloody clashes between Palestinians, including the Palestinian police force, and the Israeli army. In March 1997, Netanyahu's decision to build a new settlement on a site on Jabal Abu-Ghnaim in East Jerusalem created another crisis between Palestinians and Israelis.

There seemed to be some respite with new American involvement that produced the Wye River agreement of 1998.² But this was a limited arrangement that divided the city of Kahlil (Hebron) between the settlers and the locals. It was once again a memorandum catering solely to Israel's security's needs and perceptions (Aruri 1999: 18; Hanieh 2001).

When the time came allegedly to discuss the issues at the heart of the conflict, such as refugees, settlements, the fate of Jerusalem and the borders and sovereignty of the future Palestinian state it was clear that this was not going to materialize. The Camp David Summit in 2000 was broadcast as a summit for finalizing peace – in essence it was the last attempt to force Yasser Arafat to declare a total surrender to the Israeli peace dictate. He refused and in the volatile atmosphere that followed all that was needed was a spark to ignite the fire. The Israeli opposition leader at the time, Ariel Sharon, decided to visit the Al-Aqsa mosque in September 2000 and all hell broke out: the second Intifada began.

The Israeli response to the uprising caused the Palestinian reality to deteriorate even further. In the next decade the whole political scene would change. Hamas would take over the Gaza Strip, and the matrix of oppression and control of Israel over the West Bank would disrupt any remnants of normal life in the West Bank. It was hard to think of the textbooks as reflecting a different reality according to the demands of the Israelis or whoever supported them (Roy 2004).

This was particularly difficult as education was hit hard by these developments. In 2000, according to the UN, around 500 barriers restricted student movement across the West Bank. Collective punishments such as curfews contributed to the closure of schools, as did Israeli incursions. During the period from 2003 to 2004, a total of 1,152 schooldays were lost in the West Bank (Palestinian Monitoring Group 2005). The majority of Palestinian students faced challenges of considerable scope and intensity. These obstacles have in turn impacted significantly upon educational development, attendance and learning outcomes.

Schoolchildren and students within Area C were at risk of physical attack from settlers while some classes in these areas were conducted in caravans and tents due to the lack of available school space. There was a high dropout rate in these areas (which was particularly pronounced among female students) (UNICEF 2011). In some cases children had to walk more than five kilometres to get to their schools and in other instances they needed to cross the Separation Wall. Teachers also routinely encountered the same obstacles.

In East Jerusalem the problems were of a different nature. Students in East Jerusalem were under the Israeli Ministry of Education's authority. The censorship of Palestinian national identity was manifested in a well-publicized controversy, in which the Ministry's staff made a series of changes to Palestinian textbooks. As a consequence, the Palestinian logo was replaced with the logo of the Jerusalem municipality while the Palestinian flag was deleted; in addition, all sections related to Palestinian history and the Nakba were also removed. In some cases the censored pages were left blank.

The situation is still the same at the time in which we are writing this chapter. A total of 3,414 Jerusalem-based students are separated from their schools by the wall. There are currently 5,000 children who are not registered as students, due to a lack of teaching space; in addition, of those students who are enrolled, around 2,300 have been impacted by a lack of classroom space (UNICEF 2011: 6).

The construction of the Separation Wall and the sealing off of the city from the rest of the West Bank has significantly affected education in East Jerusalem. As a consequence of this action, around 150 communities (of a total of approximately 290,000 Jerusalem ID holders) are currently cut off behind the Separation Wall, a situation which is ultimately likely to further accelerate further decreases in East Jerusalem's Arab population (which has substantially declined under Israeli occupation) (UN OCHA 2013).

Worst hit was the Gaza Strip. In the latest attack on it in the summer of 2014, 118 schools were damaged and 22 schools completely destroyed, with 95 schools used as shelters for those who were displaced, numbering about 190,000 to 215,000. Moreover, according to the UN about 190,000 children needed psychological support as a result of the war and loss of family members and relatives. Before that, the education sector had suffered a shortage of about 200 schools (and this is despite the fact that schools operated on a double-shift basis) (UN OCHA 2014). So the Palestinian mission was both to remain loyal to Palestinian culture, heritage and identity and at the same time to reflect the reality on the ground if it wished to be relevant to the society whose education it wanted to serve.

The declared mission of IPCRI was 'to promote democracy, tolerance, peace and pluralism'. By implication, IPCRI asserted that education should 'develop students' skills in problem solving, conflict resolution [and] critical thinking, [thus enabling] them to deal with problems that have more than one correct answer'. Loyalty to Palestinian history and narrative and adopting a reflective view of the reality in which students lived did not, in the eyes of IPCRI, fall within the list of these noble aspirations. But it is impossible to understand the double talk and insincerity of IPCRI if one does not first describe how in general the Palestinian books were received.

The condemnations of incitement

The condemnation of the Palestinian textbooks began in pro-Israeli quarters in the United States. The reports by these organizations and individuals claimed that the Palestinian textbooks incited violence and hatred against Israeli Jews and thus did not promote the values of peace, tolerance and co-existence. These were used in Israeli propaganda and lobbying campaigns against the Palestinian Authority. Since the PA was dependent on external funding it affected the Palestinian efforts to recruit money to develop, among other issues, their educational system.

One of the leading figures in the USA condemning the textbooks was Senator Hillary Clinton. Following the failure of the Camp David summit in 2000, from her first Senate campaign Senator Clinton continued to criticize Palestinian textbooks. She declared: 'All future aid to the Palestinian Authority must be contingent on strict compliance with their obligation to change all the textbooks in all grades – not just two at a time' (Henry 2000).

Her position was supported by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP),³ an American non-governmental organization, one of whose directors, from 1998 to 2000, Itamar Marcus, resided in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank (Moughrabi 2001; Brown 2002). He alleged that:

Ever since the PA became responsible for education in 1994, Palestinian children have been learning from their schoolbooks to identify Israel as the evil colonialist enemy who stole their land . . . the new PA textbooks fail to teach their children to see Israel as a neighbour with whom peaceful relations are expected.

CMIP 2000

Chris Patten, the British politician on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, who served as the EU Commissioner for External Relations from 1999 to 2004, rejected vehemently the accusation that his organization had effectively endorsed and promoted anti-Semitism. He stated: 'It is a total fabrication that the European Union has funded textbooks with anti-Semitic arguments within them in Palestinian schools. It is a complete lie.' In subsequently observing that 'some critics may not be particularly interested in the facts, preferring to try to fit reality to their theory rather than the other way round', he effectively summarized the essential matter at hand (Patten 2002).

Nathan Brown, Professor of Political Science at George Washington University, was to subsequently reiterate Patten's observations when he investigated the original claims. He explicitly stated: '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' (Brown 2002). According to Brown's review, by the omission of the Jewish narrative in the historical or the present context, the Palestinian curriculum avoided controversial issues related to the Oslo Agreement and the consequence of the facts on the ground including the Israeli settlements and the permit system that interrupts the contiguity of the 1967 land. So it seems that in some cases

the condemnation was based on what was supposed to be in the textbooks, but was not necessarily there. Not that mentioning permits and contiguity is tantamount to anti-Semitism.

In 2000, a group called 'Jews for Truth Now' accused Palestinians of incitement against Israel in the Palestinian school curriculum. The group claimed that a Palestinian textbook entitled *Our Country Palestine* teaches Palestinian sixth-graders that Israel should be destroyed. The group announced this in the *Haaretz* newspaper, in the USA and in other countries. Khalil Mahshi (2000), then General Director of International and Public Relations at the Ministry of Education, investigated the matter and found that the reference supposedly found in that book did not exist. Moughrabi (2001) found similar results. Nevertheless, the claim found an unquestioning audience, and CMIP reprinted the accusation and published a report that was translated into several different languages. As a result, two main funding sources for developing Palestinian curricula decided to shift funding to different projects, one from Italy and another from the World Bank. According to Na'im Abu Hommos, the Palestinian Minister of Education, 'The World Bank officially told the Palestinian Ministry of Education that the money destined for books for 7, 8, 12 and 14 year-olds, as well as for teacher training for these same years, would be allocated to other activities' (Morena 2001).

The Palestinian Authority Ministry of Education (2001) responded to CMIP to refute the allegations and ascertained that mentioning Israel as an occupier is a fact accepted by the UN. The Ministry emphasized that it will not describe Israel as an occupier when peace is reached and occupation ends. More importantly, the Ministry urged:

The donors and the other UN member states should be courageous to voice their honest opinion about reality here in Palestine as they learn it first hand through the presence of their representative bodies. They should not be coerced into silence by unofficial lobbyists from any side. We expect them to use due process before they take positions and pass judgments. The first step in this process is to seek and find out the truth. This requires talking to all parties concerned and not accepting one-sided and biased reports.

Despite suffering from what might, outside of the uniquely fertile soil of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, be taken to be a terminal affliction (namely having no basis in actual fact), the allegations were to find a renewed life and impetus in subsequent years, a development which says as much about the politics of the conflict as the ostensible concern. Both Ariel Sharon (in 2004) and Benjamin Netanyahu (in 2013) repeated the allegations. Foreign donors, having been browbeaten and shrilly accused of effectively promoting anti-Semitism, were compelled to re-evaluate their own funding arrangements, with the consequence that prior funding arrangements were consequently rescheduled and realigned.

In 2004, Sharon stated that Palestinians should stop incitement against Israelis in the Palestinian media and in the Palestinian curriculum, as preconditions for negotiations (Mualem and Benn 2004). As a matter of fact, one of Sharon's fourteen reservations to the Road Map for peace in 2003 was that Palestinians stop incitements

(*Haaretz* 2003). Prime Minister Netanyahu repeated the same request in January 2014 (Keinon 2014).

IPCRI's mission

Thus IPCRI took upon itself, as part of its greater overall mission to solidify the peace process through promoting values of democracy and reconciliation, to look at the textbooks produced by both sides in the post-Oslo era. While the Israeli textbooks escaped unscathed, the Palestinian ones were severely criticized. Overall, the Palestinian textbooks exposed many samples of 'an ambiguous or negative approach toward pluralism/tolerance/peace'. The aim of the studies is to ensure that the curriculum teaches peace and pluralism to influence students and encourage reconciliation and co-existence. The IPCRI study included most Palestinian textbooks and different grades but only the first to the eighth grades of Israeli textbooks for one academic year.

The three IPCRI reports on the Palestinian textbooks were presented to the Public Office of the US Consulate General in Jerusalem (but it is not clear whether the reports on the Israeli textbooks were handed in as well). The reports covered the period from 2000 to 2005. The first report evaluated the newly completed Palestinian textbooks for school year 2000/1. The evaluation covered grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8. The second report covered grades 4 and 9, school year 2003/4. The third report evaluated the fifth and tenth grades, school year 2004/5.

The books were analysed thematically and were considered as potential contributors to civil society, peace, tolerance and diversity. The evaluation thus studied the curricula of language, art, religious education, history, civil education and national education. The second report, which focused on the Palestinian books alone, included an examination of human rights and the relationship to the State of Israel and to Jewish people. The report on Israeli textbooks did not analyse the national Israeli narrative in relation to the Palestinian one because, and according to IPCRI, this topic is not covered in the selected textbooks. As we shall see below, the Palestinian textbooks were in particular criticized for not including the Israeli narrative, without considering the grade level.

The Palestinian textbooks were analysed for the 'content' and 'communication' of the messages conveyed. The second report focused more on the content and symbolic material in relation to the concept of civil society including peace, human rights and democracy.

The third report focused on history education and geography in relation to the region. The report paid special attention to the notion of Palestine, homeland and Jerusalem. Such attentions were meant to assess the image and representation of Israel and Jews in the textbooks, and whether they refer to the relationship with the State of Israel and the topics related to peace agreements.

Let us first look at the analysis of the Palestinian textbooks. Overall one can say that there were some positive attributes found, which we describe here as 'A for Effort', but the balance sheet was negative. The positive side was the aspiration to prepare proper textbooks; the negative side was the failure to implement these aspirations. This

condescending attitude is of course reminiscent of lofty modernizationist attitudes and colonialist approaches to education in the non-Western world.

A for Effort

The reports concede that they have not found direct incitements or hatred. The curriculum was praised for its stress on the need to accept the 'other'. The problem, however, as the reports mentioned again and again, was that these general notions were not associated with Israelis and Jews.

The reports acknowledged that concepts of peace, democracy, pluralism, respect for other cultures and universal human values in general were highlighted and stressed in the Palestinian curriculum. However, such values were not extended to include Israel and Jews.

These relatively positive remarks were, it seems, a sideshow in the report and written by additional reviewers and not the main body of researchers. They were also not integrated into the major part of the analysis of the three reports. Hence, we have very little to add to this section if we want to represent faithfully the spirit and word of the reports.

F for Failure

The tone of the reports is set in the first of the three reports through an evaluation of an Israeli educator. He wrote:

The reviewer pointed out the references (or lack thereof) to Israel, Israelis, Jews, Judaism, and Zionism that he found problematic from an Israeli point of view. Subsequently, a Palestinian and international team analyzed the textbooks keeping in mind the remarks made by the Israeli educator.

IPCRI 2003: 20

Therefore it was explained the report was written in order to:

serve as an incentive to implement reform in the educational system in the direction of multicultural and global education, much of which is included in the promising foundational dimensions and the five-year plan for the reform of the Palestinian educational system.

IPCRI 2003: 20

In order to achieve that, according to the reports, the Palestinian curriculum has to be changed. At the time of the reports it was evaluated as 'inclusive' and nationalist. The reports concluded that the curriculum, despite its effort to encourage respect of other cultures, religions and ethnic groups, failed to mention Jews in particular. For example, in teaching the Koran and the Hadith, tolerance towards other religions was encouraged but the reports criticized the Palestinian curriculum for not mentioning Judaism in this context. The report assumed almost a sinister plot behind the omission: "This lack of reference is perceived as tantamount to a denial of such a connection, although no direct evidence is found for such a denial" (IPCRI 2004a: 4).

It is very clear that IPCRI did not wish to be identified with the more brutal condemnations of the book. Hence, it is not always clear whether the possibility of incitement, as above, is disguised cleverly by the Palestinians or is the unfortunate outcome of the sloppiness of the authors of the textbooks. So in general the reports stated that the curriculum did not incite explicitly for hatred or violence against Israel or Jews. However, one could not be blamed, so it seemed, if the books were to be considered inflammatory if one was to 'consider the calls to liberating the Palestinian land/territories as instances of incitement' (IPCRI 2004a: 7). That 'one' would be Israel and the world, and hence, even if the books did not incite they appeared to incite, which was bad enough.

In a similar vein the third report explicitly expresses a concern that the refugees' dream of return to their homeland was not sufficiently qualified or mitigated (IPCRI 2006: 35). The essential consideration was not therefore the rights per se, but rather their subsequent rearticulation and reconstitution within the context of a conflict resolution framework.

The technique should be clear to the reader by now. There is an impulse to respect others and peace in the Palestinian textbooks, but it was not applied specifically to Jews and Israel. It seems, however, that most of the attention was paid to the framing of Palestine in the books and how it was juxtaposed with what IPCRI feared would seem to be an incitement.

Framing Palestine: the right and wrong way

In several places, the bottom line of the report was given in clear language. In a more detailed analysis the formula was more vague and focused on the possibility that incitement would be inferred from the text, even if the intention to incite was not there. The first summary comes at the very beginning of the third report:

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 Arabs' exclusive claim to the ancient history of the region is emphasized and several passages including 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.

IPCRI 2006: 3

Whereas in the report itself an ambiguous way of saying the same thing can also be found:

[the curriculum] cannot be described as a war curriculum. Neither is it a peace curriculum. The textbooks do not contain calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. However, students are exposed to texts that promote the religious and national duty of loving and defending the homeland and the Palestinian culture.

IPCRI 2006: 63

Here are a few examples that all evolve around the way the Palestinian textbooks frame geographically, politically and even emotionally, Palestine.

The first example refers to Jerusalem. When mentioning Jerusalem, there is no mention of the Jews and Judaism or of the city as a capital of Israel. The reports criticized the curriculum for referring to Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine but not also as the capital of Israel. Thus, the history and historical facts covered were in the eyes of the report 'selective'. In the report on the Israeli textbooks, the reviewers claim they, for their part, displayed a diverse view on Jerusalem as they mentioned the Temple Mount and 'where the Dome of the Rock is located is holy to Jews and to Muslims'. Jerusalem thus constituted the core of the conflict between Israel and the Arab world in general, and between Israel and the Palestinians in particular (IPCRI 2004b: 68).

Moreover, the reports accuse the curriculum of not referring to the State of Israel clearly and state that 'in some contexts, Jews, in historical and modern-day contexts (occupation, Zionism, settlers) are negatively represented in Palestinian textbooks' (IPCRI 2003: 7). The reports found that Israel was referred to as an occupying power and cause of Palestinian suffering. The curriculum encourages students to liberate and defend their land. This was translated by the report as calling for violence.

The second one deals with the notion of homeland. The Palestinians were expected to present multi-perspective narratives instead of focusing on Arab and Palestinian identities when engaging with the concept of homeland. The homeland, according to the critique, was not defined in the context of the present political reality and within the guidelines of the UN resolution and the peace agreements signed with Israel. Report III gave examples of such vagueness in wordings and/or referring to the pre-1948 or historical Palestine. For example, the curriculum mentioned the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994 on parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. When referring to the pre-1948 situation the report gave examples of mentioning villages destroyed by Israel and the refugee problem created. In Report III, the review considered the homeland concept as ambiguous because it addressed the issue of Palestinian refugees, their suffering and their dream to go back to homeland 'without qualifying it' (IPCRI 2006: 35).

It seems the report expected the Palestinian curriculum to ignore pre-1948 Palestine altogether. The second report was alarmed by the fact that the textbooks referred to Israeli cities such as Jaffa and Acre as part of the homeland and that Israel was not mentioned on any map; neither is Palestine. Report I explains this:

The rationale for this approach, as explained by political officials and educators alike, is that Israel itself has not yet marked its borders and that no final agreement has been reached with the PLO and the PA as to the final status of the borders between the two political entities.

IPCRI 2003: 39

But the report insisted that: 'This, however, does not mean that maps included in the textbooks should be left without labels that reflect the historical as well as the present-day political reality' (IPCRI 2003: 39). Report III admits that: 'Whereas physical

geography is almost comprehensive, the 'political geography of the region still suffers from elements of vagueness and imbalance, especially as it relates to direct references to "the State of Israel" as a geographic and political entity' (IPCRI 2006: 7).

The report's prior criticism of 'vagueness' and a lack of clarity also failed to acknowledge that the broader peace process was itself predicated upon the principle of constructive ambiguity (a point which was vividly illustrated by the fact that the initial terms of agreement between the two sides essentially boiled down to an acceptance to undertake further negotiations). One could indeed make a strong case that it was precisely this 'vagueness' and lack of clarity which functioned as a condition of possibility for the peace process in the first instance.

Although Report I states that homeland in the present context is defined as the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and this is defined in dotted lines or coloured, the report on the Israeli textbooks explains the absence of Palestinian places or borders because the maps 'are presented mainly in the context of the new Zionist settlement in the Land of Israel' (IPCRI 2004b: 20). The reviewers further justify this by saying that the maps were about the geographical and not political borders or were not relevant to the period. For some reason this argumentation was not allowed in the Palestinian case.

The third example refers to present-day realities as they were reflected in the curriculum. The report mentioned critically that the curriculum referred to the policies of Israel in the occupied territory, such as restriction of movement, confiscating land, house demolitions and other measures. In fact these references were depicted as part of the negative aspects of the curriculum. So it rebuked the book for the way the present reality appeared there. 'Generally speaking, Israel, Israelis, Zionism and Zionists are depicted as occupiers, invaders, aggressors, infiltrators, usurpers, and oppressors' (IPCRI 2006: 14).

But again, this being a liberal Zionist report, it is stated that this could be inferred as incitement. Similarly, in the analysis of this theme the report states clearly:

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. If the lack of ample references to the State of Israel in the body of the texts and on the maps as denial of its existence [*sic*], no evidence was found that points to an intentional attempt to do so.

IPCRI 2004a: 5

Report III also acknowledges that the curriculum encouraged dialogue and tolerance but non-Arabs are not included or mentioned; moreover, the report accuses the curriculum of being vague in calling for resisting the Israel occupation, and that might be perceived as a call for liberating historical Palestine.

The curriculum that should have been

The reports are very didactic in tone and offer an insight into the way liberal Zionists would have dealt with the issues at hand. The reports emphasized the significance of

critical thinking and exploring in education which they failed to see in the Palestinian curriculum. Thus more information should be provided about Israel, Jews and peace agreements. One can conclude that, based on the evaluation of such reports, the Palestinian curriculum is expected to rebrand Israel and reframe Palestine. Report II, for example recommended: 'the struggle to end occupation should be used as a vehicle to teach students about peaceful and non-violent actions, conflict reconciliation and conflict resolution' (IPCRI 2004a: 38).

It further expected the curriculum to highlight the interactions and cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis in different fields such as education and health. All in all, the curriculum as far as IPCRI was concerned should be a song of praise for the Oslo Accord:

The concept of peace with Israel is not mentioned in the textbooks. The peace process based on the Oslo Accords, the Wye River Memorandum and the Anti-Incitement subcommittee – whose purpose was to reduce tensions and create a positive atmosphere of positive cohabitation – are not referred to in the 5th and 10th grade textbooks.

IPCRI 2004a: 27

This is also related to a negative review of how international peace efforts were reviewed in the textbooks. The curriculum was scolded for mentioning the UN resolution⁴ without referring to the partition plan and the recognition of Israel's right to security and borders. It also wished to rewrite the Palestinian version of events of how the second Intifada erupted.

Overall, the reports suggested that the Palestinians should have adopted a more scholarly and professional approach to the text. Report I explained extensively the need to address the theoretical framework of intolerance, prejudice and discrimination. The report emphasized the role of education in changing attitudes. Moreover, Report III stressed that peace education should be part of the curriculum and that 'the challenge for educators, however, is to replace a belief in peacekeeping with a commitment to peace-making and peacebuilding strategies to address the multifaceted forms of violence that exist in the region' (IPCRI 2006: 28–9).

The lack of scholarly soundness in the books is pointed out also by the third report. It gave the impression that the Palestinian curriculum lacks accuracies in history education in opining that:

textbooks should introduce objective, up-to-date, comprehensive, and historically accurate information and accounts free of inciting, inflammatory, and offensive language and rhetoric and of elements of bias and of stereotypical images and representations.

IPCRI 2006: 41

Well, had these textbooks been written by the new Israeli historians and the states' post-Zionist scholars who today dominate the production of knowledge on Israel and Palestine worldwide, these 'inaccuracies' would have been endorsed by the updated and critical research.

The reports also recommended that the Palestinian curriculum should adopt a pedagogy that encourages critical thinking and exposes students to different perspectives and historical narratives. This is mostly specified as to include Jews and Israeli perspectives or to mention their historical roots.

And how should resistance to oppression be framed? The curriculum is criticized for rejecting oppression and occupation and encouraging resistance and defending the land. Report III refers to this as calling for violent resistance. The examples of peaceful resistance with reference to international models such as India and South Africa are considered isolated and not sufficient (IPCRI 2006: 34).

In short, the reports concluded that 'It is essential to promote a culture of peace, coexistence, cooperation, and tolerance in spite of all the adverse circumstances that prevail. These efforts should be concerted and should cover all aspects of life' (IPCRI 2006: 43). Therefore, the reports recommend that history education should teach about the other, emphasize the present political reality of post-Oslo and refer to the legitimate rights of Palestinians and Israelis. Needless to say, if the rights of the Palestinians would be mentioned in a hypothetical revised report the possibility that this would infer incitement would be raised once more.

To sum up, the report did have a bottom line, as mentioned before, and did not leave the final word in any ambiguity. The report concluded that representation of Israel and Jews was biased, especially in relation to the historical root of the Jewish in the Middle East. At best it seems the textbooks did not include the Jewish history at all, neither of ancient Israel (which in any way it was not meant to do as the textbooks were dealing with modern history) or in modern times (IPCRI 2006: 36).

The Israeli books under the microscope

In its report, IPCRI found little fault with the Israeli textbooks. One of its main explanations for this was the random selections it claimed to have used for both sets of textbooks. But somehow the random search of Palestinian books revealed incitement while the one on Israeli books saw little problem in them.

Thus the IPCRI report states: 'Because we examined the books that are intended for 1st–8th grades, the question of the national Israeli narrative and how it relates to the Palestinian narrative is not particularly relevant' (IPCRI 2004b: 3). If there were any criticisms it was a remark that concepts of peace, pluralism and reconciliation were not gleaned from Biblical stories.

The report accepted that Arabs in general did not make their way into Israeli textbooks on history or culture. This absence was justified in the following way:

However, in view of the fact that these textbooks are designed for students in Jewish State-education elementary schools, they deal predominantly with the history of the Jewish People, with Zionism, and with Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel.

IPCRI 2004b: 10

It is worth mentioning that any evaluation of Israeli textbooks was treated not only with bias but in favour of the Israeli curriculum. This is despite the studies available that found Israeli textbooks were racist and incite against Arabs and Palestinians. So while IPCRI found no fault with the Israeli textbooks, critical Israeli scholars were far less impressed. A study of 124 Israeli textbooks by Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University (1998) found that Arabs were described as 'hostile, deviant, cruel, immoral, unfair, with the intention to hurt Jews'. Nurit Peled-Elhanan's study of sixteen books on geography, history and civil studies (2012) found that Palestinians were represented as primitive, that the myth of *terra nullius* was uncritically reproduced, and that the Israeli massacres of 1948 were relativized as an unfortunate, although necessary, precondition for the establishment of Israel.

It is striking that the same standards recommended to the Palestinians, and the absence of which the reports lamented in the current textbooks, were not expected of the Israeli narrative. While the Palestinian narrative was condemned for being reductionist, in the report on the Israeli textbooks the simplified historical account was praised as evidence of encouraging good relations with neighbours. As a matter of fact, the examples referred to are not only inaccurate but also condescending.

The most astonishing part of the report on the Israeli textbooks is that obvious fabrications and distortions were repeated without any criticism. One of the stories the report referred to in the report on the Israeli textbooks was about a Zionist settler who avoided buying land close to Arab 'settlements', so as not to incur the envy of the Arab inhabitants (IPCRI 2004b: 12). The Zionist settler also permitted Arab neighbours to continue and use the spring water on 'his' land. Even when negative examples were given of the stereotyping of Arabs, positive examples were followed immediately and based on the reviewers' interpretations and would be considered as diverse images of Arabs (IPCRI 2004b: 14–16).

While the absence of Israel from the Palestinian textbooks was condemned, the absence of Palestine in the Israeli textbooks was justified. The reviewers related the absence to the grades studied and the period covered.

Conclusion

The attitude of IPCRI to the issue of the textbooks was very clear from the outset. In its eyes Palestinian education could not legitimize resistance or a struggle against occupation. Moreover, from IPCRI's point of view any reference to the resistance and struggle are framed as incitement. And thus if resistance or even a striving to change the status quo of a decades-long occupation and colonization is delegitimized as an educational mission, cherishing the status quo is what IPCRI expects to be the main object of the Palestinian educational system. As noted, politically and economically, the PA submitted to this logic of the 'peace process'; educationally even the most cooperative Palestinian educators found it very hard to accept.

The framing of references to a past or present struggle as incitement exposes an even more profound discord between the liberal Zionists of IPCRI and the Palestinian national educators. There can be no reference, in the eyes of IPCRI, to the core issues

that produced the struggle in the first place. Therefore the criticism insinuates that existing Palestinian grievances are somehow artificial or induced. Palestinians are therefore denied political agency to the extent that they appear as unthinking receptacles, as an inert mass that can easily be cultivated and instrumentalized for purposes other than their own.

In closely engaging with each of these instances we get a sense of how the education debate (and the conflict resolution framework of which it is part of) has become politicized. The instrumental adaptation of incitement appears, to this extent, as a means through which broader forms of violence are enabled, legitimized and enacted. State violence by Israel thus is not questioned in Israeli books, by IPCRI or anyone else condemning the Palestinian textbook in the post-Oslo era, but any form of Palestinian resistance is depicted as harming the chances of reconciliation. Peace therefore demands nothing of Israel in terms of struggle and violence, but insists it magically disappears from the Palestinian arsenal, even as the occupation continues (or in fact becomes worse, as was the case).

The critics focused on the pre-Oslo agreement chapters of the Palestinian textbooks and insisted these books should depict 1967, and not 1948 or let alone 1882, as the starting point of their narrative.⁵ This meant in essence wiping out the Palestinian narrative through surveillance and control. There is no engagement with knowledge here for the sake of reconciliation or mutual understanding. As pointed out by Edward Said, 'The Palestinians are expected to participate in the dismantling of their own history at the same time' (Said 1984).

The examination of the textbooks, by IPCRI or by anyone else, condemning it as incitement is not based on any factual or professional scrutiny as the EU Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten (2002) explains:

[I]t was alleged that we were funding textbooks [and] that [they] were untrue, we denied it. There was even a report by the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem refuting the allegations in terms, a report which is publicly available at the Council web-site! Did this change anything? Alas, no. The story comes back again and again and again with the regularity of clockwork.

The IPCRI reports were a far more complex examination than the explicit condemnation voiced by official Israel and the USA. But long reports have a bottom line and in this it was a verdict of bias that was translated by politicians into an accusation of incitement. Hence a supposedly more balanced, and academic, view carried at the end of the day the same message expressed more vulgarly and bluntly by politicians – the Palestinian textbooks and curricula are biased in a way that endangered peace and reconciliation.

The complex approach was framed in the following way. The textbooks and curricula were praised for an overall attempt to be loyal to principles of peace and pluralism, but failed to do that when they focused on history (the very essence of every national narrative). Take out a Palestinian version of the history of Palestine from the textbooks and they would have been praised for the positive impulse.

Palestine was reframed by sheer military, political and economic force in the Oslo Accord and has been ever since that failed peace attempt. The only space where this imposition was resisted, and therefore so harshly criticized, is education. The gap between historical framing and narrative has been ignored by peace brokers ever since 1967 and depicted as an obstacle to peace. In fact what the issue at hand proves is that this very gap is the reason for the conflict, and if it cannot be breached between the most moderate Palestinians and liberal Zionists we need a new framing, which to our mind only the settler colonialist paradigm offers.

Notes

- 1 President Arafat held a press conference on 14 December 1988 at which he denounced violence, accepted the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and recognized the State of Israel and its right to exist.
- 2 Netanyahu and the PLO signed the Hebron Protocol on 15 January 1997 to prepare for the Israeli redeployment from the city.
- 3 Subsequently renamed the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education.
- 4 The reports refer to 'the UN resolution' without specifying which one or ones. They probably meant UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (22 November 1967) and 338 (22 October 1973). The reports thought that UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (29 November 1947) was missing, which concerns the partition of Palestine.
- 5 The first immigration of Jews from the diaspora (known in Hebrew as 'Aliyah') began in 1882.

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