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White pages: Israeli censorship of Palestinian textbooks in East Jerusalem

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ABSTRACT

This study examined History textbooks taught in East Jerusalem. The political context of East Jerusalem and its education system manifests a continuous power struggle between the Palestinian National Authority and Israeli authorities, in this case, the Israeli Ministry of Education. Through analyzing the textbooks, this study speaks of the power dynamics and systems of political control manifested through the Israeli censorship. The aim of this paper is to present the intricate power relations of the education system in East Jerusalem as it is revealed in the censorship of textbooks. In analyzing the content censored in textbooks for elementary and high schools, three main censorship categories emerged: “erasing symbols,” “leaving out segments,” and “deleting the content of whole pages.” These are presented and analyzed within a political context in the study.

KEYWORDS

Textbooks; Palestinian–Israeli conflict; East Jerusalem; education

Introduction

Jerusalem is a unique city with historical, political and social complexity. Palestinians living in East Jerusalem find their daily reality dominated by two rival powers: Palestinian and Israeli. Their Palestinian national and ethnic identity is manifested in personal behavior and social structure. Their Israeli surroundings serve a constant reminder of the occupation/conflict – starting at the core national difference, through daily struggle with municipal bureaucracy, to individual choices of schooling and employment. This atmosphere has a wide impact on the education system in East Jerusalem; in addition to involving political issues in decisions on their curricula, it also affects the students’ learning process.

The existing political tension and general atmosphere around it, effect both the content that students are taught and the way in which the students perceive it. The education system in East Jerusalem has become a battle field for the two conflicting powers, the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, to try and implement their authority. One of the main tools of control of the educational system both these authorities use and seek control on is the curricula and how it

manifests in textbooks. This study comes to exam how the power relations manifest in the textbooks.

Fourteen History textbooks are examined in this study. Twelve books are History textbook taught in 5th to 10th grades, comparing the latest textbooks issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Education for use in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), these same textbooks are censored by the Israeli Ministry of Education to be used in East Jerusalem Schools. Two additional History textbooks are taught in 11th and 12th grades. These two textbooks are issued by the Palestinian Authority but are studied as they are in East Jerusalem without undergoing any censorship. All books are the intellectual property of the PNP which developed and published them since 2000.

This study examines History textbooks taught in East Jerusalem. Textbooks in primary school affect not only the knowledge of the students, but also the values, ideologies and identities that society seeks to hand down to them (Apple 1993). Therefore, the power struggle over textbook content is indicative of the overall national Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

I started looking into this issue after looking at textbooks to try and analyze their content, and encountering white pages in History schoolbooks. Some pages in the East Jerusalem textbooks were left blank following an Israeli censorship process, which lead me to initiate this study that examines why and how this censorship is applied. Furthermore, the main finding of the study is that there is a categorical difference in censoring policy between primary school textbooks and high-school textbooks. This finding in particular uncovers the political motives for censorship, showing that the motives for censorship are indeed political. The Israeli Ministry of Education is not dealing with these textbooks with the appropriate level of professional, educational and pedagogical concern. The first question to be asked is why there is Israeli interference in the textbooks taught in East Jerusalem in the first place. In order to address this question, I present a brief historical survey of the Palestinian education system.

Narratives, textbooks and control

The aim of this paper is to present the intricate power relations of the education system in East Jerusalem as it is revealed in the censorship of textbooks. Textbooks convey more than knowledge, they represent the Historical narrative that students learn – their own as well as of others. Textbooks convey social and political guidelines to the next generation; therefore, an analysis of school textbooks and curricula reveals notions of national identity that a society aims to instill in its students (Schissler and Nuhoğlu Soysal 2005). Curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, but is a carefully selected assembly of texts, the dominant vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political and economic conflicts, tensions and compromises that organize and disorganize a certain group. The decision to define some groups' knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups' knowledge hardly sees the light of day, stems from who has power in society in is even clearer when there is a clear occupied–occupier relation between groups (Apple 1993). While Palestinian textbooks written by the Palestinian Authority present the dominant narrative of Palestinians, when the Israeli authorities interfere with the content of textbooks, they employ a policy of power that introduces and centers the Israeli dominant narrative

even if by omission. This policy aims to for the erasure and elimination of characteristic of settler colonialism of Israel (Wolfe 2006). This demonstration of power and control is a specific case for the unbalanced power relation between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority.¹

These practices of control of textbooks specifically, but narratives and histories more widely, are not unique to the Israeli–Palestinian context. In colonial contexts, the question of control of knowledge, and more specifically control of the way in which colonized populations access and interact with knowledge, has always been a key factor and brought along inherent tensions for the colonized as well as the colonizing. Bhabha addressed these fundamental issues in constructing of knowledge and power in colonial context when speaking of the inherent tension between the stated goal of the colonizers to bring the colonized to the same level of knowledge and progress as the colonizers, together with the inherent idea that the colonized are inferior. This situation creates an inherent tension in education of the colonized: “... mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.”²

In the Israeli–Palestinian context, this dynamic is visible in the tension between the self-image of Zionism as developing and progressing local populations, and between the inherent condescension over the endogenous Palestinian population (Zureik 2016). To this is added the stated and dominant Israeli need for control over Palestinian civilian population that is done not only by force, but also through means of controlling knowledge and the construction of history.

Israel has, for years, attempted to control and censored Palestinian history. This can be seen in Israeli curricula for Palestinian within Israel (Al-Hajj 2003), or in the systematic seizing of Palestinian archives and historical materials (Sela 2017). Such control of historical materials and narratives is part of what Zureik refers to as ongoing processes of colonization, which as opposed to colonialism has ongoing social, cultural and educational effects, focusing on the minds rather than resources of the colonized (Zureik 2016). The consequence of this is that Palestinian did not have the chance to build their own historical narrative until very recently. The publishing of the Palestinian textbooks in 2008 marked a change in this and an opportunity for building such historical knowledge from the colonized perspective, but as was found in the study, this was countered by the Israeli censorship where this could be done – in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian education system and curricula

The Palestinian education system was only formed after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994. After the 1948 war and until 1967, Palestinian schools in the west Bank and the Gaza strip were using Jordanian and Egyptian curricula and textbooks, respectively. Palestinian students used textbooks that were designed according to Jordanian and Egyptian education philosophies, ideologies, objectives and goals. After the 1967 war, Israel assumed military control over the Palestinian education system. Even then, the same Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks continued to be used in Palestinian schools, but they were censored by the Israeli military education commander (Adwan, Bar-Tal, and Wexler 2016). Following the Oslo Accords in 1994, informal content about Palestine was being introduced in schools, content that was not printed in the Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks. During these transitional stages, all textbooks bore a special stamp to show that the PNA

approved the books for use, based on an agreement with the states of either Egypt or Jordan. These books had been used until 1995, when an independent curriculum for Palestinian students was developed (Mazawi 2011). The Palestinian curricula and textbooks were thus developed in successive phases since 1998 until their completion in 2006. In fact, Palestinian textbooks were published and taught only in 2000 (Alayan 2012).

The struggle for independence and national recognition in the PNA is reflected in the stages described for its educational system. The initial dissociation from the Jordanian and Egyptian curricula, the initial steps to design a Palestinian narrative, and the publishing of the first Palestinian curriculum. In fact, an educational system often reflects ideological and organizational processes at the individual, group, societal and national level (Fiala 2006). This is indeed evident in the new Palestinian curriculum, as outlined in Khouri (2003). Students begin their History studies with familiarity with the map, flag and other national attributes (1st grade), the history of the Canaan period (2nd grade) moving through the struggles at the British Mandate period (3rd grade) and Palestinian traditions (4th grade). In more advanced grades (5th to 8th grade), students progress further in History, to cover the pre-Islamic History, the prophet Mohammed period, and until the Ottoman Empire. Higher grades deal with nationally significant issues such as Palestinians in exile (9th grade), Western colonialism including World War I (10th grade), the Israeli occupation (11th grade) and World War II including Nazism and Fascism (12th grade) (Palestinian MoE). The Historical narrative presented in this curriculum enhances national identity as is typical for textbooks for new nations (Podeh 2000).

A pedagogical analysis of the textbooks published in the 1990s and early 2000 found that the new textbooks issued by the PNA focused on the role of Palestinians as victims of Zionism and of the Israeli occupation, while Israel was depicted as the aggressor in this conflict (Adwan 2004). A subsequent analysis of the content of textbooks published after 2000 found that the textbooks present Israel, Zionism and Europe mostly as the Other (Alayan 2012). While the Other is presented in these books as an oppressor of the Palestinians, it mainly serves to differentiate it from the Self and allow the readers to build a counter-identity.

Israeli authorities reviewing the new PNA textbooks are not satisfied.³ For instance, in several discussions of the educational committee, Israeli members of Knesset condemned anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic contents found in Palestinian textbooks taught in the PNA (Knesset Research and Information Center Report 2010). Alongside this criticism, Israeli researchers have also shown that Israeli textbooks do not present the Palestinian historical narrative without bias (Peled-Elhanan 2012).

East Jerusalem curricula

With the annexation of East Jerusalem to Israel in 1967, Israeli authorities attempted to introduce the Arab-Israeli curriculum to schools in East Jerusalem. The Palestinians resented this change, and tried to find alternative educational options. The result was a drop of 15% in enrolment for primary state-schools, and a drop of 85% in enrolment for state high schools.⁴ A series of attempts to enforce an Israeli curriculum in East Jerusalem followed this first plan, and they all failed (Cohen 2007). The Israeli authorities, wishing to increase enrolment to state-schools, were forced to look for compromises regarding the curriculum taught in East Jerusalem.

One aspect of the objection to an Israeli curriculum is ideological. First, the Israeli curriculum has a Zionist historical narrative, and the Palestinians did not appreciate Israeli bureaucrats determining what will be taught in their schools. Second, the Palestinians wanted to keep the legacy of their Palestinian identity, while the Israeli curricula, designed for the Arab citizens of Israel, suggested a Palestinian–Israeli identity. In terms of building a national identity, parents were worried that this would disconnect the children from their national Arab values and would also weaken the family connections with the rest of the West Bank. Furthermore, Palestinians in East Jerusalem feel closer to Palestinians living in the PNA, and they would like to dissociate themselves from Palestinian–Israelis who have Israeli citizenship (Yair and Alayan 2009). A second aspect of objection is practical: an Israeli diploma of graduation is not acceptable in other Arab countries; therefore, students would not be able to apply for higher education studies in any country in the Arab world. This social effect of the education system on the residents in East Jerusalem has been attested in personal interviews (Alayan forthcoming).

Following the Oslo accords, and in light these objections, the Israeli Ministry of Education implemented a new solution for schools in East Jerusalem. While Israeli authorities remain in charge the operation of the schools, assigning funds for overhead expenses including payment of salaries for all school employees, the PNA will be responsible for curricula and educational standards enforced by the staff (Yair and Alayan 2009). This is where the discussion of PNA textbook content becomes relevant to Israeli authorities. Unlike the content taught in Gaza and the West Bank, textbooks used in state-schools in East Jerusalem must be approved by Israel, and therefore, cannot contain anti-Israel materials. Thus, as part of the compromise in accepting the PNA curriculum, Palestinians in East Jerusalem have to study Hebrew as a foreign language, and the textbooks they use must undergo Israeli censorship (Cohen 2007).

This solution was partially accepted by the Palestinians in East Jerusalem resulting in an increase in enrolment to state-schools (Cohen 2007). Despite the relative success of this compromise, Israel kept trying to advocate the Arab-Israeli curriculum, and indeed, in 2012 five Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem started teaching it. The reasons for doing so are also practical and political, reflecting the changes that took place since 1967. First, the Israeli Ministry of Education was offering a financial incentive in the form of an increased budget for the state-schools opting to add this curriculum. Second, the Israeli graduation diploma does allow students access to Israeli higher education institutions. The possibility to study in Israel, though not preferred by everyone, has become more widely accepted following the building of the separation wall and as a result the further isolation of East Jerusalem from Palestinian academic institutions.

Israeli censorship of textbooks in East Jerusalem

This study examines the textbooks currently used in the Palestinian authority and East Jerusalem as well as their censorship. Specifically, the study will investigate how the Israeli censorship is conducted, what are its aims and whether this censorship serves its purpose.

Censorship, in general, is a system of government supervision over publications. There are two types of censorship. One type is to suppress activities or decisions of the government or its military in order to protect national security. The other type of censorship restricts the distribution of artistic expression, in writing or otherwise, to prevent exposure of readers or viewers to content which might be offensive to them (Keating 2015). The

ensorship of textbooks has properties of both types. The Israeli censor going over the Palestinian textbooks is looking for any content offensive to Israel, including anti-Israeli expressions and any mention of Palestinian authority (Adwan 2004). The declared purpose of censoring is to prevent the students from being exposed to inciting materials against Israel. Another purpose could be to hinder the students from developing a positive sense of identity based on the Palestinian narrative. This implicit aim of censorship is yet another example of a wish to erase or eliminate the Palestinian narrative by the settler colonialist regime (Wolfe 2006). In this section, the manner of this censorship is presented in order to examine whether its objectives are obtained.

In analyzing the content censored in textbooks for elementary and high schools, three main censorship categories emerged: “erasing symbols,” “leaving out segments,” and “deleting the content of whole pages.” Even before going through the analysis, it is important to note that from the point of view of the students and teachers in East Jerusalem schools, this intervention in their textbook is crude and offending. In addition to the offhand manner of this censorship, which is described below, the content taken out pertains to their national identity as Palestinians. That is to say, although the textbooks are part of the Palestinian curricula and as such represent a Palestinian historical narrative, the Israeli authorities exercise their power to interfere with its content.

Erasing symbols

The cover and first page of any book provide the basic information about it: its title, author, publishing information, etc. In addition, textbook information include the grade that the book is to be taught in, and information about its educational status (e.g. approved by a Ministry of Education). The Palestinian textbooks, as published by the PNA, include the information of the publisher: Ministry of Education and higher Education – State of Palestine, accompanied by the symbol of the Palestinian Authority. However in the 5th to 10th grade books published for East Jerusalem schools, any trace of the publisher and its symbol is erased once the books go through the Israeli censor (see [Figures 1\(a,b\)](#) and [2\(a,b\)](#) 10th grade History book).⁵

In addition to omitting the symbol and title of the Palestinian Ministry of Education, the details of the publishing house “El-Iyam” which can be found on the back cover of the Palestinian Authority books is also censored in East Jerusalem.

While this graphic detail can easily be overlooked, its suppression is significant. The verbal meaning of this symbol is to convey an idea of independence; the PNA is a national entity, with its own Ministry of Education, publishing its narrative for students to learn. This idea cannot be ignored in the real world, and it is commonly known by the students. Nevertheless, the Israeli censor has chosen to omit it in an attempt to conceal this meaning. This censorship is an example of erasure and concealment which is a common practice of colonial discourse (Stoler 2002). Other aspects of Israel’s rule as colonial are described as decedents of the colonial British Mandate (Berda 2012).

Leaving out segments

The second category of censorship is specific segments including sentences, paragraphs or sub-chapters. One example for this is in the 9th grade History book, page 44 (see

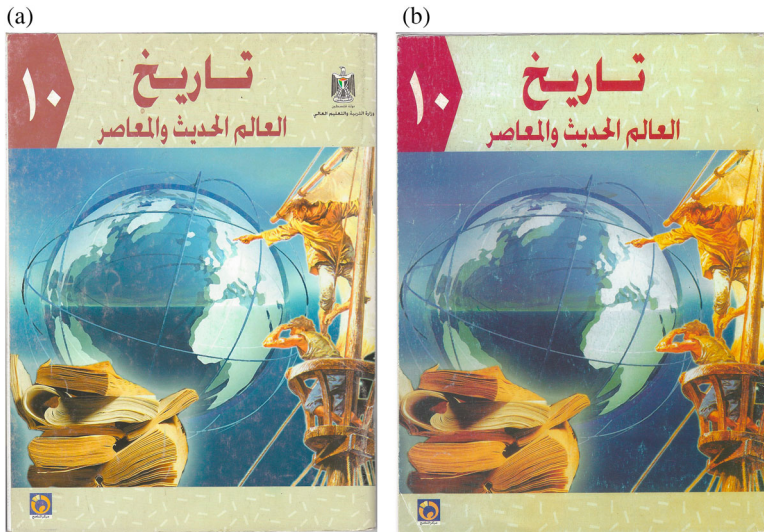


Figure 1. (a) 10th grade History book cover as originally published; (b) 10th grade History book cover censored.

Figure 3(a,b)).⁶ Following a short explanation about various Middle East countries, there is a description of Jordan.⁷

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was founded in 1921 and achieved its independence under the name the Jordanian Hashemite Kingdom in 1946. King Abed Allah Iben Husein annexed the lands of the West Bank of the Jordan in 1951 after the defeat of the Arab armies in the Palestine war in 1948, and it remained part of Jordan until the Zionist occupation in 1967.

This entire paragraph was omitted by the Israeli censor, while similar paragraphs about Lebanese independence and Iraqi independence are left in below or above. The difference

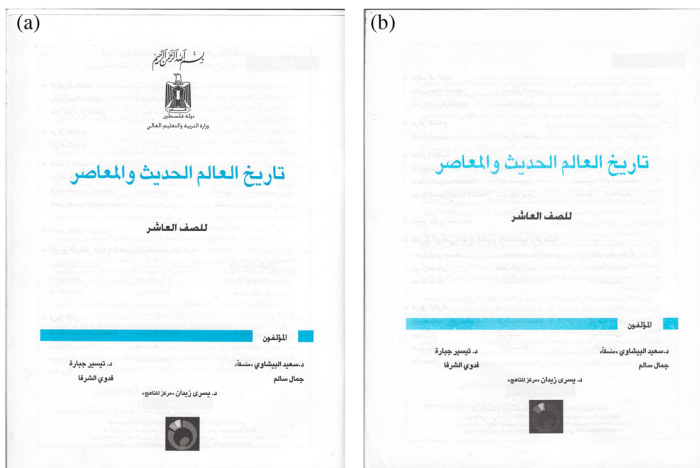


Figure 2. (a) 10th grade History book, front page as originally published; (b) 10th grade History book, front page censored.

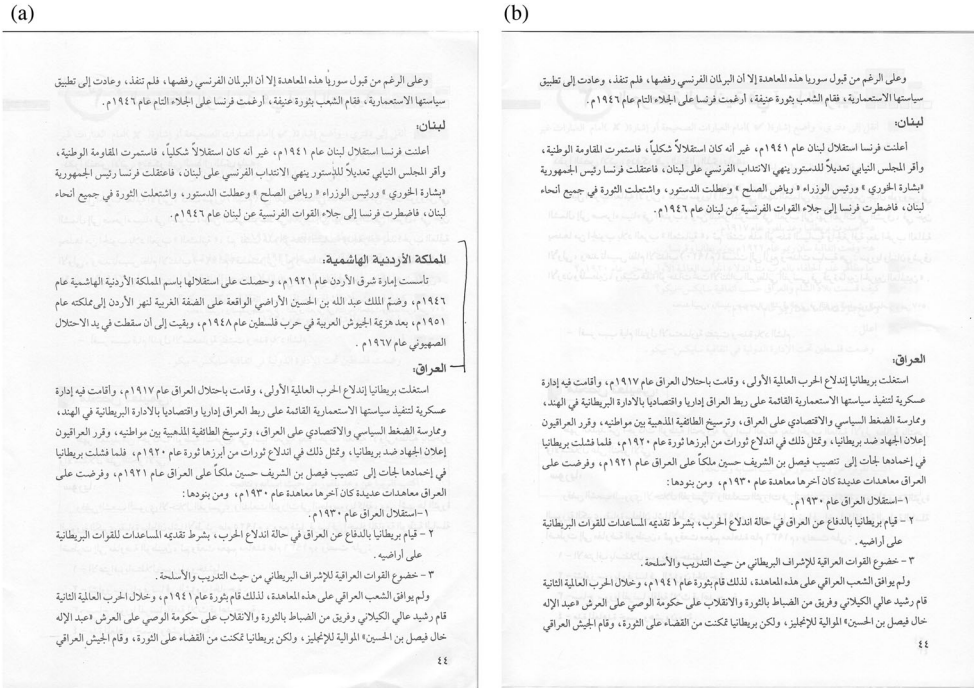


Figure 3. (a) 9th grade History book, page 44 as originally published; (b) 9th grade History book, page 44 censored.

between the segments about other countries and the one about Jordan is that it mentions the “Zionist occupation.” Hence, one of the clear criteria of the censor that is seen here is that any negative mentioning of Zionism of the Zionist movement is forbidden. In this sense, the political aim is to prevent the students from viewing Israel in a negative light.

Another example of this policy can be found in the 10th grade History textbook in a lesson titled “Zionism.” The lesson plan starts with a quote of David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel:⁸

If Zionism was not an overarching theory or a philosophical idea unconfined by time, place and circumstance, it would be Jewish philosophy in essence and a struggle against assimilation in Western societies.

Following this quote, there is a question for the students “What are the goals of Zionism?”

In the original publication, the authors of the textbook go on to explain the goals as they see them:⁹

A racist, ideological, political movement that appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century [...] It aimed to create a state that embodied the phrase “a land without a people for a people without a land,” mixing religion and nationalism to formulate its principles and beliefs, basing itself on alleged religious and historical rights [...]

Also on the same page, the authors continue to describe the circumstance in which the Zionist movement emerged as:¹⁰

The failure of the enlightenment movement that sought to incorporate the Jews in the communities in which they lived and creating Jewish loyalty to the countries in which they lived. [...] Empowerment of the Jewish nationalism especially after the French revolution [...] The support the Zionist movement received from the colonial powers. (see Figure 4(a))

However, this additional content is censored. The Palestinian student in East Jerusalem is left with only the title of the lesson, Ben Gurions' quote, and the lingering question *What are the goals of Zionism?*; the second half of the page is left completely blank (see Figure 4(b)). The rest of the chapter, which does not criticize the Zionist movement, is unchanged.

In this case, the omission is so blunt that this censorship serves to highlight the problematic perception of the Zionist movement. Instead of supplying an alternative wording, or adding hedges to the authors' interpretation of the Zionist goals, the students are left to ponder the goals themselves. While the censored content indeed presents Zionist movement unfavorably, this example also shows that this censorship is problematic from a pedagogical perspective.

A final example from this textbook is more general, when the authors explain Colonialism in six bullet points. The sixth point reads:¹¹

Colonialism takes place by occupation of the land, displacement of its owners from it, and settling of new residence in the place of the original residence by force, as in the case of Zionist colonialism in Palestine. (see Figure 5(a))

This final point is erased in the East Jerusalem textbook; there are only five bullet points explaining colonialism, none of which refer to Zionism or to the local context (see

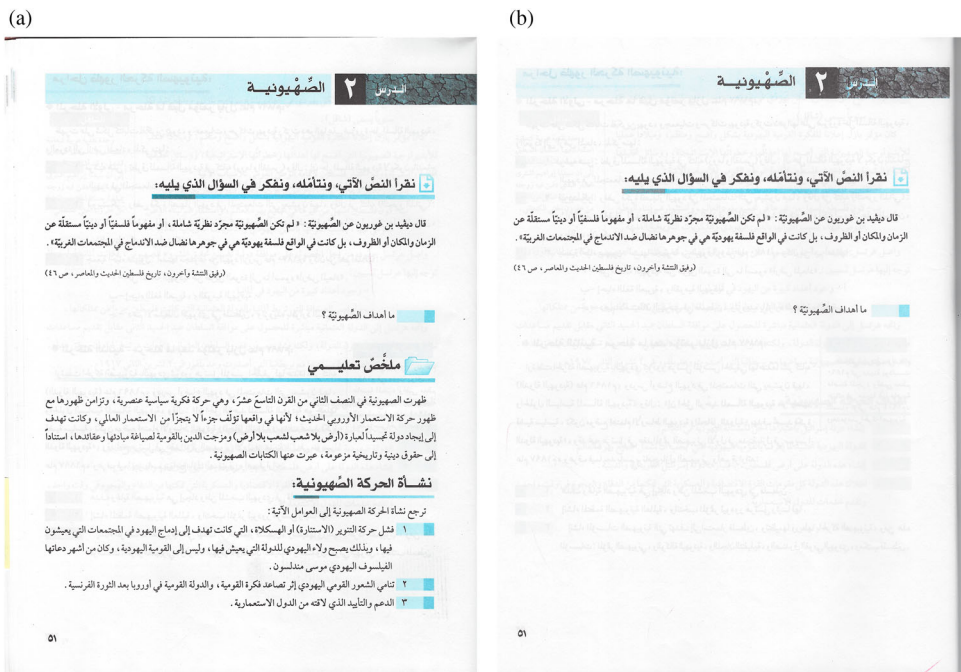


Figure 4. (a) 10th grade History book, page 51 as originally published; (b) 10th grade History book, page 51 censored.

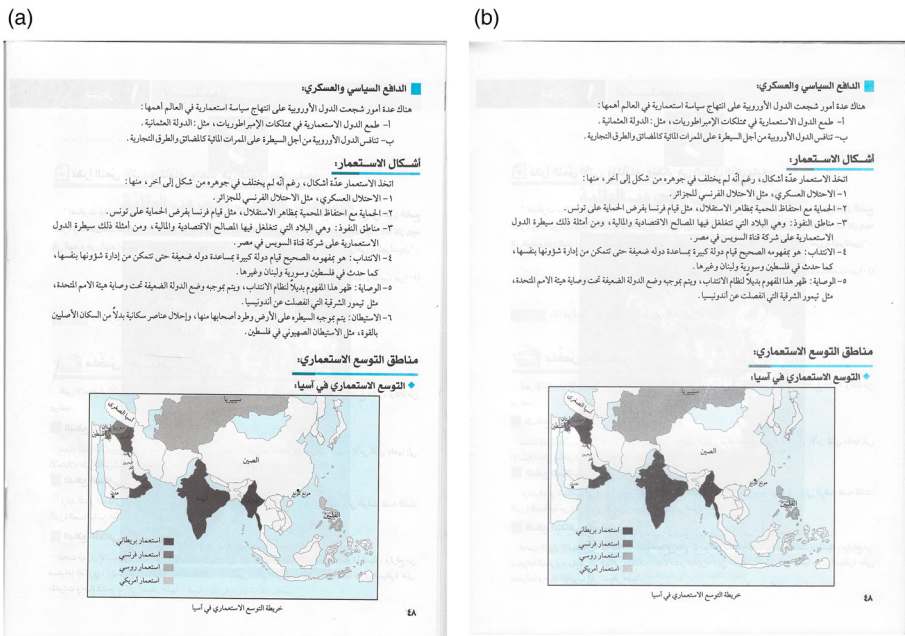


Figure 5. (a) 10th grade History book, page 48 as originally published; (b) 10th grade History book, page 48 censored.

Figure 5(b)). Similarly to the specific examples described above, there is pedagogical significance for adding this point for the students in making the concept of colonialism concrete for the benefit of the students.

This example shows that Israel is interested not only in preventing political incitement, but also in repressing any form of postcolonial discourse. Furthermore, despite the context of a general discussion of colonialism, this particular omission also has particular political significance.

In this type of quote we see the authors' opinion of Israel, approved by Palestinian authorities, as an oppressor of the Palestinian people. Therefore, this sixth point is not deleted in random by a censor spotting the mention of key-words like "Israel" or "Zionism." This deletion is deliberately intended to erase instances of a Palestinian historic narrative which could have verbalized the elements of suppression felt by its readers. This is one instance of a textbook example constructing national identity, and for this reason, it is concealed from the students.

Another general example of censorship that does not pertain to Israel directly is a quote of a declaration of the Islamic Supreme Council:¹²

[we] firmly condemn the arson of the El-Aqsa mosque that took place on August 21st 1969 by the Zionism extremist Michael Rohan. [...] and the committee has decided to reside in Saudi until Jerusalem is liberated and will be its permanent residence [...]. (see Figure 6(a))

This sentence was omitted from the East Jerusalem textbooks, presumably in order to repress information pertaining to negative actions taken in the name of Zionism (see

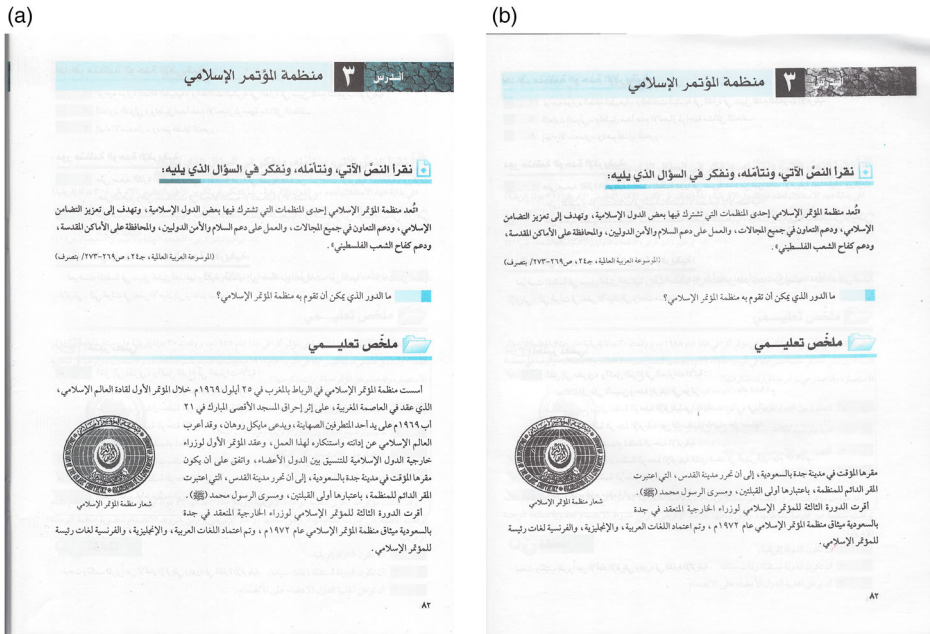


Figure 6. (a) 10th grade History book, page 83 as originally published; (b) 10th grade History book, page 83 censored.

Figure 6). Nevertheless, this quote also mentions a key element of a general Muslim wish “to liberate Jerusalem.”

Clearly, the text and sub-text of the sentence are interlaced and in some cases it is not obvious which one is disapproved by the censor. Yet it is equally clear that for whatever reason, these crude omissions of quotes and passages leave the students to “feel in the blanks” by themselves. In either case, these missing pieces are highlighted in their absence.

Even cases that do not have any specific criticism of Zionism and Israel are censored. Such is the case in the 5th grade History textbook in the section explaining about some of the ancient civilizations in the Middle East region (on page 27). One of these is “Balad Alsham” – the civilizations of the Levant. This civilization is described as residing in modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. After the Israeli censorship, only the first three countries are mentioned, and Palestine is omitted, even though this description refers to Palestine territory long before Zionism. On page 48 of the same book, however, students will find a map of that same “Balad Alsham” that includes Palestine – a map that was not censored.

This last example of seemingly random clipping shows order and method if we consider the alternative motive for censorship. I claim that the Israeli censor is not only concerned about anti-Israeli views presented in the book, rather the Israeli authorities seek to repress and conceal any representation of the Palestinian historical narrative. All of the examples for missing passages are parts of this puzzle, indicating historical landmarks for constructing a Palestinian national identity. Starting at the ancient kingdom “Balad Alsham,” establishing a historical link to the region, going through Zionist occupation and Jordanian

annexation, describing current political hardship, and culminating in a wish to liberate Jerusalem. The Israeli interference in this content undermines the Palestinian endeavor to establish a national identity. This is the meaning of the power struggle over curricula in East Jerusalem. I now turn to the case of censorship which is most blunt and therefore most obvious: the white pages.

White pages

As already mentioned in the introduction, there are cases where entire chapters are censored. In these cases, the Palestinian student in East Jerusalem finds blank white pages with nothing but a page number at the bottom. An example for that is the fourth chapter in the 9th grade (Figure 7).

History textbook "The Palestinian Case."¹³

The chapter about the Palestinian Case in the original textbook issued by the PNA gives a brief introduction of Palestinian history. It goes back to the period of British Martial law in the territory later to become Palestine, beginning with a detailed description of General Allenby taking over Jerusalem in 1917. The book also mentions the promises made by the British to Arab countries, and specifically the promise to the Arabs of Palestine, to support the establishment of an Arab state in Palestine. This promise is contrasted with the British support for the Zionist movement and eventually with the establishment of the state of Israel. In this context, the Balfour declaration is outlined in the following way:¹⁴

This declaration is considered one of history's strangest international documents: it granted land it did not own (Palestine) to a movement that did not deserve it (the Zionist movement), at the expense of the Arab Palestinian people who both owned and deserved it. This led to the

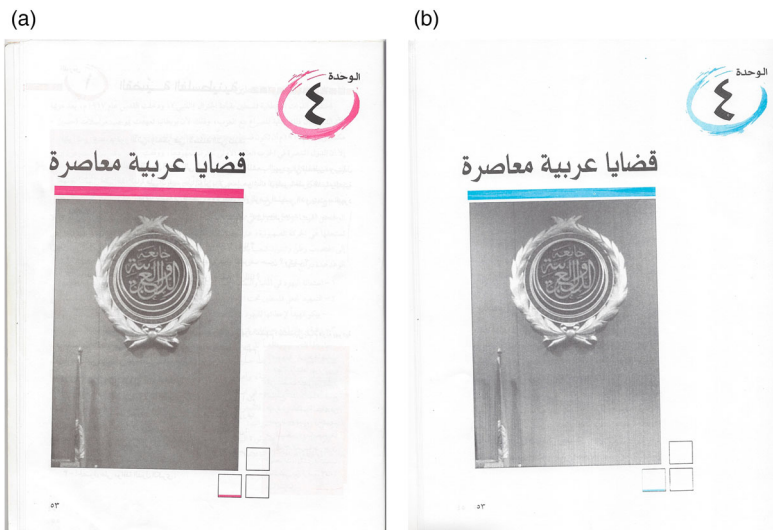


Figure 7. (a) 9th grade History book, chapter 4 title Contemporary Arab issues page 53, as originally published; (b) 9th grade History book, chapter 4 title Contemporary Arab issues page 53, censored.

forced seizure of a nation and the displacement of an entire people in a way that is unprecedented in history.

The chapter goes on to describe the reaction of the Palestinians to the Belfour declaration, their struggle in Jaffa in 1921, the El-Burak revolution (the 1929 uprising in different parts of the country), the resistance of Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam in 1935, the big strike of 1936, etc. Together with an introduction to the Palestinian national Liberation organization and its founder Yasser Arafat, the chapter also gives a definition for the Israeli settlements:¹⁵

An immigration of a group of people from foreign strong countries to weak countries, that occupy the possessions and lands of the original residents, and displace them from their lands and country by force.

The chapter is only an introduction to a long and detailed history, as is customary to provide in the 9th grade, (see Figure 8(a)), so that the students will get bits and pieces of information about the Palestinian case. In this case, the chapter has a clear message that the Zionist movement occupied Palestinian land with the support of the British Colonial powers. From the point of view of the authors, this chapter is significant for forming a collective memory in the shape of a factual narrative, as is customary for history Textbooks (Wertsch 2002). On the other hand, from the point of view of the Israeli censor, this chapter is particularly malevolent; consequently, this chapter is censored in its entirety. In East Jerusalem, students will find six blank pages in the middle of their textbook (see Figure 8(b)).

The motives of the censor in taking out this chapter seem obvious because it contains anti-Israeli statements. The Israeli authorities would like to prevent the students from reading inciting content, or in fact, any content that presents Israel negatively. In addition, this chapter is a major piece in the puzzle of constructing a national identity; it is, after all,

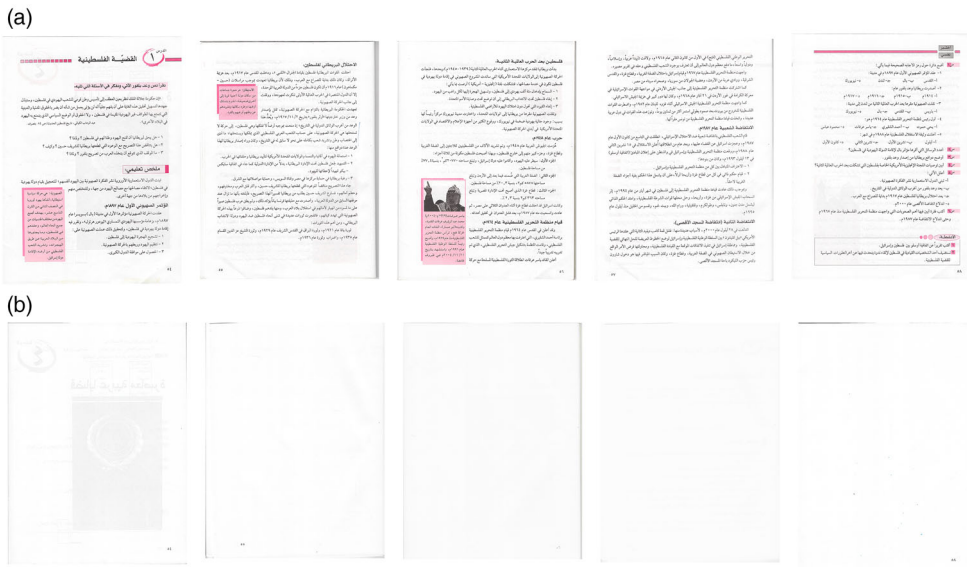


Figure 8. (a) 9th grade History book, chapter 4, pages 54–58, as originally published; (b) 9th grade History book, chapter 4, pages 54–58, censored.

explicitly titled “The Palestinian Case.” As such, erasing it serves the underlying purpose of censorship in interfering with the process of establishing a national identity through collective memory (Apple 1993).

However, there are two additional problems with this description of the censorship process. Firstly, although inciting materials are taken out, the manner of censorship sends a clear message to the students, antagonizing them. The resulting anti-Israeli attitude is due to the manner of censorship and is probably worse than any explicit phrase in the original text of the book. Moreover, the everyday hardship of confrontation with Israeli authorities is enough to generate an anti-Israeli attitude regardless of any textbook (Adwan 2004). It has further been suggested that youth are exposed to additional sources of narrative, other than textbooks, in any case (Webman 2002). Therefore, the first explicit aim of censorship in reducing anti-Israeli attitude is sorely missed.

Secondly, in such a situation of a national-political conflict, controlling the contents of curricula and textbooks is a known subject for a power struggle for gaining political control (Apple 1993). In this power struggle, the PNA seems to have more impact over content, because it is responsible for the publishing of textbooks. The education system forms a link between historical narrative and collective memory. The narrative of History books specifically is geared towards implanting foundations for national identity by forming a collective memory (Wertsch 2002). However, the results of the current study show that the Israeli Ministry of education is well aware of the power of the textbook. In this process of censorship, Israel monitors and controls the content of the textbooks taught. Hence, even though the PNA constructs the textbooks, Israel has national-political power over textbook materials. Consequently, the effect of the textbook is much weaker; following the Israeli censorship, it has little content for constructing a national identity. Any mention of the state of Palestine is erased, as a mirror of the colonial attitude of Israel towards the PNA. Thus revealing the second, implicit aim of undermining the PNA power over the education system in East Jerusalem.

But this is not the end of the story. The power struggle over content could have ended here, at 10th grade, with the explicit and implicit motives for censorship. However, the Israeli Ministry of Education does not produce a censored version of the history textbooks for 11th and 12th grades. The official reason is that the PNA curricula for these grades are geared towards preparing students for the unified national final school exams (Tawjih); therefore, for the 11th and 12th grades, Palestinian students in East Jerusalem use the exact same textbooks as their peers in the West Bank. Nothing of the censorship enforced in former years continues. The symbol of the Palestinian Authority remains on the books, the content remains identical, and furthermore, the schools are required to purchase the books directly from the PNA (see [Figure 9\(a,b\)](#)). In the following section, I briefly present the content of these textbooks, and consider additional possible reasons for the change in censorship policy.

Censoring up to a point

The censorship observed in History textbooks in primary school and up to the 10th grade is part of Israel’s colonial attitude in controlling content by censorship. This policy is officially reasoned by a reluctance to allocate funding for schools teaching materials inciting



Figure 9. (a) 12th grade History book, cover page; (b) 11th grade History book, first page.

students against Israel, yet this censorship is an act of intervention in the materials provided by the PNA and not an educational solution of a democratic state. In any case, this line of explanation for the motives of censorship does not coincide with the lack of censorship in higher grades.

The 11th grade textbook includes many statements and issues previously censored. The first part of the book includes a description of ancient times, different kingdoms in Palestine (from the Mamilachs through the Crusades and Islamic kingdoms to Napoleon), the Islamic period, modern and current Palestinian history, the effects of the World War I on the region, and the shift from the Ottoman Empire to the British mandate. The second part of the book focusses on the Palestinian–Zionist conflict starting with the Ottoman Empire, through the British Dominion period until the foundation of the state of Israel. This includes the relationships between the British rule, the Zionist movement, the Palestinians and Arab nations.

The book presents many documents and correspondence between the Palestinians and British regarding the Palestinian national case including between Sheikh Hussein and McMahon, as well as the Balfour declaration and its consequences for Palestinians. The book clearly mentions the 1948 war and the emergence of the refugee problem, and continues survey subsequent confrontations including the Lebanon war and the first Intifada (Palestinian uprising of 1987).¹⁶ As mentioned above, all of these subjects are included in the Tawjihi exam; therefore, even in East Jerusalem the teachers and students received the material as it was originally published.

In the 12th grade History textbook, there is even a specific lesson titled “The Racial Discrimination” (starting on page 94). The text goes on to explain what racial discrimination is, its origins in Colonial Europe and the Europeans treatment of the Global South, the racist

discrimination implemented by the Nazi party in Germany in 1933, Apartheid South Africa, and in the context of all these also the Zionist discrimination against Palestinians within the state of Israel.¹⁷

Israel, since its establishment in 1948, executed a series of racist policies with the intention of elevating the Jewish identity of the state, and change the demographic build of its residents. Some of these steps are:

- (1) The displacement of the Palestinian people from their lands and bringing Jews in their place, in contradiction with UN resolution 194 from 1948 recognizing the rights of refugees to return and be compensated. Israel does not recognize this resolution and ignores it.
- (2) Issuing racist legislation such as the law of return (1950) according to which any Jew has the right to return to Israel, and later the citizenship law (1952) that gives any Jew who immigrates to Israel an Israeli citizenship in order to strengthen the Jewish character of the state.
- (3) Treating the Arabs that remained in the state as a minority group.
- (4) Confiscation of Palestinian lands and legislation that allows state control of these lands, such as the absentee property law and other [...] demolition of Arab houses [...] building the separation wall after the 2000 Intifada that is defined as the racist separation fence [...].

The chapter ends on page 98 with a comparison between Apartheid South Africa and Israeli discriminatory policies. These concepts, censored in different ways for the previous 6 years of education, appear now explicitly. This content particularly supports the characterization of textbook content as significant for establishing a national narrative through forming a collective memory. The students studying this material enforce their national identity and identify with Palestinians in the West Bank, dissociating themselves from Israel and Israeli–Palestinians.

Moreover, the simplified facts scattered throughout books in primary school do not amount to a cohesive political agenda, as they appear in the textbooks for the higher grades. This finding enforces my earlier analysis of the motives for censorship. Under the guise of an educational censorship, Israel has political motives to undermine the Palestinian struggle for forming a collective identity. The Israeli strategy of suppressing and erasing Palestinian materials is further manifested in its colonial management of information archives (El Shakry 2015; Sela 2015).

Although Israel does not intervene in the content of these books, as it constitutes compulsory material for the Tawjia, it is still interested in discouraging students from studying this curriculum. In fact, the Israeli Ministry of Education keeps trying to add the Arab-Israeli curricula to schools in East Jerusalem, as an alternative track for graduation with a matriculation instead of a Tawjia. At the beginning of the 2016 school year, this curriculum has become an official alternative in some schools – meaning teachers must be proficient in teaching it, and the students have to choose which curriculum to study. This is a first step on the path to erase the Palestinian curricula in East Jerusalem altogether, and replace it with the Israeli one.

In this situation, students choosing a diploma are in fact required to state their allegiance. By choosing a Palestinian Tawjia, they express national loyalty to their fellows in the PNA; by refusing a matriculation diploma they give up on opportunities for employment and higher education in Israel. In the power struggle between the forces managing schools in East Jerusalem, Israel is using its domination to infiltrate the power source of the PNA – the curriculum – and in addition to discourage students from studying this curriculum altogether.

Conclusion

This study examined History textbooks taught in East Jerusalem. The political context of East Jerusalem and its education system manifests a continuous power struggle between the PNA and Israeli authorities, in this case, the Israeli Ministry of Education. The PNA is responsible for curricula in East Jerusalem schools, providing appropriate textbooks for it. However, since these schools are in the jurisdiction of Israel, this content is supervised and censored by the Israeli Ministry of Education. As control of knowledge and narrative are often colonial practices of control, this created an inherent tension within these textbooks.

Textbooks in general serve to enhance collective memory and reproduce the historical narrative of their writers and sponsors (Boyer and Wertsch 2009). In this case, the novel curricula recently constructed by the PNA is significant in unifying a Palestinian national identity, and therefore, is concerned with structuring of a self-identity contrasted with the Israeli identity as the Other (Alayan 2012). This feature is characteristic of national textbooks composed in a phase of constructing a nation (Podeh 2000). There is no denying the fact that these books are not designed to present a Zionist narrative of the local history. These textbooks advocate an anti-Zionist narrative as part of their depiction of the Zionist activists as the Other (Alayan 2012).¹⁸

Still, the radical censorship observed in this study includes omission of Palestinian national symbols, elimination of anti-Zionist passages and even deletion of whole chapters. The motives for this censorship can be explicitly defined as a wish to protect the students from reading inciting materials in state-schools. Nevertheless, the implicit motive uncovered in the study is that the extracted materials form crucial parts of the Palestinian Narrative, and therefore, their suppression can be considered intentionally directed in undermining the formation of collective memory.

Furthermore, this suppression and deletion is unfavorably perceived by the Palestinian readers, teachers and students alike. The Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem are Palestinians, Part of the Palestinian people and similar to the Palestinian citizens in the West Bank and Gaza, despite being subject to Israeli sovereignty. This interference in the content and especially its offhand manner – leaving blank pages – serve as a mark of Israeli power and control. Moreover, the constant competition between the Palestinian curriculum culminating in the Tawjihi and the Arab-Israeli curriculum providing an Israeli diploma of matriculation is a real, everyday conflict for parents and students.

The choice in graduation between a full-uncensored Palestinian curricula and an Israeli matriculation determines the fate of graduates at an early age. Choosing a Tawjihi will lead to limited options for higher education and employment opportunities in Israel, in the current political situation. Yet, choosing a matriculation is unacceptable by parents due

to the same political situation of national conflict. In this sense, the power struggle over textbooks perpetuates the power relations between the PNA and Israel.

It is important to mention, that while this study focuses only on analyzing of the Palestinian textbooks and their censorship, in the last two years, there are additional factors in the East Jerusalem educational system that touch on the same issues. Since 2014 there has been growing pressure on schools in East Jerusalem to add the Israeli curricula to schools, centering even more the Israeli narrative, far beyond the censorship presented here. This deepens the tension around who has control over curricula, trying to completely replace the influence of the Palestinian Authority.

As an educator, I find this form of censorship distasteful. Despite the personal and national perspective present in the Textbook, as a pedagogical tool it is first and foremost an instrument of education and knowledge. The role of a Ministry of Education is to enforce education for values of social justice; furthermore, it should allow representation of multi-cultural perspectives, acknowledging the social identity of minorities. The act of censorship, erasing and suppressing of content, shows a colonial attitude characteristic of military control instead of a liberal, democratic dominion as the Israeli Ministry of Education aspires to be.

Reference details of textbooks:

Palestinian National Authority

- (1) *Ta'areekh al-Arab wal-Aalam Fil-Qarn al-Ishrein*. Arab and World History in the 20th Century, 12th Grade. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine. First Edition, 2006\2007.
- (2) *Ta'areekh Falastin al-Hadith wal-Mu'asser*. Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine, 11th Grade. Part I. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine. First Edition, 2001\2002.
- (3) *Ta'areekh Falastin al-Hadith wal-Mu'asser*. Modern and Contemporary History of Palestine, 11th Grade. Part II. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine. First Edition, 2005\2006.
- (4) *Ta'areekh al-Aalam al-hadith wal-Mu'asser*. Modern and Contemporary World History, 10th Grade. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine. First Edition, 2004\2005.
- (5) *Al-Taareekh al-Arabi al-Hadith wal-Mu'asser*. Modern and Contemporary Arab History, 9th Grade. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine, 2003\2004.
- (6) *Ta'areekh al-Hadara al -Arabia al -Islamia*. History of the Arab Islamic Civilization, 8th Grade. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine, 2003\2004.
- (7) *Ta'areekh al-Ausur Al-wasta*. Medieval History. 7th Grade. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine, 2001\2002.
- (8) *Ta'areekh al-Hadarat Al-kadeema*- History of Ancient Civilization. 5th Grade. The Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority, State of Palestine, 2004\2005.

Notes

1. More about these power relations is in Y. Berda's book *The Bureaucracy of the Occupation*.
2. Bhabha (1984).
3. The second part of the Oslo Accords, signed in 1995, specifically states that the parties will take measures to avoid incitement. Hence, Israel began to scrutinize content presented in Palestinian textbooks as part of its conflict management strategy.
4. Some of the parents sent their children to the school of the Waqf instead of sending them to the state school. The Waqf is an Islamic religious trust operating mainly in the Old City of Jerusalem; it is funded by Jordan for civil administration of the holy city, but it also operates religious Islamic private schools.
5. Modern and Contemporary World History 10th grade, El-Iyam, 2004\2005.
6. Modern and Contemporary Arab History for the 9th grade, El-Iyam, 2003\2004.
7. See note 6, page 44.
8. 10th grade book, page 51.
9. See note 8.
10. See note 8.
11. See note 8, page 28.
12. 10th grade, 83.
13. Modern and Contemporary Arab History for the 9th grade. El-Iyam, year 2003\2004: 54–58.
14. See note 13, page 55.
15. See note 13.
16. 11th grade textbook
17. 12th grade textbook, page 94.
18. In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that the Palestinian textbooks do mention aspects of the Jewish history and relation to the region, including the Jewish settlements in ancient times and under the Roman Empire. This fact supports my analysis of the content as being Anti-Zionism and not anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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