



Peace and the "Other" in Tunisian School books: Can They Serve as a Model?

By

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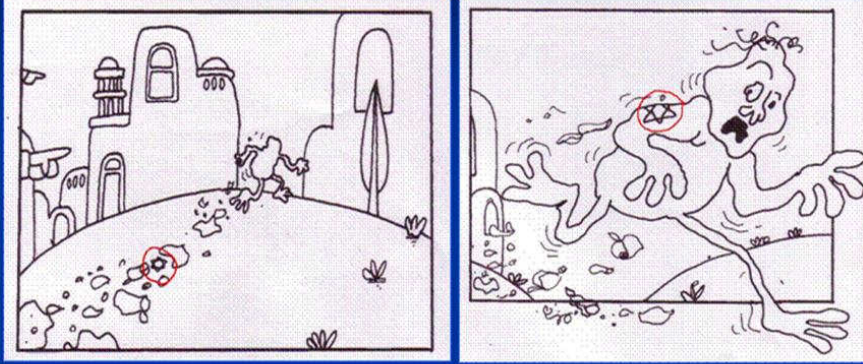
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Introduction

- IMPACT-SE is a not-for-profit NGO dedicated to the mission of education for peace and tolerance worldwide on the basis of the relevant resolutions of UNESCO and other international bodies. During the last decade it has conducted surveys of more than a thousand schoolbooks and teachers' guides of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran examining their attitude to the "other" and to peace. The results of these surveys appear in some dozen reports available on the organization's Web site <http://www.impact-se.org>
- The overall assessment is discouraging. Schoolbooks of all the above-mentioned nations, except Israel, delegitimize and demonize the "other". They do not advocate peaceful solutions to existing conflicts but rather prefer a violent struggle against the "other" within which they emphasize the traditional Islamic ideals of Jihad and martyrdom. This stand is most evident in the context of the Middle East conflict but also vis-à-vis other "others" such as the West. Here are some examples, all related to the Jews' image.

Iran



Lesson 6: The Contaminator

Would you like to narrate the story?

Gifts of Heaven – Workbook, Grade 3 (2004) pp. 13-15 (Circles added)

Egypt

دروس مستفادة من معاملة النبي - صلى الله عليه وسلم - لليهود

- ٢- إن عنصرية الدين تسيطر عليهم ، فهم يعادون الدين الإسلامي ، ويقفون موقفَ العداوة والحرب من كل دين غير دينهم .
- ٣- عنصرية الجنس متمكنة في نفوسهم ، فهم يكرهون غيرهم من الأجناس والشعوب .
- ٤- إنهم لا يدينون بولاء لوطن يقيمون فيه ، ولا يحفظون له عهدا ، ولكن تقوم حياتهم على الغدر والخيانة .
- ٥- إن يهودَ الأُمس هم يهودُ اليوم والغد .. طينة واحدة ، ولا بد من دراستهم ودراسة

Egypt

Lessons derived from the treatment of the Jews by the Prophet [Muhammad]

- ... Religious racism dominates them [the Jews]. They are hostile to the Islamic religion and take a hostile position against any religion that is not theirs.
- Ethnic racism is firmly established in their souls. They hate other ethnic groups and peoples.
- They do not owe allegiance to the homeland where they live, nor [do they] keep a commitment. Rather, their life is based on treachery and betrayal.
- The Jews of the past are the [same as the] Jews of today and of the future. [They are] all the same. One should study them, study their ambitions, and arm oneself against them with every [possible] weapon...

Islamic Education, Grade 11 (2002) p. 77

The Palestinian Authority

إن أعداءكم قتلوا أطفالكم، وفتروا بطون نساءكم،
وأخذوا بلحى شيوخكم الأجلاء، فساقوهم إلى حفائر الموت سوفاً،

...Your enemies killed your children,
split open your women's bellies, held
your revered elderly men by the beard
and led them to the death pits...

Reading and Texts, Grade 8, Part 2 (2008), p. 16

Syria

لقد علمت موقف اليهود الذين يبتغون للمسلمين القتل والسلب والإبادة .

وهذه صفة الخونة والغادرين في كل زمان ومكان يتخذون من التسامح واللين مرتعاً ومنفذاً لجرائمهم وسيئاتهم . وإن دل هذا على شيء فإنما يدل على النزعة العدوانية الشريرة المتأصلة في الشخصية اليهودية . مما يؤكد أن التعايش معهم أو مجاورتهم خطر جسيم يهدد الوجود الإسلامي والعربي بالدمار والفتنة .

لذلك فإن منطق العدالة الصحيح يوجب فيهم حكماً واحداً لا مفر من تنفيذه . هو أن يرد قتلهم الإجرامي عليهم باستئصالهم .

Syria

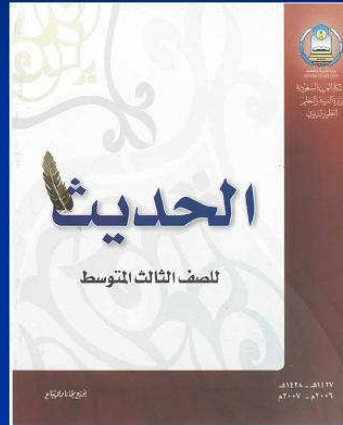
You have already learned of the attitude of the Jews who plotted to kill, loot and exterminate the Muslims... That is the characteristic of traitors and deceivers in any time and place. They make use of tolerance and gentleness as a hotbed and a loophole for their crimes and sins.

If this points to anything, it points to the hostile [and] evil tendency that is rooted in the Jewish personality. That, in its turn, confirms that coexistence with them, or having them as neighbors, is an enormous danger that threatens Muslim and Arab existence with destruction and extinction.

Therefore, the logic of genuine justice decrees against them one verdict the execution of which is unavoidable. Their criminal intention shall be turned against them by their elimination.

Islamic Education, Grade 10 (1998/99) pp. 115-16

Saudi Arabia



... أن رسول الله

ﷺ قال: «لا تقوم الساعة حتى يقاتل المسلمون اليهود فيقتلهم المسلمون، حتى يختبئ اليهودي من وراء الحجر والشجر، فيقول الحجر أو الشجر يا مسلم، يا عبد الله! هذا يهودي خلفي، فتعال فاقتله، إلا الغرقد فإنه من شجر اليهود».

وفي هذا الحديث يخبرنا

ﷺ عن صورة من القتال بين المسلمين واليهود.

Saudi Arabia

...God's Messenger said: "the Day of Judgment will not arrive until the Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims will kill them. Even if a Jew hides behind a rock or a tree, the rock or the tree will say: 'O Muslim, O worshipper of God! There is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him', except the salt bush [*Gharqad*], for it is one of the Jews' trees."

...In this Prophetic Saying [*Hadith*] he [Muhammad] tells us of one of the forms of the battle between Muslims and Jews...



Hadith, Grade 9 (2006) pp. 148

- Now, IMPACT-SE has just completed a new survey of 64 recently published Tunisian schoolbooks. In light of the findings, which proved to be much different from those encountered in other Arab nations and Iran, a question has been raised whether the Tunisian schoolbooks could serve as a model for their Arab and Muslim counterparts, as far as the attitude to the "other" and to peace is concerned. I will try to answer this question at the end of this presentation, but let us, first, review the findings.

Merits of the Tunisian Schoolbooks

- The Tunisian approach regarding the attitude to the "other" in general is unique: the "other" is presented as a mirror image of the "self", which necessitates interaction with it as a precondition to the latter's development.

ولا يُمكنُ اليومَ أنْ نتصوّرَ وجودنا خارجَ العلاقةِ الجوّاريّةِ معَ الآخرِ. ذلكَ أنْ الأنا والآخرَ لا يُمكنُ فضلُ أحدهما عن صاحبه، فهما ينتميان إلى العالمِ نفسِهِ، ويمكنُ لكلٍ منهما عبْرَ النظّرِ إلى الآخرِ، أنْ يتبيّنَ ما يتبسّمُ بهُ هو من ذاتيّةٍ أو موضوعيّةٍ، بلْ إنْ الآخرَ ضروريٌّ والجوّارَ معه - بأيّ شكلٍ كانَ - لآزمَ

الاختلافَ بينَ الشّافاتِ وبينَ اللّغاتِ، لا يقومُ حائلًا دونَ التّواصلِ الإنسانيّ.

It is impossible today to imagine our existence outside the dialogue relations with the "other." This is so because the self and the "other" are not separable from each other. They both belong to the same world and each of them can see his own personality by looking at the other. Moreover, the "other" is essential and the dialogue with him – in whatever form – is necessary... The difference between cultures and languages is not an obstacle to human connection.

[Literary] Texts, Grade 13 – [Sciences] (n.d.) p. 154

- Dialogue with the "other" is encouraged, which necessitates recognition of the "other" and its acceptance as equal to the "self". This point and the former one are not to be encountered in any non-Tunisian schoolbook.

شُرُوطُ الْحِوَارِ

ضُرُورَةُ الْإِعْتِرَافِ بِالْآخَرِ وَبِهَوِيَّتِهِ وَمُعْتَقَدَاتِهِ وَخَضَارَتِهِ وَإِخْلَالِ
مَبْدِئِ السَّمَاوِحِ مَحَلِّ نِزَاعَاتِ التَّعَصُّبِ وَإِقْصَاءِ فِكْرَةِ التَّفَاوُلِ بَيْنَ الثَّقَافَاتِ وَاسْتِبْدَالِهَا
بِفِكْرَةِ التَّكَاوُلِ بَيْنَ الثَّقَافَاتِ بِإِعْتِبَارِ كُلِّ مِنْهَا مُمَثِّلاً لِجُزْءٍ وَلَوْجِهٍ مِنَ التَّجَارِبِ الْإِنْسَانِيَّةِ،
وَبِإِعْتِبَارِ الْحَدَاثَةِ خُلَاصَةً تَلْكَ التَّجَارِبِ الْإِنْسَانِيَّةِ كُلِّهَا وَلَيْسَتْ جِزْءًا عَلَى حَضَارَةِ دُونَ
أُخْرَى.

The Conditions for a Dialogue

...The need to recognize the "other," his identity, his beliefs and his civilization, to replace fanatic inclinations with the principle of tolerance, to drive away the notion of rivalry for precedence among cultures and replace it with the idea of integration between cultures, considering that each one of them represents a part and an aspect of human experience, and considering that modernity is the essence of this human experience all and not a monopoly of a [certain] civilization with the exception of other ones...

[Literary] Texts, Grade 13 [Sciences] (n.d.) p. 201

- Tolerance towards the "other" and rejection of any type of discrimination are forcefully advocated. In this context, Islam is used as a means of fostering an atmosphere of *rapprochement* with non-Muslims rather than as a means of alienation, contrary to what one may find in books of some other Nations in the Middle East.

وَنَحْنُ نَجِدُ ذِكْرَ إِحْتِرَامِ الدِّيَانَاتِ الْآخَرَى وَحُرِّيَةِ الْمَعْتَقَدَاتِ
وَإِحْتِرَامَ جَمِيعِ الْأَرَاءِ فِي سِتِّ وَثَلَاثِينَ سُورَةٍ وَخَمْسِ وَعِشْرِينَ وَمِائَةِ آيَةٍ، فَالْتَسَامُحُ يَمَثُلُ حُبْنَتِ الْفِكْرَةِ
الْأَسَاسِيَّةِ فِي الْقُرْآنِ، فَكَيْفَ جَعَلَ بَعْضُ النَّاسِ مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ أَدَاةً لِلتَّعَصُّبِ وَالتَّزَمُّتِ

We find mentions of respect for other religions, freedom of faith and respect for all opinions in thirty six [Koranic] chapters [Surah] and one hundred and twenty five [Koranic] verses. Tolerance, therefore, represents the basic idea in the Koran. How come, then, that some people have made the Book of God a tool of bigotry and narrow-mindedness?

[Literary] Texts, Grade 9 (2007) p. 159

فقيم الحرية والعدالة والتسامح والديمقراطية التي تقوم
عليها حضارتنا المعاصرة، تستمد مرجعيتها الفكرية
والاجتماعية والسياسية من الرصيد الإنساني الحافل لعصر
الأنوار والنهضة الأوروبية الحديثة... هذه النهضة التي عادت
بدورها لتستلهم من الحضارات القديمة معاني الإنسانية
وسيادة العقل والحكمة والقانون،

The values of liberty, justice, tolerance and democracy, on which our contemporary civilization is founded, draw their intellectual, social and political authority from the rich human stock of the period of Enlightenment and modern European Renaissance... which went back, in its turn, to seek inspiration from the ancient civilizations regarding the meanings of humanism and the supremacy of reason, wisdom and the law...

History, Grade 11 [Sciences], (2007) p. 7

- Historical non-Arab and non-Muslim "others" in Tunisia, such as Numidians, Carthaginians, Vandals, Berbers, etc. are all embraced as part of Tunisia's history, without any attempt to posthumously "Arabize" them, as done in Syrian and Palestinian schoolbooks.
- Historical conflicts with the Christian West, such as the Crusades, are not employed as a means to demonize it. Modern Western Colonialism and Imperialism are discussed in factual language and are not used as a means of presenting the West as inherently evil, as sometimes done in other Arab schoolbooks and in Iran.
- As far as the West in modern times is concerned, the bottom line in the Tunisian schoolbooks' attitude is that coexistence with the West is both necessary and possible in spite of past residues and present concerns.
- The contribution of Islamic civilization to Western civilization in the Middle Ages is emphasized, but not as a means of scoring points in inter-civilization rivalry – as done in schoolbooks of other Arab nations. Rather, it is used to show that the present Western-rooted universal values are the fruits of a joint effort and, therefore, are worth being adopted.
- Tunisian schoolbooks feature more openness to Western culture than those of other Arab countries. They see Globalization not only as a threat to Third World countries but also as an opportunity that should be seized as a precondition to self-development.

إِنَّا نَنْظُرُ إِلَى الْعَوْلَمَةِ نَظْرَةً شُمُولِيَةً.
 وَمِنْ وَاجِبِ الْأَمَانَةِ الْفِكْرِيَّةِ أَنْ نُؤَكِّدَ أَنَّ الْعَوْلَمَةَ فُرْصَةٌ تَارِيخِيَّةٌ أَمَامَ شُعُوبِنَا، فَذُ
 تُسَاعِدُهَا عَلَى الْقَفْزِ عَلَى الْهَوَّةِ الشَّاسِعَةِ الَّتِي تَفْصِلُهَا عَنِ كَوَكِبَةِ الْأُمَمِ الْمُصْنَعَةِ
 وَلَكِنَّهَا، أَيْضًا، تَنْطَوِي عَلَى مَخَاطِرَ جَمَّةٍ، لَيْسَ أَيْسَرُهَا نُوْبَانُ الشَّخْصِيَّةِ، وَأَنْجِلَالُ
 رِبَاطِ الْأُمَّةِ، الَّذِي هُوَ اللَّغَةُ وَالثَّقَافَةُ.

We look at Globalization comprehensively. It is our intellectual integrity which obliges us to emphasize that Globalization is a historic opportunity in front of our peoples. It may help them jump over the vast gap which separates them from the group of the industrial nations. But it also contains grave dangers, of which the dissolution of [our] personality and the disintegration of the nation's connecting bond, that is, language and culture, is not the least one.

[Literary] Texts, Grade 13 [Sciences], (2007) p. 164

Much effort is being made to nurture a friendly attitude toward France among students of the lower grades, which is meant to withstand the discussion in higher grades of past French colonialist policies in Tunisia. Such an approach is not to be found in other schoolbooks in the region.



جِيرَانُنَا مِنَ الْأُرُوبِيِّينَ ، لَهُمْ طِفْلٌ فِي مِثْلِ سِنِّي
 إِسْمُهُ مَارْسَالُ
 ذَاتَ يَوْمٍ ، التَّقَيْنَا فِي الطَّرِيقِ ، وَمَدَدْتُ لَهُ يَدِي . تَرَدَّدَ
 لَحْظَةً ثُمَّ صَافَحَنِي بِحَرَارَةٍ ، وَدَعَانِي إِلَى بَيْتِهِمْ .
 وَمَرَّتِ الْأَيَّامُ وَالشُّهُورُ ، فَأَيْسْتُ بِهِ وَأَيْسَ بِهِ وَصَرْنَا
 صَدِيقَيْنِ حَمِيمَيْنِ .

Our neighbors are European. They have a boy of my age whose name is Marcel... One day we met on the road and I extended my hand to him. He hesitated for a moment and then he shook my hand warmly and invited me to their house...Days and months passed. I liked his company and he liked mine and we have become close friends.

Reader, Grade 2 (2007) pp. 27-28

- Western support of Zionism and Israel is referred to, but Israel's international legitimacy is also mentioned. In other words: The West cannot be exclusively "blamed" in this respect – contrary to what is done in other Arab schoolbooks which present Israel as the creation of Western Imperialism exclusively.
- Jews fare in the Tunisian schoolbooks much better than in their Arab counterparts. Crude anti-Semitic expressions are absent here, some Jewish individuals (such as world-renowned philosophers) are favorably referred to and the historical conflict between the prophet of Islam and the Jews of Arabia is hardly discussed, while other Arab schoolbooks use this historical episode to nurture hatred to the Jews today. In sharp contrast to the anti-Jewish Prophetic Saying [*Hadith*] given in a Saudi Arabian textbook, a Tunisian one presents the following one:

« مَرَّتْ جَنَازَةٌ فَقَامَ النَّبِيُّ وَقُمْنَا « فَقُلْنَا : « يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ
إِنَّهَا جَنَازَةٌ يَهُودِيٌّ » فَقَالَ « أَوْ لَيْسَتْ نَفْسًا، إِذَا رَأَيْتُمُ الْجَنَازَةَ فَقُومُوا »

“A funeral procession went by [in Medina] and the Prophet [Muhammad] stood up and we stood up [as well]. We said: “O Messenger of God, this is a Jew’s funeral.” He said: “Is it not a soul? Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up!”

Islamic Education, Grade 9 (2007) p. 32

This approach of the Tunisian schoolbooks clearly proves that one can be anti-Israeli without being anti-Semitic.

- Peace as an ideal is advocated, with heavy emphasis on Islamic tenets in this context. It should be noted that Tunisian schoolbooks do not refer much to the Islamic traditional concepts of Jihad and martyrdom and when they do, they always do that in historical contexts, as a matter of the past, and not as a future endeavor to be adopted by the students – contrary to what is done in other Arab and Iranian schoolbooks.

Deficiencies of the Tunisian Books

- Within the context of the Middle East conflict, the Tunisian schoolbooks deviate from their stressed line of embracing the "other". There are cases of non-recognition, delegitimation and even demonized description of Israel, and the narrative of the conflict is clearly biased



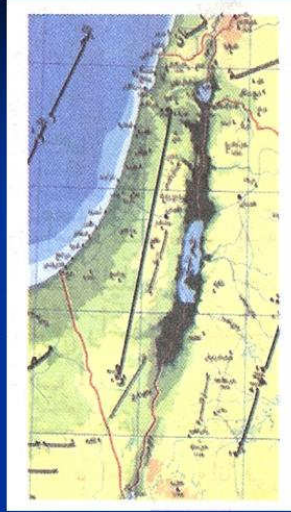
No rest for the colonialist on the occupied land

[Literary] Texts, Grade 12 [Sciences], (2007) p. 305

- A peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict is not advocated. The peace process is discussed in neutral language and both possibilities of a peaceful solution, as well as a military liberation, are referred to equally. The latter is even portrayed once as an act of purification. Moreover, acts of terrorism against Israelis, such as the attack on the Israeli team at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, are referred to in terms denoting positive attitude (*Fidai* [sacrificial] operation).

Some Credit Points within the Deficiencies

- The attitude of non-recognition regarding Israel's existence is inconsistent. One can find sporadic cases in which the name "Israel" appears on the map – a phenomenon not to be encountered even in schoolbooks issued by Egypt after its formal recognition of Israel in the framework of the 1979 peace treaty between the two states. The phrase "the State of Israel" is used in texts as well alongside the antagonistic phrase "the Zionist Entity".



“Palestine”
[Literary] Texts, Grade 7 (n.d.) p.
158



“The State of Israel”
Social Sciences: History,
Geography, Civics, Grade 9
(n.d.) p. 89

- Alongside cases of demonized descriptions of Israel, the Tunisian schoolbooks alone feature an impressive positive description of an Israeli individual.

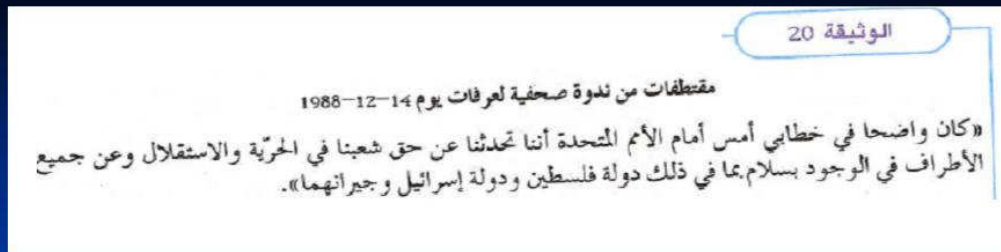
عُرف الشاعر الفلسطيني محمود درويش (1942-...) بانخراطه في المقاومة بالشعر والنشاط السياسي منذ المراهقة وبداية الشباب أي منذ سن الأحلام والعشق والهيام. فلعله لذلك جعل بعض شخصيات شعره تعيش التمزق بين حب المرأة وحب الوطن وما بالك إذا كانت هذه المرأة من قوم العدو. وهذه القصيدة هي إحدى قصائده في «ريتا» الفتاة الإسرائيلية التي لم يهنأ حبيبها بحبها لما بينه وقومها من عداوة والتي تحولت إلى رمز اعتمده الشاعر للتعبير عن مضامين متعددة.

The Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish (1942-2008) was known by his joining the [Palestinian] resistance by [way of his] poetry and political activity since [his] adolescence and the beginning of youth, that is, since the age of dreaming, love and passion. Maybe because of that he made some of his poetic characters live torn between the love of a woman and the love of the homeland, especially so, when that woman is one of the enemy people. This poem is one of his poems about Rita, the Israeli girl whose lover did not enjoy her love because of the enmity between him and her people...



[Literary] Texts, Grade 12 [Humanities], (2006) p. 93

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- Although the general narrative of the Middle East conflict is biased, there is a clear admission in the books that it was the Arab side which started the war in 1947-48 in defiance of the UN partition resolution, the war which brought a severe calamity upon the Palestinians – a fact which is often blurred in the Arab narrative.
- Although Zionism is not recognized as a legitimate national movement of the Jews in modern times, the description of its history is relatively objective, with far less abusive terms in comparison with other Arab or Iranian schoolbooks.
- Although peace with Israel is not openly advocated, the Tunisian books provide a statement by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in favor of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian state, a statement absent from the Palestinian schoolbooks themselves.



Document 20:

Excerpts from a press conference by Arafat on Dec. 14, 1988

“It was clear from my speech at the United Nations yesterday that we talked about the right of our people to freedom and independence and about [the right of] all the parties to exist in peace, including the State of Palestine and the State of Israel and their neighbors.”

History, Grade 12 [Sciences], (2007) p. 267

Conclusion

- The bottom line of this presentation, and the answer to the question posed above is as follows: the Tunisian schoolbooks in their present condition may serve as a model for their Arab and Iranian counterparts, as far as their attitude to the "other" in general – and Jews and the West in particular – is concerned. Their openness to the "other", their emphasis on the values of peace, coexistence, cooperation and tolerance, as well as their utilization of Islamic religious tenets in this context, are all unique and deserve appreciation.
- However, their attitude to the "other" and to peace within the context of the Middle East conflict is clearly incompatible with what they teach with regard to the "other" and to peace in general, which necessitates rectification. The sporadic elements of moderation already expressed in the books in this respect may hopefully lead to the required improvement.