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**Educational Sector, Reforms, Curricula and  
Textbooks in Selected MENA Countries**

***Images of 'Self' and 'Other' in Textbooks of Jordan,  
Egypt, Lebanon and Oman***

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Lebanon and Oman***

**October 2009**

## **Impressum**

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### **Project Coordinator:**

Falk Pingel

Susanne Kröhnert-Othman

### **Project Team:**

Hamed Abdelsamed

Samira Alayan

Atef Botros

Sarhan Dhouib

Jonathan Kriener

Nesrin Shibib

Achim Rohde

Georg-Eckert-Institut  
Für internationale Schulbuchforschung  
Celler Straße 3  
D-38114 Braunschweig



**GEORG-ECKERT-INSTITUT**  
FÜR INTERNATIONALE SCHULBUCHFORSCHUNG



Auswärtiges Amt

## **Preface**

This report is based on a project conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (GEI) from 2006 to 2009, focusing on textbook revision and educational reforms in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The project was funded by the German Foreign Office.

The GEI's principal aim was to contribute to a constructive dialogue between European and Muslim majority countries of the MENA region. For this purpose, a broad network of scholars, curriculum experts and representatives of Ministries of Education (MOE) from both regions was established during the four-year duration of the project. The network examined, assessed and exchanged views on the various education systems.

Of particular interest were the recent educational reform policies in MENA countries, especially the curricula and textbooks of the humanities and social studies disciplines (History, Geography, Civics) that are considered crucial for the development of pupils' identities and worldviews. Focus also fell on the perception of 'Self' and perception of 'Others' promoted at schools and the degree of independent critical thinking fostered among pupils through the curriculum of these disciplines.

Understanding the content and functions of textbook narratives as well as the dynamics of educational reforms implemented in various MENA countries in recent years was seen as a pre-condition for engaging in a constructive and informed debate about whether and to what extent, not only educational policies, but also classical stereotypes in textbooks could be changed. Finally, one of the preconditions of the project work presented here and which became an important driving force of the project later, was the fact that until today there is only little Arab-Arab dialogue or regional research 'from within' on the recent transformation of curricula and textbooks in MENA countries. The building of a network including main actors who present the critical potential of the region was not only necessary to set up the basics for the transregional cultural dialogue, but was also seen by network members as an important opportunity to initiate and establish regional resources and infrastructures for future research on education reforms and textbooks and thereby become equal partners for mutual exchange.



The GEI project played an important role in mediating between different national actors of the MENA region and supported young scholars who worked on topics related to the project focus by offering visiting grants to conduct research at the GEI library.

The GEI library has put together an important collection of History, Civics, Geography and Religion textbooks from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Tunisia, and Morocco. This material base and the expertise accumulated in the course of the project could be built upon in the future by expanding the existing network and research activities to include partners in additional MENA countries.

An Arabic language edited volume of the project's results entitled *Educational Reforms and Textbooks in the Middle East: Changing Perceptions of the Self and the Other* will be published by Dar al-Shurouq in November 2009. An English volume is scheduled for publication in 2010 by Berghahn Books. By publishing in both languages we hope to achieve two specific aims: Firstly, to contribute to an informed discussion on the issues raised in the project among Arab educators and scholars. Secondly, to encourage constructive debates between experts and educationalists from MENA and those from other regions who are interested in education in Arab countries.

But above all, through this project, we hope to have contributed to a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges involved in textbook revision and educational reforms in MENA, particularly with regard to the changing images of the 'Self' and the 'Other' presented in History, Civics and Geography textbooks.

The insights gained from this project will be used as the framework of a *Best Practices and Research Guidebook* for history textbook authors regarding representations of the 'Other' in European and Arab-Islamic textbooks, an initiative launched in 2006 by the Cairo based UNESCO Mediterranean Programme. As a partner in this initiative, the GEI supported the drafting of the guidebook and offered professional advice. Other partners include the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), the Islamic Education Science and Culture Organisation (ISESCO), the Swedish Institute in Alexandria and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation.

Members of the project team participated in several conferences and workshops about the guidebook in Alexandria, Braunschweig, Cairo and Paris. A highlight was the Copenhagen Conference on *Education for Intercultural Understanding and Dialogue* in October 2008. It brought together, as co-sponsoring organisations, UNESCO, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ISESCO, OIC, ALECSO, the Council of Europe, the Alliance of Civilizations, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development and Anna Lindh Foundation.

We are grateful to the German Foreign Office for funding this project and for its willingness to engage in a long-term effort of the kind required to yield sustainable results in this particular context.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years education has become an increasingly debated issue all over the world among experts and an interested public alike. According to human capital theory, education is regarded as a crucial resource contributing to the development of a country in the age of globalization. Therefore building a 'knowledge society' through education becomes a top priority of policy planners in any country. Education is also viewed as an important socialising factor that influences the formation of individuals as enlightened state citizens. In this sense, quality education is understood as a potential antidote against authoritarian governmentality and a pre-condition for the emergence of democracy or 'good governance'. In MENA countries, the existing education systems are generally seen as part of the problem, rather than the solution, of underdevelopment and authoritarianism that are identified as continuities prevailing in the region. Much debate and widespread criticism about education systems of MENA<sup>1</sup> countries have followed the publication of a series of annual reports titled the *Arab Human Development Report* (AHDR) between 2002 and 2006, by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank's MENA development report of 2008 entitled *The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. These reports have pointed to low and unequal standards of and limited access to education in Arab countries as main reasons for their relative poverty. This diagnosis must, of course, be differentiated as between the modernising and well-off oil economies of the Gulf States and those countries of the MENA region which are currently characterised by lack of natural resources, a high fertility rate and accordingly, high pressure on the national labour markets.

In the reports, the line of argumentation has generally favoured economic indicators and quantifiable levels of socio-political 'modernisation' as measuring sticks for the effectiveness of a country's education system. Wide-ranging reforms in three interrelated areas are suggested as a remedy against the perceived educational underdevelopment prevalent in the region: The first challenge is to secure access to education by physically expanding the existing education systems and by opening them to hitherto disenfranchised social groups like girls and children with special needs.

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<sup>1</sup> The report focuses on the Arab countries of the region and excludes Israel.

Secondly, that improvements in the quality of education are promoted through curriculum reforms, the introduction of state-of-the-art didactic approaches to teacher-training schemes and textbooks and the introduction of information technology at schools. The third aspect refers to education system management. Instead of clinging to what is perceived as static and overly centralised public education systems, as has long been the rule in most MENA countries, the reports favour decentralising education system management as a means to improve the accountability of the system, combined with calls to introduce market elements like public-private partnerships and incentives for excellence for both teachers and students.

While there is a general consensus regarding the deficiencies of most education systems in the MENA region, opinions differ widely on which measures need to be taken to improve the situation. Although some educational pragmatists seem to have embraced the management approach towards educational development, others claim that the education reform policies promoted by international donor institutions constitute a neo-colonialist cultural intervention.

Thus, improving access to education by expanding the school infrastructure in countries of the region is seen as a necessity by all relevant actors. But whether this should be achieved through investments in public school systems or by fostering the expansion of private school sectors remains a debated issue. Some argue that seeking to remould education systems in Arab countries along a neo-liberal agenda of privatisation and deregulation principally serves the interests of transnational capital in Middle Eastern markets and thus infringes on the sovereignty of states in the region. Yet, already since the 1980s even the formerly 'socialist' Arab states have opted for a policy of economic and social disengagement, reflecting their integration into a capitalist world system, and private educational sectors have existed in most MENA countries throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often under the tutorship of European institutions like churches. The colonialist context, in which modern school systems were introduced in MENA countries and the economic dependence of many contemporary MENA countries from loans extended by international donor institutions, form important backdrops of contemporary debates regarding foreign interventions in the educational systems of these countries.

Particularly sensible in this context are curriculum reforms and textbook revisions promoted by international donor institutions. Reforms that support active learning and problem solving skills among pupils are regarded as crucial factors for influencing the quality of education in MENA countries, widely criticised for clinging to an outdated tradition of rote learning methods and teacher-oriented didactics that prevent the emergence of pupils who are capable of independent and critical thinking. To some extent, the latter approach reflects the authoritarian governmentality prevalent in countries of the MENA region. Post-colonial state elites of the region have invested large amounts of energy and resources in disseminating normative discourses of cultural authenticity, national identity and loyalty to the state among the populations residing in their territories. Public education systems have served as an important tool in this context. Therefore, promoting active learning and problem solving skills through education contains an implicit political dimension that is not always popular with Middle Eastern state elites, particularly in disciplines like History and Civic Education when it comes to the interpretation of continuities and still prevailing lines of conflict inside the national collective. Civic Education (*at-tarbiya al-madaniyya*) was created as a new school subject as part of the most recent educational reforms in Arab MENA countries and comprises different aspects previously tackled by more classical subjects like Social Studies (*ijtima'iyat*), History (*tarikh*) and Geography (*al-jiughrafiya*). In some cases Social Studies replaces those subjects and in others it is taught alongside those subjects and may be replaced by Patriotic Education (*at-tarbiya al-wataniyye*) in upper school grades of secondary education.

Partly as an effect of the attacks of 9/11, numerous calls have been made in the West to reform not only the didactics but also the contents of curricula and textbooks used in Arab countries, particularly in History as narratives were said to promote mythical transfigurations of the national 'Self' and intolerance towards (Western) 'Others'. It should be mentioned here that drawing symbolic lines of distinction between "us" and "them" is a daily life practice in every society and does not necessarily result in negative perceptions which can be strategically used to depict an enemy. The notion of a "clash of civilisations" however insinuates mutual cultural boundary making between the "West" and the "Muslim World" that results in enmity and hatred.

But both secular nationalists and Islamists in MENA countries highlight what they perceive as dangers to the cultural identity of Arabs and of Muslims through the proposed curriculum reforms and alterations of textbook narratives. Some critical voices have stressed the necessity to nurture local, national and regional approaches to learning rooted in indigenous traditions of knowledge and its generational transmission to preserve the relevance of the education systems for domestic constituencies. While secular nationalists accept the universality of Western development models and merely reject what they see as the economic, political and cultural subjugation of the MENA region under European and American interests, Islamists reject the whole epistemic model of Western secularism and call for an Islamisation of all knowledge to regain what they perceive as the authenticity of Arab-Islamic civilisation.<sup>2</sup> While curricula and textbooks used in countries of the region have been continuously altered by the governments in power, reflecting various and changing political agendas and domestic balances of power, external interventions on the level of contents of curricula and textbooks are quite easily rejected as illegitimate across the whole political spectrum.

Actors in this highly contested terrain are the post-colonial Arab state elites who tend to value education not least of all for its socialising function of producing loyal state citizens willing to submit to centralised and often authoritarian government control. Such approaches were prevalent in countries like Ba'thist Iraq and Nasserist Egypt, both of which played a crucial role in the expansion of education in the region, and are still visible today in these and other countries including Syria, Saudi-Arabia and Jordan. It is thus not altogether surprising that calls for the decentralisation of education system management, is viewed with a degree of scepticism by most state elites in MENA countries. A notable exception to this rule is Lebanon, which is characterised by weak state structures and a tradition of communal autonomy that does not exist in most other MENA countries. In post-civil-war Lebanon of the 1990s, the government reinstated a centralised national curriculum, but schooling practices are widely decentralised, as the school system consists of numerous and semi-autonomous sectors.

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<sup>2</sup> For a poignant discussion, see Mazawi, André Elias (2010), "Naming the Imaginary: 'Building an Arab Knowledge Society' and the Contested Terrain of Educational Reforms for Development", in Osama Abi-Mershed ed., *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World. Legacies and Challenges*. London/New York: Routledge, 201-225. See also Faruqi, Ismael (1982), *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*. Herndon, VA: IIIT.

### Typology reflected in the sample

	<b>Strong state control over textbook narratives</b>	<b>Weak state control over textbook narratives</b>
<b>Liberalised landscape of providers of education</b>	Jordan /Egypt	Lebanon
<b>Centralised landscape of providers of education</b>	Oman	

Egypt and Jordan are presented here as two countries which have been implementing wide-ranging educational reforms in recent years, with considerable support by international donor institutions.

The political Jordanian context is characterised by a constitutional monarchy in which political authority structures focus on the Hashemite King who appoints the members to the council of ministers but also faces challenges by oppositional members of the elected parliament in which part of the opposition today is shaped by members belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Although Egypt nominally is a socialist democratic state with various parties it in fact faces a period of restriction of political freedom since the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. Emergency laws today give the dominant party and the president the power to limit the freedom of movement and association for civil society and act against opposition especially, the Muslim Brotherhood.



The debated issue of communalism and religion in the region is prominently discussed in the case study on Lebanon. With Lebanon we have chosen an example of a parliamentary democracy of a special type – consociationalism – in which high public offices are proportionally reserved for representatives of the different religious communities in the country.

Finally Oman is presented as a latecomer to a rapid process of modernisation that began in countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the 1960s. In the case of Oman it was only after 1971 that educational reforms were started to build a knowledge society which includes all Omani nationals. However, the political system did not change in its basis. Until today it is an absolute monarchy that does not allow the establishment of political parties. The enlightened monarch holds final decision-making control in all sectors of society.

Against this background, our point of departure for the report will be the following questions:

- a. Have the reforms in the four MENA countries resulted in an upgrading of quality of curricula in the humanities? Does the upgrading include a move away from a previous negative stereotyping of ‘Others’ – especially ‘Europe’ and ‘the West’? Is there a different portrayal and recognition of European cultural heritage and mutual transcultural transfer?**
- b. What links can be identified between authoritarian state control of curricula, liberalising markets for educational providers, upgrade in quality of education and changes of the images of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’?**
- c. What, as a consequence of the latest reforms in curricula, can be concluded about options for further textbook revision and transcultural dialogue about education?**

## 2. Educational Sector, Reforms, Curricula and Textbooks in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Oman<sup>3</sup>

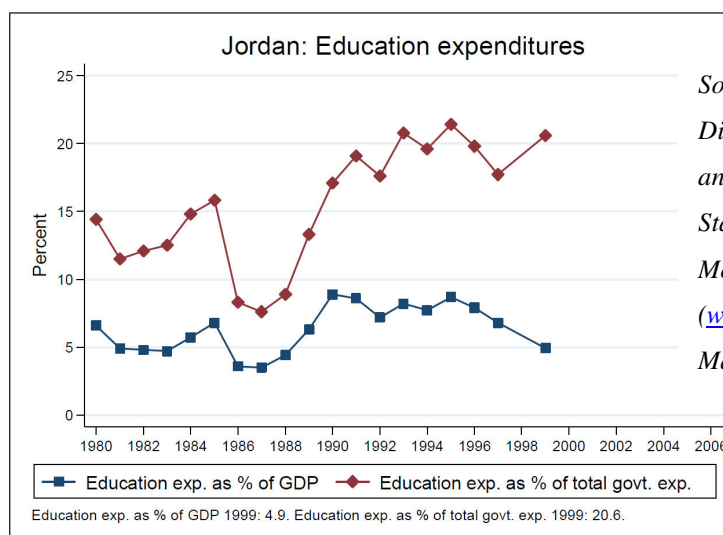
### 2.1 Jordan

#### 2.1.1 Structure of Educational Sector

In creating the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946 under British tutelage, Jordanian monarchs set out to build a modern state and nation. Next to stabilising their power base through alliances with powerful tribes, they created a state bureaucracy and invested in the country's material infrastructure. From the outset, the emphasis was on developing the educational system, including the dissemination of a national narrative for the new country through the school curriculum and textbooks. The narrative that emerged created a nationalist history by constructing a linear progression from the primordial origin of the Arabs to the present day configuration of the Jordanian state.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of consistent development efforts and a series of reforms in education initiated by the Hashemite monarchy, since the late 1930s and supported by international donor institutions particularly since the 1990s, the education system of Jordan is today considered among the most developed and efficient in the region.

Jordan's development from a predominantly agrarian to an industrialised society is attributed to the significant role of education.



Source: UNICEF, Division of Policy and Practice, Statistics and Monitoring Service ([www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org)) May 2009

<sup>3</sup> The country studies are authored by Samira Alayan (Jordan), Achim Rohde (Egypt), Jonathan Kriener (Lebanon) and Sarhan Dhoub (Oman).

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, Betty S. (2001), "Writing the Nation: Textbooks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 21 (1-2): 15-23.

At 8.9 percent, Jordan today has the third lowest illiteracy rate in the Arab world. The primary gross enrolment ratio has increased from 71 percent in 1994 to 98.2 percent in 2006. The transition rate from primary to secondary school during the same period has increased from 63 percent to 97 percent, and transition rates to higher education have varied between 79 to 85 percent of secondary school graduates.<sup>5</sup>

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education. The post-secondary education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR). The MoHESR includes the Higher Education Council and the Accreditation Council. It has outlined a National Strategy for Higher Education for the years 2007-2012.<sup>6</sup> While Jordan has public and private schools, a third sector is run by UNWRA, which provides services to the Palestinian refugee populations in Lebanon, the Westbank, Gaza and Jordan. The private education sector accommodates at least 31 percent of the total school population in the capital city Amman. Private schools hardly exist elsewhere in the country.<sup>7</sup> The heavily taxed private schools demand tuition fees ranging from \$1,000 up to \$7,000 per annum. These are extraordinary sums which only the privileged can afford, when compared to the average family income. The majority send their children to state-run public schools.

UNWRA schools make up 3 percent of the Jordanian school system and have been providing free basic and preparatory<sup>8</sup> education to Palestinian refugees for nearly five decades. The agency has also been offering vocational training courses in eight training centres, two of which are in Jordan, for the past four decades. The agency has established an Institute of Education, with headquarters in Amman, to provide training for the UNRWA teaching staff. A large part of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian origin – 1,9 million out of a total population of 5,6 million are officially

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<sup>5</sup> World Bank (2009), "Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy 11", Project Information Document, World Bank, Washington, DC. See <http://imagebank.worldbank.org>, retrieved 15/09/2009

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Mamlaka al-Urduniyya al-Hashimiyya, Wizarat at-Tarbiyya wa-t-Ta'lim, Idarat al-Manahij wa-l-Kutub al-Madrassiyya* [Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Education, Curriculum and Textbook Branch] (2006), *Al-Itar al-'Am lil Manahij wa-t-Taquim* [General Curriculum and Assessment Framework].

<sup>7</sup> Abbas, M. (2009), "At-Tatawarat at-Tarbawiyya fil-Urdun mundhu al-Khamsinat wa hatta al'an: Marahil at-Tatawarat wa Simataha" [Assessing the Development of the Jordanian Education System from the 1950s Until Today], in Alayan, Dhoub, Rohde eds., *Al-Islah al-Tarbawi fi-sh-Sharq al-Awsat. Al-Dhat wa-l-Akher fil Manahij al-Madrassiyya* [Educational Reform in the Middle East. 'Self' and 'Other' in the School Curriculum]. Amman/Ramallah: Dar ash-Shuruq.

<sup>8</sup> Preparatory education here means the lower secondary level from Grade 7 to 10.

registered as refugees.<sup>9</sup> Other Jordanians of Palestinian origin are not registered as refugees. Thus, the total number of Jordanians of Palestinian origin residing in the country remains unknown. But not all Palestinian refugee children in Jordan attend UNRWA schools. As Palestinians have been integrated into Jordanian society, most refugee children have access to government schools. However, the Jordanian state does not provide exact data concerning these issues, indicating its political sensitivity. There are important differences between the three sectors mentioned, regarding budgets, equipment, class sizes, etc. Thus, most UNRWA schools run on more than a single shift. At least 83 percent of UNRWA elementary schools and 62 percent of UNRWA preparatory schools operate on full double shifts.

The educational system consists of a two-year cycle of pre-school education, followed by 10 years of compulsory basic education and two years of secondary academic or vocational education. After this pupils must pass a standardised nation-wide exam (General Certificate of Secondary Education Exam, (*Tawjihi*) to continue higher education. In the basic education level, standardised textbooks are issued and distributed by the MoE. In secondary schools, pupils follow a core curriculum consisting of nine mandatory subjects: Arabic, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Computer Studies, Earth Science (Geography), Chemistry, Biology and Physics. Islamic studies are also mandatory for all, except Christian students. The secondary education level consists of two years study for pupils aged 16 to 18 who have completed the basic cycle (10 years) and comprises a general (academic) and a vocational track. The academic track qualifies pupils to pass the *Tawjihi* exams and enter university. The vocational or technical track qualifies pupils to continue higher education in community colleges or technical universities. They can also directly enter the labour market, which offers vocational training and apprenticeship schemes. Public schools are free, and schooling is compulsory until the age of 15. More than half of the Jordanian population is below the age of 30.

Education system management is centralised under the MoE which is made up of various boards and commissions including the general Board of Trustees; the Board of Education; the Planning Commission; the Department of Inspection, Control and Quality Assurance; the Secretariat of the Jordanian National Commission for Education, Culture and Science; and the Office of the Minister.

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<sup>9</sup> UNRWA population statistics, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/index.html>. Retrieved 30/09/2009.

The school administration (including finances) is divided into seven regional departments while the department for educational and technical affairs is divided into 10 regional departments.

### **2.1.2 Educational Reforms**

The Jordanian education system developed in several stages. During the first stage (1921- 1950), the judicial and material groundwork was laid. A law introduced in 1952 decreed that education is a human right of every citizen, without discrimination. Despite the stated aim of the education system to contribute to the formation of educated and loyal state citizens instilled with religious and national values as well as openness towards the world, it should be noted that since the beginning of formal education in Jordan and even in the 1960s there was no evidence of what could be called a Jordanian philosophy of education. This could indicate the complexity of the Jordanian state and its nation-building efforts and the initial weakness of Jordanian nationalism, as promoted by the monarchy, which should have served as a basis for an elaborate philosophy of education. Jordan's long enduring state of dependency from British colonialists further impeded the formulation of a national philosophy of education.<sup>10</sup>

An elaborate national educational philosophy was first defined during the second stage (1951-1977) which focused on physically expanding the school system in the primary and secondary levels, teacher-training, and curriculum and textbook development for all levels with a particular focus on the sciences. Although important improvements in the curriculum were made during this period, numerous shortcomings remained. These included weak links between the curriculum and educational goals for each stage of education and a lack of correlation between the books and the curriculum of the various grades; a weak association between the approaches used and the needs of the community; the inadequacy of the curriculum to keep up with the accelerated revolution of knowledge and technology; and focusing on the narrative of facts and knowledge for memorising and a neglect of skills

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<sup>10</sup> Abbas, Muhammad (2009), "*At-Tatawarat at-Tarbawiyya fil-Urdun mundhu al-Khamsinat wa hatta al'an: Marahil at-Tatawarat wa Simataha*" [Assessing the Development of the Jordanian Education System from the 1950s Until Today], in Alayan, Dhoub, Rohde eds., *Al-Islah al-Tarbawi fi-sh-Sharq al-Awsat*.

training. Last not least a lack of focus on the development of higher-order thinking skills and scientific methods to resolve problems.<sup>11</sup>

The third stage (1978-1986) experienced a dramatic material expansion, but quality remained mediocre. In a speech in 1980, King Hussein emphasised the need to work on the development of the educational system in terms of content and objectives. Efforts in this direction were intensified during the fourth stage (1987-2003) when reforms were implemented in the areas of educational policy, education system structure, curricula and textbooks, didactics, school buildings and equipment, teacher-training, educational planning, research and development, co-operation with universities, pre-school education, literacy and adult education, educational discipline, computer education, and educational management. These efforts were supervised and financially supported by international donor institutions. This process was accelerated under King Abdullah II, who aims to turn Jordan into a regional technology centre and an active player in the global economy. The current fifth stage emphasises the need to integrate the various levels and sectors of the education system into a coherent system and use education as a means to transform Jordan into a knowledge economy. Documents published by the MoE on these aspects include the 'Jordan Vision 2020' and the '2002 Vision Forum for the Future of Education'.<sup>12</sup>

In July 2003, the government launched an ambitious programme entitled 'Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy Programme' (ERfKE), supported and supervised by numerous international donors, including the World Bank. The goal of the programme is to re-orient educational policies and programmes in line with the needs of a knowledge-based economy, improve the physical learning environment in schools and promote early childhood education. The first phase of the programme ended in June 2009. The second phase (from 2009 to 2015) is aimed at strengthening and institutionalising the reforms introduced under ERfKE, with a particular focus on school level implementation and teacher quality. It aims to strengthen the institutional capacity of the MoE in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation systems; and improve the employment, utilisation and professional development of teachers.

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<sup>12</sup> World Bank (2009), "Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy 11", Project Information Document, World Bank, Washington, DC. See <http://imagebank.worldbank.org>, retrieved 15/09/2009.

The programme also aims to fine-tune the curriculum and student assessment to ensure alignment with the demands of a knowledge-based economy.<sup>13</sup>

Discourses on economic development and education reforms in the Arab region, including Jordan, reflect competing national, regional and geopolitical agendas of the various relevant actors. The struggle over educational reforms for development can be described as a struggle over the naming of the social transformations that the Jordanian society is undergoing and it includes leftist, liberal, culturalist, nationalist and Islamist voices. This struggle is not only over a particular economic order, but also over a political power structure that would legitimise and sustain it.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the current Jordanian educational policies turn the country into a showcase for the kind of agenda promoted by international donor institutions. No doubt, education in Jordan has witnessed a remarkable development in all sectors and aspects of the system, both in terms of quality and quantity.<sup>15</sup> To an important degree, this is the result of the priority given by the monarchy to education throughout the country's history. To this day, the Hashemite rulers perceive education as a means to modernise Jordanian society and develop the economy.

Jordan's educational sector has made great strides within a few decades – beginning with the push for universal access to compulsory education, from the early 1950s to early 1970s, and the legislation concerning basic education that supported these moves. Thus, the MoE is obliged to provide education in any location where there is a minimum number of 10 children between ages six and 16. Efforts to expand the maximum access to basic education were coupled with parallel efforts to diversify secondary education, particularly during the early 1970s until the mid-1980s. Since the early 1990s the major education reforms, implemented under the umbrella of project loans by international donors, have focused on improvements on three fronts: quality of education, education system management and pupils' results. Attempts are being made to increase the relevance of basic, secondary and professional education for the social and economic needs of the country, as defined by the government.

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] (2003), *The Arab Human Development Report: Building a Knowledge Society*. New-York: UNDP.

<sup>14</sup> Mazawi, Andre Elias. (2009). "Naming the Imaginary. 'Building an Arab Knowledge Society' and the Contested Terrain of Educational Reforms for Development", in Osama Abi-Mershed ed., *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World. Legacies and Challenges*. London/New York: Routledge, 201-225.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Tal, Ahmad (1978), *Al-Dhuruf al-Siyasiyya wal-Iqtisadiyya wal-Ijtima'iyya alati Atharat fi Tatawur at-Tarbiyya wa-t-Ta'lim fil-Urdun [Political, Economic and Social Factors that Influenced the development of Jordanian Education]*. Aman: Wizarat ath-Thaqafa wa-sh-Shabab.

The general aim is to transform the education system from a traditional one that relies on invocation, to an effective system which emphasises active learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.<sup>16</sup> It remains to be seen, to what extent this agenda is actually going to be implemented, and what impact such reforms will have in the longer run.

In sum, the development of education in Jordan over the various stages in terms of quantity and quality is remarkable in the MENA region. During its early stages it comprised only a limited number of pupils, schools and teachers and had only a modest budget. Today, it provides sufficient schools and teachers to accommodate all students who are at the age of learning. A formerly mostly illiterate society now boasts the lowest illiteracy rate in the Arab world. In its early stages, there was no clearly defined educational philosophy, and the textbooks were ideologically laden and teacher-oriented. The curricula and textbooks did not consider concepts such as human rights and environmental protection, public health and democracy, while confirming what is termed the national heritage and values of Jordanian society. Today's educational reforms aim at developing curricula and textbooks that foster active learning and critical thinking skills. They also aim at introducing new roles for pupils, teachers and supervisors. Not least of all, information technology is to be systematically integrated into classroom teaching. The current curriculum aims to encourage teachers to use ICT tools to broaden and deepen pupils' experience to use web resources that are included in textbooks of several subjects.

### **2.1.3 Recent Curriculum Developments**

In 2003, Jordan began a four-year process of rewriting the curriculum for basic and secondary education. The new curriculum set new standards for pupils' achievements. Schools would use the curriculum as the foundation for teaching and learning programmes to meet the needs of pupils. Defining a curriculum framework that identified the general objectives of education and specific objectives for each grade and discipline was the first step in the process of curriculum revision. Curriculum development in Jordan officially follows the principle of equal

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<sup>16</sup> World Bank (2009), "Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy 11", Project Information Document, World Bank, Washington, DC. See <http://imagebank.worldbank.org>, retrieved 15/09/2009.



opportunities in education and aims to introduce new scientific knowledge in multiple areas. At the same time, the curriculum is defined as being rooted in the idea of Arab nationalism. After the adoption of the new curriculum, it was translated into textbooks by special committees which included teachers, administrators and experts from both the MoE and Jordanian universities. As a result of this process a new curriculum and a new generation of textbooks have been developed during the past 15 years.<sup>17</sup>

In line with an outcomes-oriented curriculum, teachers are called upon to demonstrate the qualities of innovation that they want their pupils to develop. The new curriculum makes teachers more responsible for demonstrating creativity and variety in their teaching. Teachers will be required to help pupils reach the outcomes, but they will have more freedom to select resources and vary the order in which they introduce topics. They will have more responsibility to facilitate learning rather than being the source of knowledge, and they will need to give greater consideration to the individual learning needs of every pupil. If pupils are learning in more creative ways, there will need to be different ways for determining whether they have been successful. The new curriculum will provide teachers with more diverse opportunities to assess learning achievements. Tests and examinations will continue to be useful, but pupils will need to be credited for teamwork, presentations, research and other innovative skills that they acquire. The new curriculum is being written by teams of educators from across the country, instead of individual authors within or commissioned by the MoE. These teams include teachers and supervisors from school districts who are familiar with classroom realities. The current stage of education reforms thus includes a certain opening of the system to include more stakeholders in the process. The introduction of such participatory elements is meant to improve both the quality and the legitimacy of the curriculum and thus guarantee its implementation on the ground.

At the same time, the whole process of curriculum and textbook development remains under firm control of the MoE, which is responsible for producing all curricula and textbooks for all the subjects.

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<sup>17</sup> Jaradat, Izzat a.o. (1996), *Al-Kitab al-Sanawi [Yearbook]*. Amman: Al-Mudiriyya al-'Ama lil-Buhuth wa-d-Dirassat at-Tarbawiyya [General Directorate of Educational Research].

The Directorate of Curricula and Textbooks, in the MoE, directs all the processes related to designing, implementing and evaluating the curricula and textbooks. The MoE funds the production, supported by loans from international donor institutions. The approval and authorisation of textbook guides is the responsibility of the Board of Education within the MoE. Among the members of this board are members of parliament, former ministers, senior experts from the private school sector as well as decision makers from different sectors.<sup>18</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Textbook Analysis**

The following section offers an analysis of 17 Jordanian textbooks, from Grade 7 to 12 published between 2001 and 2008. There are seven History, four Civics, and six Geography books. The textbooks present a Jordanian national narrative that promotes multiple identifications of its citizens. On the one hand, Jordan is presented as an integral part of the Arab and Islamic nation. But on the other, Jordan's legitimacy as a separate Hashemite state is emphasised by exclusively focusing on the local identity of Jordanians and their distinctiveness compared to other Arabs.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Civics textbooks focus on a variety of issues from a patriotic inward looking perspective, such as national (Jordanian) independence, state sovereignty, democracy in Jordan, citizen's rights and freedoms laid down in the Jordanian constitution, including the rights of women and children. Jordanian textbooks present Jordan as a civilised and democratic country that respects human rights. A notable effort is made to highlight the issue of social equality by emphasising the role of the Ministry of Social Development, and Islamic values by pointing to the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places. Further emphasis is placed on the structure of the Jordanian economy, and on the Ministry of Agriculture, thus indicating the enduring importance of the agricultural sector in the Jordanian economy. The textbooks also introduce the various administrative regions of Jordan and their geographical features, the natural resources, agriculture and industries, and the problem of water supplies.

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<sup>18</sup> *Al-Mamlaka al-Urduniyya al-Hashimiyya, Wizarat at-Tarbiyya wa-t-Ta'lim, Idarat al-Manahij wa-l-Kutub al-Madrassiyya* [Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Education, Curriculum and Textbook Branch] (2006), *Al-Itar al-'Am lil Manahij wa-t-Taquim* [General Curriculum and Assessment Framework].

<sup>19</sup> Nasser, Raid M.( 2005). *Palestinian Identity in Jordan and Israel, the Necessary 'Other' in the Making of a Nation*. London/New York: Routledge

Textbook narratives also focus on a variety of topics from Jordan's cultural history, such as the history of important cities in Jordan (Amman, Karak, Salt, Um al Jamal, Aqaba, Irbid, etc). The textbooks breathe a spirit of local patriotism and loyalty to the Hashemite family, which is presented to have been at the root of Jordan's progress while guarding its local traditions.

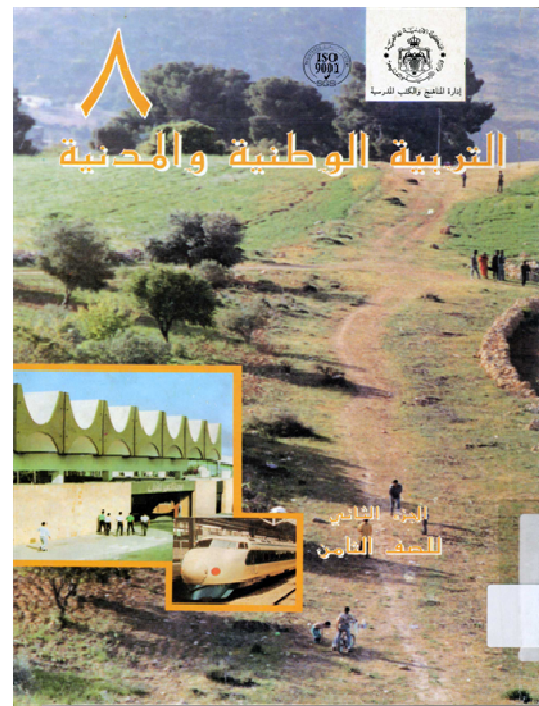
The Civics textbooks are notably inward looking and do not often include representations of external 'Others', if these are not directly related to Jordanian history. The textbooks do include accounts of foreign (British) interventions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of Jordan's struggle for independence. These accounts are factual in style. Implicit discussions of external 'Others' are visible in those chapters in textbooks dealing with national security and world peace. Those seem to draw a line of distinction against 'generalised' enemies of peace – be they inside or outside the country – to underpin the peaceful 'nature' of the Jordanian self.



*A History Textbook for Grade 10 reflecting the patronage of the Royalty over the textbooks*

Jordanian History textbooks present an equally inward looking narrative that emphasises the different layers of identity forming the legitimacy basis of the Hashemite kingdom. The self-image constructed here is centred on Jordan's Arab and Islamic identity, and at the same time emphasises local patriotism as defined by the Hashemites. Indeed, the MoE openly declares that it focuses on the application of general principles and concepts and trends that together form and constitute the philosophy of education.

This philosophy is determined by four major frames: Islam and Arabism, the Great Arab Revolt (an Arab nationalist rebellion against Ottoman rule initiated in 1916 by the founder of modern Jordan, Sharif Hussein Bin Ali, with the aim of establishing a unified Arab state all over the Arab peninsula, which was initially supported and later let down by the British and French colonial powers), and Jordanian national history. The textbooks include recognition of the officially registered political parties, civil society organisations, and their professional, social, and political agendas as well as recourses to world civilisation. The focus on world civilisation clearly enjoys little priority compared to those elements that focus on Arab-Islamic and local Jordanian history.<sup>20</sup> In general, Jordan is presented as an Islamic country; Islam forms a great part of the national identity. The Hashemite family and King Abdullah II are highlighted as proof of Jordan's Islamic credentials (the Hashemite family traces its origins back to the Prophet Muhammad's own family) and at the same time as proof of it being a peace-loving country without enemies.



*Cover of Jordanian Grade 8 textbook for Patriotic and Civic Education boasting symbols of technical modernity and mobility against the background of a rural landscape*

At the same time, there are clear references, at least in the Civics textbooks, to values and political principles such as democracy and state independence, human and civil rights, peaceful coexistence in the region, gender equality, all in a spirit of Jordanian patriotism. The textbook narratives thus mirror a specifically Jordanian negotiation between the local and the global, between emphasising local or regional cultural traditions and modernist elements that present Jordan as being in line with standards set by the international community in terms of good governance and democratic values.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, Betty S. (2001), "Writing the Nation: Textbooks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 21 (1-2): 15-23.

Yet, a closer look into Jordanian textbooks shows that they contain only limited and scattered references to the diversity of Jordanian society, like rural Bedouins versus urban culture, Palestinian refugees, the Circassian, Chechen and Christian minorities. Gender issues are mostly treated in Civic textbooks regarding contemporary life. While conceding a certain degree of discrimination against women, particularly in the more traditional layers of society, women are nevertheless presented as being worthy of equal rights. They are said to enjoy the freedom to take up paid employment outside the home, have access to higher education, etc.

At the same time, the textbook presents Jordan as a country rooted in traditional Islamic values. Women are rarely represented in the History textbooks, which mainly present the deeds of important men. In contrast, women are more prominently represented in Civics textbooks focusing on modern and contemporary Jordan. Such textbooks emphasise that in accordance with Islam, women in Jordan have the right to work, education and property. Arguably, there is a certain implicit message conveyed through the Jordanian textbooks: While contemporary women are presented to have access to education and wage labour, they are still not equal members of the Jordanian nation that is constituted through the deeds of important men. In addition, even the textbooks dealing with contemporary Jordan present women as equal to men mainly in the area of education (showing women as teachers and students), but otherwise they are still mostly mentioned in the context of family roles as mothers and sisters, or as working in menial sectors such as the textile industry.

Jordanian textbooks contain general accounts of European and world history in the medieval and modern eras, including the European Renaissance, religious reform movements in the early modern era, the age of discoveries and the emergence of nation states in Spain, England and France. They also mention the revolutions that took place in the West and their impact on the world in triggering liberation and independence movements in other countries, but without naming specific examples. Representations of Europe are ambivalent. On the one hand, there are notably positive accounts of Europe's civilisational, economic and scientific achievements. Greek philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle, and European thinkers and contributors to modern philosophy like Descartes and Kant are positively referred to, not without mentioning that Arab and Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina and

Ibn Rushd were at the root of the European Renaissance and crucial for the emergence of modern science. At the same time, Europe is presented as colonialist and intrusive. The textbooks contain elaborate accounts of how the Muslim world had faced numerous Crusades over a period of 200 years, and how the greed of Europe in the Levant supplemented colonialism. The textbooks mention the colonisation of Jordan until its independence.

Notably, there is no reference to external 'Others' as enemies in the textbooks dealing with the contemporary world. These textbooks rather seem to make a conscious effort to use a language of peace and mutual respect. Thus American history is referred to by mentioning the American Revolution and independence from Britain. But these accounts are short, contain only general information and fail to discuss other aspects of US history and its contemporary role in the world. In sum, these references to the European or American 'Other' serve mainly to construct a certain Jordanian or Arab-Islamic self image: The textbooks contain images of an Islamic civilisation that is marked by its openness to the world, as part of a plurality of civilisations that exert mutual influences on one another. Little or no information can be found on countries like the US, China, Russia, etc. European history is mentioned only insofar as it relates to the crusaders, the American and French revolutions, the industrial revolution and Napoleon. The textbooks highlight the legacy of colonialism and the Arab struggle for independence. Jordan is presented as part of a wider Arab homeland, but the focus is clearly on Jordanian patriotism. Internal 'Others' like Palestinian refugees or the great numbers of Iraqi refugees who immigrated to Jordan after 2003 are not accounted for in the textbooks.

A notable void in Jordanian textbooks is Israel, indicating its status as the most relevant external 'Other' in the Arab Middle East. The history textbooks do not mention the background of Jordan's current relationship with Israel at all. Accounts of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Jordanian textbooks are limited to highlighting Jordanian efforts to protect Jerusalem and the Palestinian lands. Israel is presented in the textbooks as an occupier and an aggressor, but only very limited information is given regarding the conflict like short accounts of the Zionist movement in Palestine and the various Arab-Israeli wars, written from an Arab nationalist perspective.

However strongly these accounts emphasise the heroism of the Arab armies and in particular the Jordanian one in the course of these events, the textbooks notably refrain from open incitement and are written in a factual style. The textbooks fail to discuss many events in history and they hardly present any background information necessary to understand the historical facts mentioned.

In fact, the not always harmonious history and nature of Jordanian-Palestinian relations over the years and the fact that a large part of Jordanian citizens are of Palestinian origin, turn Palestinians into a kind of internal 'Other', while at the same time Jordan's recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of Palestinian national aspirations in 1988 turned them into external 'Others'. Arguably, Palestinians occupy a third position of an 'Other' who is neither completely internal nor external, thus threatening the very stability of the concept of nationhood as promoted by the Hashemite monarchy. But these issues are never explicitly discussed in the textbooks, indicating their political sensitivity in the eyes of the Hashemite monarchy.

Regarding the didactical quality of Jordanian textbooks, the texts are very short and contain only general information on any given subject. To gain any meaningful information on the issues discussed in the textbooks, pupils would need to access additional sources, like school libraries or the Internet. The exercises and questions attached to the various sections contain a mix of repetitive and open questions and thus foster active learning attitudes to some degree. Yet, given the shortness of the textbook narratives and the scarcity of explicit references in the textbooks to other sources of information to be used by pupils, it remains unclear to what extent pupils are actually asked to develop active learning skills regarding the disciplines under scrutiny here. These findings suggest that despite declarations to the contrary to be found in the curriculum framework and in official educational policy statements, the focus in the learning process is still very much on the teacher as the provider of normative knowledge and not the pupils as independent and critical thinkers, at least in disciplines like History and Civics. This state of affairs corresponds with the character of the Jordanian monarchy, which despite some seemingly democratic elements (like a parliament) ultimately remains an authoritarian system.

Active learning and independent thinking skills might be desired with regard to the sciences. But when it comes to the politically more sensitive humanities and social studies disciplines, the government seems to feel the need to rely on normative discourses and passive learning methods, however more subtle these narratives might be structured when compared to textbooks issued in previous decades.

### **2.1.5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

In the textbooks analysed in the previous section, the Hashemite monarchy presents itself as the spearhead of a popular movement towards independence and modernisation, as the legitimate leader of the people. Their legitimacy is based on the Hashemite family's descent from the Prophet and their leadership in the Arab revolt. Compared to the contemporary History and Civics textbooks analysed here, those issued in the 1950s were more heavily laden with ideological Pan-Arab content; the Great Arab Revolt was represented even more prominently than in the ones used nowadays, and it was presented as a formative event not only for the Hashemite family and Jordan, but also for Arab history as a whole. To legitimise their rule over this newly founded country, the Hashemites wove a national narrative that incorporated the vocabulary of 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalism and referred to traditional allegiances recognisable to Jordan's population. In the course of the current stage of educational reforms, the textbooks issued contain narratives that also include openings to global history and contemporary global issues to some degree.<sup>21</sup> However, the priority still clearly rests on forming loyal Jordanian state citizens who are imbued with a belief in the legitimacy of the monarchy. Yet, it is unclear how relevant such textbooks are for the formation of pupils' worldviews. After all, despite its authoritarianism, Jordan is not an isolated country, and youths have access to the Internet and to independent media outlets. In order to gain a more lasting legitimacy, the monarchy should allow for a genuine political opening. Such changes would have to be reflected also on the level of curriculum and textbook development, namely by allowing for a greater degree of diversity and a more explicit discussion of relevant internal and external 'Others' in the History and Civics textbooks. Furthermore, there should be a genuine introduction of learner-oriented didactical approaches and incentives for independent critical thinking in disciplines such as History and Civics.

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<sup>21</sup> Anderson, Betty S. (2001), "Writing the Nation: Textbooks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 21 (1-2): 15-23.



Such textbooks would more adequately reflect the life experiences of Jordanian pupils and make them more relevant for shaping their worldviews. Despite the progress Jordan achieved in building one of the most efficient education systems in the MENA region, the curriculum still reflects a notably conservative approach to learning. Introducing information technology in itself is not enough to foster active learning skills and independent thinking among pupils.

## **2.2 Egypt**

### **2.2.1 Structure of Educational Sector**

The evolution of a formal Egyptian education system based on Western curricular models dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Muhammad ‘Ali began rebuilding the Egyptian state, military and economy along European lines (1811-49). His main aim was to train qualified cadres of state administrators and army officers as well as to build up a skilled workforce for the evolving modern industrialised sector of the Egyptian economy. For this purpose, the traditional system of *kuttab* schools and religious institutions of higher learning such as the university of Al-Azhar were gradually sidelined by a highly centralised and hierarchical state-run education system; starting with institutions of higher learning and later free elementary and secondary schools.<sup>22</sup> However, during the British occupation (1882-1919), these plans were temporarily halted and free public education was abolished. Only foreign and missionary private schools offered a modern quality education to a privileged and Europeanised minority serving in the British administration. Under the constitutional monarchy (1922-53) the right to free public education was inscribed in the constitution. Compulsory primary education was introduced in the 1930s, but limited resources hampered the development of the public education system, while private schools continued to thrive.

Despite the dramatic expansion of the public education system since the overthrow of the monarchy by the Free Officers’ Movement in 1952, the segmentation of the school system and the hierarchical and centralised character of the state’s educational

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<sup>22</sup> Al-Sayyid, Alaf Lutfi (1984), *Egypt in the Rein of Muhammad Ali*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press; Sayed, Fatma H. (2006), *Transforming Education in Egypt. Western Influence and Domestic Policy Reform*. Cairo & New York: The American University of Cairo Press.

policies dating back to those formative years continue to prevail. After a second phase of rapid expansion since the 1990s, the Egyptian education system is now the largest in the MENA region. Some 17 million pupils are enrolled in about 40,000 schools. As of 2007, 83 percent of all pupils studied in state-run public schools which teach the national curriculum devised by the MoE. Most pupils are enrolled at Arabic language schools, but a small number attend so-called experimental language schools where Science and Maths are taught in English, pointing to the growing need of English language proficiency in today's labour market.

In 2007, private schools were attended by 7,2 percent of all pupils. Some private schools mainly follow the national curriculum, but offer better learning conditions in terms of class size, equipment and qualified teaching personnel who receive higher salaries than those in public schools. Other private schools are sponsored by foreign institutions and teach most classes in English, French, or German. Together with the national curriculum, these schools also offer the possibility of attaining the American High school diploma, the French baccalauréat or the German Abitur, etc. The high tuition fees turn these schools into elitist institutions catering to the privileged few.

About 10 percent of all students are enrolled in the semi-autonomous religious school sector run by the Supreme Council of the Al-Azhar Institution.<sup>23</sup> These schools receive government funding but operate partly along the national curriculum, placing a high emphasis on religious education. Graduates of Al-Azhar secondary schools can continue higher education but only at Al-Azhar University.<sup>24</sup> A growing number of independent Islamist schools have sprung up and represented at least 7 percent of all private schools in 1999. These are often run by people associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Like all private schools, they are subject to supervision by the MoE, but reportedly cultivate an Islamist counter-culture and are thus closely scrutinised and at times suppressed by the state.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education (2007), *National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt, 2007/08 – 2011/12*. Cairo, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Zeghal, Malika (2007), "The 'Recentering' of Religious Knowledge and Discourse: the Case of al-Azhar in Twentieth Century Egypt", in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman eds., *Schooling Islam. The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 107-130.

<sup>25</sup> Herera, Linda (2006), "Islamization and Education: Between Politics, Profit, and Pluralism", in Linda Herera and Carlos Alberto Torres eds., *Cultures of Arab Schooling. Critical Ethnographies from Egypt*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 25-52; see also Herera (2003), "Islamization and Education in Egypt: Between Politics, Culture, and the Market", in John L. Esposito and François Burgat eds., *Modernizing Islam. Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*. London / New Brunswick: Hurst / Rutgers Univ. Press, 167-192; Starret, Gregory (1998), *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics and Religious Transformation in Egypt*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

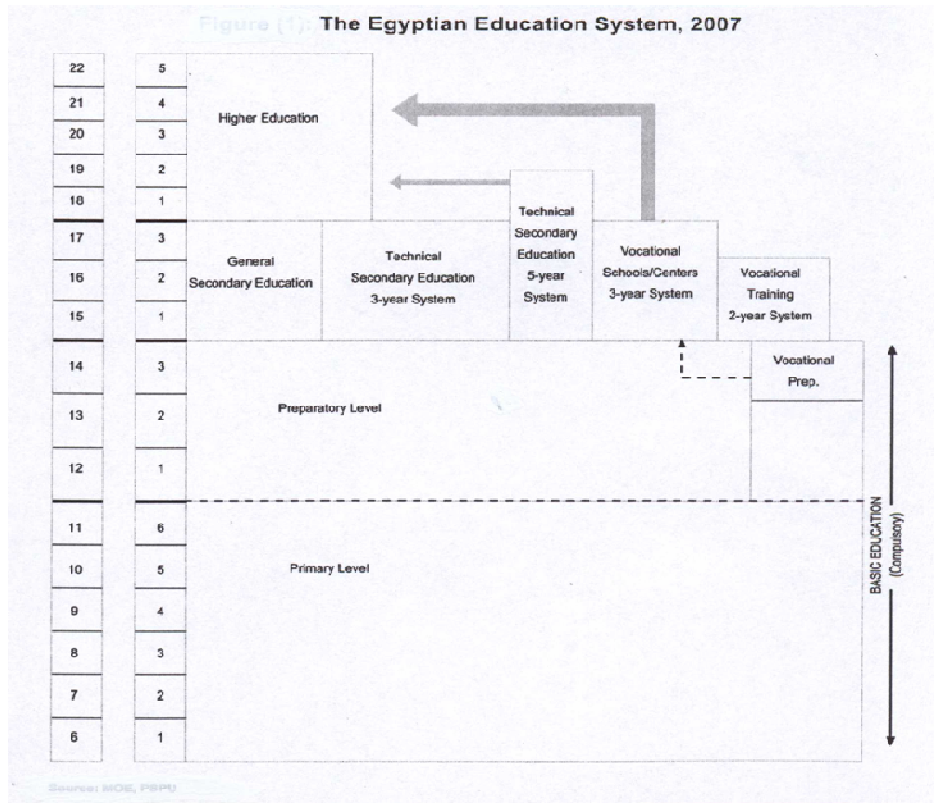
Another development in private schooling is the number of private tutoring centres that have sprung up since the 1990s despite being officially prohibited by the MoE. Learners seek additional training at the centres to improve school grades in the hope of ensuring access to institutions of higher education. Partly a consequence of the poor quality of many public schools in terms of classroom size and educational facilities, private tutoring centres are also an additional source of income for chronically underpaid teachers. The MoE regards the sector with disdain because it draws both financial and human resources away from the formal education system. But as long as Egypt does not manage to improve the quality of schooling, it will hardly convince parents to rely less on private tutoring.<sup>26</sup>

Pre-primary education is not part of the formal education system and several actors are involved in this sector. The school system is divided into three levels: six years of primary school, followed by three years of preparatory, or lower secondary, school. These two levels are termed basic education and are compulsory.

Depending on success in the countrywide standardised exams at the end of basic education, pupils may continue with secondary education, which consists of between three and five years and is divided into several tracks – general secondary, technical secondary and vocational schools subdivided into three types: industrial, commercial and agricultural (see figure 1).

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<sup>26</sup> Sayed (2006), *Transforming Education in Egypt*, 71-73.



**Figure 1:** Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education (2007), *National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt, 2007/08 – 20011/12*. Cairo, 30.

### 2.2.2 Educational Reforms

A number of persistent trends have characterised debates about educational reforms since the inception of the modern Egyptian school system. In general terms, the public school system is characterised by a lack of school buildings with double-shifts not uncommon to this day, overcrowded classrooms (see figure 2), a lack of educational facilities like libraries and equipment and a large bureaucratic apparatus in the MoE. The hierarchical and over-bureaucratic school administration has often been criticised as static and incapable of effectively managing the education system. Egyptian state elites have long treated education as an instrument to impose their respective political agenda, rather than empowering people to actively participate in the shaping of the education system. In addition, the successful implementation of the curriculum on the ground is negatively influenced by a poor quality of teacher-training institutions.

**Table (32) Average Class Size, 2005/06, and % Change from 2001/02, by Level of Education**

Level of Education	Class Size, 2005/ 06			% Change From 2001/02		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
KG	30.8	27.7	29.8	0.3	-3.9	-0.9
Primary	43.8	33.5	42.8	2.4	-2.5	1.8
Prep	38.9	29.2	38.3	-5.3	-3.6	-5.2
Gen. Sec.	39.8	27.9	38.5	-2.5	-7.0	-2.9
Tech. Sec.	38.5	23.03	38.5	0.3	1.2	0.2

**Figure 2:** Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education (2007), *National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt, 2007/08 – 20011/12*. Cairo, 45.

Curricula are considered to be based on rote learning, do not encourage critical thinking and active learning and often criticised for failing to adequately qualify learners for the needs of the labour market.<sup>27</sup>

After the revolution of 1952, free quality education was open to all and from pre-school to doctoral level. The right to free education (for boys and girls) across the board is guaranteed by law and constitutes an important part of the regime's legitimacy dating back to its 'socialist' phase. But limited economic resources and a constant state of political instability and wars meant that implementation lagged far behind, the quality of schooling remained wanting and drop-out rates high, most notably in the rural areas and in disadvantaged urban environments.

During the 1990s, when the Egyptian state was caught in a violent standoff with militant Islamists, whose strongholds were mostly located in marginalised regions and cities in Upper Egypt and in densely populated urban slums, educational reform became part of the regime's domestic security policy and included investments to expand the formal school system in such areas where the state's influence had hitherto been weak.

<sup>27</sup> Herera, Linda and Carlos Alberto Torres eds. (2006), *Cultures of Arab Schooling. Critical Ethnographies from Egypt*, Albany. State University of New York Press.

It is commonly understood that religious revivalist movements in the Middle East derive their appeal, to an important degree, from the fact that they express a form of social protest against secular post-colonial state elites perceived by many as having failed to deliver the goods on which their legitimacy rests.

In an effort to re-establish state authority and enhance its legitimacy, the state accompanied violent repression of militant Islamists with infrastructural development programmes, not least of all in the educational field. Notable efforts were made to expand and improve the educational infrastructure in marginalised areas, often in co-operation with international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

According to the MoE, the government built about 14,000 new schools between 1992 and 2006. Such activities were supported by sizable funding of foreign donor institutions. Their involvement in the educational reforms, initiated in the 1990s, signalled the gradual disengagement of the MoE from its own 'socialist' past as it partly adopted neo-liberal development policy strategies devised by USAID, the Worldbank, etc. International donors see investment in education as a means to increase productivity, national income, and socio-economic mobility, which would eventually lead to socio-economic transformation and ultimately democratisation. Part and parcel of this strategy is a call for more market and less state, which in the educational field translates into calls for a decentralisation of education, more autonomy and accountability for individual schools and more choice for parents. At the same time the efficiency of public education is viewed with a degree of scepticism and private contributions to education, through tuition fees or public-private partnerships, are being encouraged.

Egypt partly adopted such strategies in the 1990s, for instance, by introducing the above mentioned experimental language schools which are co-sponsored through tuition fees and thus have more funds at their disposal than regular public schools, even while forming part of the public school system. Such policies have been criticised as resulting in a fragmentation of the public school system into a high quality education sector for those who can afford tuition fees and low quality for those who can't – the majority of the population, thereby intensifying the rifts or differences and the potential for social strife.

This criticism draws its political relevance from the fact that the right to free education for all inscribed in the constitution has never been abolished, and the achievement of social justice continues to be a high priority of official Egyptian educational policies.

Regarding the management of the education system, the MoE has resisted calls to decentralise (or democratise) the education system and grant more autonomy to the regional administrations and local schools. Although it has paid lip service to this agenda, the MoE in fact has to this day not altered its centralised and hierarchical way of administering the system. In part, these ambivalent and partly contradictory Egyptian educational policies indicate the government's reluctance to openly dissociate itself from its 'socialist' foundations as well as its opposition to loosening control mechanisms over the population. After all, the Egyptian state is still lacking democratic legitimacy, and its overblown centralised state bureaucracy has long served as a way to 'hide' unemployment and co-opt the educated elites. In addition, the various sectors of the state bureaucracy tend to defend their status out of self-interest and do not easily give up power, thus turning the implementation of educational reforms towards more coherence and decentralisation into a potentially delicate enterprise. The implicitly neo-liberal educational policies adopted by the MoE since the 1990s are understood as being at least in part an effect of Western involvement and globalization. But foreign involvement is often rejected in Egyptian society as a form of neo-colonialism, particularly when it comes to the educational sector. Arab nationalists, with their anti-colonialist and socialist inclinations, as well as Islamists thus criticise the MoE's educational reform policies as corrupting Egyptian interests and cultural identity, while democrats and neo-liberals view them as repressive and insufficient. Education is an openly contested issue in Egypt, more so than other, 'harder' issues related to government policies or performance.

As a result, Egyptian educational policies were often said to lack a clear and coherent direction – instead they address various competing agendas simultaneously, in order to build consensus around the government among the various constituencies comprising Egyptian society.<sup>28</sup>

The main thought behind the MoE's strategic plan for pre-university education reform for the years 2007-2012, which continues along the same lines adopted during

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<sup>28</sup> Sayed (2006), *Transforming Education in Egypt*, Ch 3 & 4.

the 1990s, seem to indicate the Egyptian government's decision to push through a comprehensive reform of the education system, based on the guidelines of international donor institutions. The three main concerns of Egyptian educational policies are the interrelated areas of access, quality and system management. Improving the quality of education is the highest priority under the current plan. To achieve this goal will require among other things, the setting up of national standards, a reform of teacher-training and a comprehensive curriculum reform that fosters life-long learning attitudes, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The second priority is improving the delivery of quality education through reform of the education management system, namely by decentralising system management, performance accountability and school governance, including a stronger participation of local communities. Securing equal access to education for all has been downgraded from first to third place on the list of priorities. In this respect efforts will not only include 'traditional' means of expanding access like constructing new schools, but also the bridging of divides between and within the various school levels through curriculum and administrative reforms.<sup>29</sup> It remains to be seen how and to what extent these plans are implemented.

### **2.2.3 Recent Curriculum Developments**

Curriculum reform is one of the core components of the Egyptian government's current educational reform policies and this has been an ongoing effort since the mid-1990s.<sup>30</sup> Funded by the World Bank, the MoE has comprehensively revised the curriculum for all grades as well as the teaching materials used in the science subjects of the General Secondary level. Reform efforts first focused on improving access to primary education and on redesigning the curriculum with the aim of integrating an active learning approach and a comprehensive assessment system. Since 2006, the number of subjects taught has been reduced and syllabi for individual disciplines have been condensed and streamlined to some degree to reduce what the MoE considers an overly confusing wealth of information. Based on these steps, the main

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<sup>29</sup> Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education (2007), *National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt, 2007/08 – 2011/12*. Cairo.

<sup>30</sup> Farag, Iman (2009), "Itijahat Islah al-Ta'lim fi Misr" [Tendencies of Educational Reform in Egypt], in Alayan, Dhoub, Rohde eds., *Al-Islah at-Tarbawi fi-sh-Sharq al-Awsat. Al-Dhat wa-l-Akher fi-l-Manahij al-Madrassiyah [Educational Reform in the Middle East. 'Self' and 'Other' in the School Curriculum]*. Amman: Dar ash-Shurouq (in print).



goal of the current phase is to develop a completely overhauled and standards-based curriculum framework for all grades and school types that puts particular emphasis on integrating information technology (to varying degrees in different schools according to available resources) and comprehensive assessment methods that support active learning and enhances critical thinking. The content and the ways of production of textbooks and other learning materials will change accordingly. Until now, the MoE commissioned individual authors to produce textbooks and learning materials. The current reform plan stipulates that future teaching materials should be designed by teams of authors including ICT and assessment designers, editors and illustrators. Within the MoE, three separate bodies are each responsible for different aspects of the curriculum development process: The Centre of Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development (CCIMD) produces the curriculum (syllabus); textbooks are either designed by the centre itself or by external authors commissioned by the centre. Each discipline and grade has only one set of teaching materials. The MoE plans to liberalise the market for teaching materials and teacher guides. This is also seen as a way to improve the timely delivery of teaching materials to schools, which is often cited as a problem teachers face at the start of the school year. Additional teaching materials and ICT tools are produced by the Technology Development Centre (TDC) which operates independently from the CCIMD. A third independent body, the National Centre for Educational Evaluation and Examinations (NCEEE) is responsible for producing assessment guides for each discipline. According to the current strategic plan, these bodies will be restructured to make them more coherent and improve co-operation between them. This is aimed at improving the quality of curriculum and textbook development and pupil assessment.

The strategic plan's list of priorities includes the formidable task of a comprehensive reform of teacher-training, both at college and on-the-job, necessary for ensuring implementation of school education reforms. While the Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for the training of teachers at college, the MoE focuses on school based training schemes and plans to link payment and promotion to performance. It remains to be seen, to what extent such measures will help to change the current low quality of teaching in Egyptian public schools, which is the result of various factors, not least of all the miserable wages and the low social prestige of teachers as well as the low priority given by the government to the training of teachers. Introducing

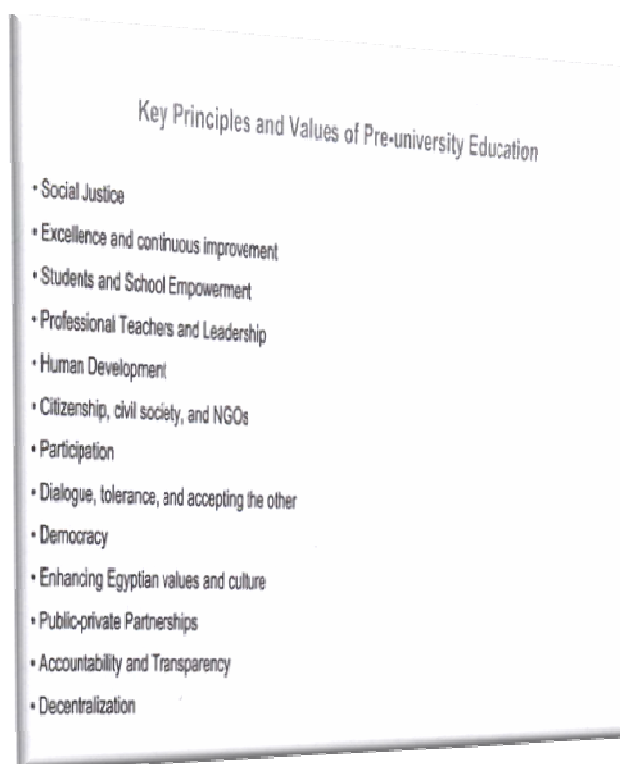
information technology and modern didactics to the curriculum alone will not change the social conditions in rural areas and disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods.

Such measures will also neither alter the 'hidden curriculum' of teachers, nor will they create sufficient incentives to stem the rise of private tutoring that is an important additional source of income for many teachers.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the introduction of market principles and the planned decentralisation of the education system, developing the curriculum framework and the curriculum of individual disciplines will remain under the central authority of the MoE. The tendency towards fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills inscribed in the curriculum reform plans since the 1990s presents a certain political challenge for the Egyptian government, as it does not easily fit its own authoritarian structure. In fact, most efforts at curriculum and textbook development in recent years have focused on the sciences and languages, while politically more sensitive disciplines like social studies and humanities as well as arts and physical education have been neglected. According to the MoE, the key principles to be disseminated through school education include the values of democracy, good citizenship, and acceptance of the 'Other' as well as the enhancement of Egyptian values and culture (see figure 3).

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<sup>31</sup> For vivid descriptions, see the chapters of Kamal Maguib, Iman Farag and Fadia Manguith in Herera / Torres eds. (2006), *Cultures of Arab Schooling*.



**Figure 3:** Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education (2007), *National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt, 2007/08 – 2011/12*. Cairo, 77.

If applied to the teaching of History, Civics, Religion etc, these key principles would imply the introduction of multiperspectivity to the treatment of historical topics and social issues including adequate treatments of questions of gender equality and cultural diversity. But in a conference entitled *Self-Image and Image of the ‘Other’ in Arabic Textbooks* held at the GEI in February 2007, Egyptian MoE officials highlighted their conviction that history education at school serves the principle aim of instilling in pupils the ‘correct’ consciousness, while critical thinking and multiperspectivity would be reserved for those who continue to higher education.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, a tense relationship has long been noted between the MoE officials and professional historians regarding the content of textbooks.<sup>33</sup> For a better

insight of these matters, the following section offers a survey of Egyptian textbooks for the disciplines of History and Civics designed for different grades and dating from 2000/01 and 2006/07. History forms part of the social science curriculum, which is introduced in the primary stage and is reduced to an optional subject in secondary schools. This means that History, Geography and Civics (in secondary schools also termed ‘patriotic education’) are taught as one integrated subject.

<sup>32</sup> Personal observations by the author.

<sup>33</sup> Farag, Iman (2001-3), «Les manuels d’histoire égyptiens: Genèse et imposition d’une norme», *Genèses* 44: 4-29.

#### **2.2.4 Textbook Analysis**

In a Grade 4 Civics textbook from 2005/06, the curriculum starts by introducing the various administrative regions of Egypt, their geographical features, natural resources, agriculture and industries, including tourism. The Islamic and modern history of Egypt is introduced through short presentations of some leading political personalities of different eras – Salah ad-Din, Muhammad ‘Ali, Nasser and Mubarak. A Grade 6 Civics textbook dating from 2005/06 contains two chapters on water and energy resources, coupled with a chapter portraying leading personalities in 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt including Muhammad ‘Ali and Ahmed ‘Urabi, followed by two chapters on the Egyptian tourism industry. The information in these books is highly selective and quite superficial; the exercises and questions attached to each chapter focus on repeating information presented in the book. Islamic history is somehow marginalised compared to modern national history, but both are presented as a history of important men. The self-image of Egypt conveyed through such textbooks contains modernist aspects (industrial development, tourism) as well as folkloristic presentations of Egyptian rural traditions. While tourism is mentioned as an important sector of the economy, tourists themselves remain distant and are not explicitly discussed.

Teaching materials used in the preparatory level (Grades 7 to 9) – for example, a Grade 7 Civics textbook comprised of two parts (one for each semester) dating from 2005/06 and published in an identical version also in 2006/07, focuses on Egypt starting from a global perspective, with a section on the planetary system and one on the physical features of planet earth followed by a section on the geographical features of Egypt and its climate. Remarkably, the first two sections contain occasional quotations from the Qur’an and invoke the wisdom of God in creating earth in this particular way, in an apparent effort to reconcile conservative Muslims with the teachings of modern science. The voluminous two following sections of the first part focus on ancient Egyptian civilisation, on the various Pharaonic dynasties and on the administration, economy, technology and partly the religion of ancient Egypt. The Pharaonic era is presented as an integral part of Egypt’s national history. The texts are short and contain only very general information; exercises and questions focus on repeating and rearranging information given in the textbook.

The second part of this textbook starts with two sections focusing on the demographic development of modern Egypt and its urbanisation, its economic development (including the tourism industry) and environmental problems with the information being factual and mostly abstract.

The third section of the book returns to the Pharaonic era and presents a narrative on social life in ancient Egypt, with a notable focus on the status of women and their 'active and important' roles in society, both within the family and at work. Although this unit states that women's way of life in ancient Egypt was not in accordance with Islamic rules (Page 47), the text clearly intends to make a point here by explicitly discussing women's contributions to social and economic life, including images of female figures in light clothes, which would be a much more sensitive thing to do with regard to an Islamic context. The order in which the sections are arranged creates the impression of presenting different chapters of an organic national history, whose essence remains the same over the millennia. Ancient Egyptian civilisation is presented in a notably positive light in this context, with further units focusing on the scientific, architectural and other cultural achievements of Pharaonic Egypt and its central position as a leading power in the ancient world. The fourth section focuses on Egyptian history in the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, with a less pronounced look at their cultural and scientific achievements than regarding the Pharaonic era, presumably due to the 'foreign' descent of those dynasties. In comparison, the advent of Christianity in Egypt and particularly the history of the Copts is presented vividly, pointing out that the original meaning of the term 'Copts' was 'Egyptians'. The textbook closes with a unit on the great Muslim conquests (*Futuh*), when 'the sun of Islam rose in the land of the Nile' (P 91), Muslim invaders are reported to have mixed with the indigenous Coptic population through intermarriage, and a Qur'anic quotation stresses the tolerance Islam extends to Christians. Again, the exercises and questions attached to the various sections focus on repeating and rearranging the information in the book, which remains rather general and selective given the time span and the wide range of aspects it covers. The main aim of the two-volume textbook apparently is to present a unified Egyptian national history reaching over several millennia and comprising various religions and cultures.

*The cover of the textbook for Islamic Civilisation and Modern Arab History for general secondary education displays a collage of national heroes (issued for 2005/2006)*

If the Grade 7 Civics textbook is written from what could be termed an Egyptian patriotic perspective, the Grade 8 textbook (dating from 2003/04 and reprinted in an identical fashion until 2006/07) breathes the spirit of Pan-Arabism, a second important component of modern



Egyptian nationalism. Similarly structured in a non-chronological order, its first volume starts with short presentations of the geography, demography, and natural resources of contemporary Arab states, with no particular emphasis on Egypt, which is presented as one part of a larger Arab nation.

The following sections focus on the rise of Islam, early Islamic history as well as the Umayyad and Abbasid empires. These latter sections are constantly enriched with Qur'anic quotations, thus stressing the links between Arabism and Islam. The textbook's second volume is divided into three sections. The first deals with industry and commerce in the contemporary Arab world, presenting them as a distinct and integrated economic space. This is a projection of Pan-Arabist ideology, rather than a reflection of realities on the ground, but it reinforces the image of Egypt being part of a greater order.

The second section focuses on 'Islamic civilisation' in history, it contains short texts on the early Islamic state, economy, military and society and the arts, including a

paragraph on the role of women in 'Islamic society'. The learner is told that the military forms an integral part of 'Islamic civilisation', but the paragraph does not put a strong emphasis on disseminating militarist values (P 32/33).

Concerning women, the textbook states that Islam defined different but equally valued roles for women and men, and it mentions in general terms that according to Islam women have the right to work, education, property, the right to choose their husband while enjoying the protection of their family also after marriage. It mentions women's 'right to ask for a divorce', but also states that the family is the basic unit of Islamic society and that therefore divorce is detested by God. The text also mentions famous women in Islamic history who participated in the Prophet's battles and in political life. The paragraph (see image on the right) is illustrated with the photograph of a female worker in the textile industry, stating that 'Islam guaranteed women's rights' (P 37).



Apart from this paragraph and the previously mentioned one on women in Pharaonic Egypt, women aren't explicitly mentioned anywhere in these textbooks. Such cursory and rather shallow narratives seem like token texts whose principal function is to pacify both international donors with their requests for gender sensitive textbooks and conservative public opinion in Egypt. The third and last section of this textbook is about Egypt's contributions to 'Islamic civilisation', thereby highlighting the country's significance as a leading power in the Arab-Islamic world. It contains short paragraphs on the political, economic and cultural aspects of the various dynasties ruling in Egypt until the Mamluk era. The exercises and questions attached to the various sections focus on repeating and rearranging the information in the textbook, partly by using additional sources found in the school library.



A Grade 9 two-volume Civics textbook issued in identical versions in 2004/05 and 2005/06 combines a survey of the world's geography with an account of modern Egyptian history. This curricular structure apparently aims at locating Egypt within an international context, and the textbooks discuss external influence on developments in Egypt. They are discussed in the following sub-chapter. The exercises and questions attached to the various sections are notably more complex than in the textbooks previously discussed. Often pupils are asked to write essays discussing various questions and they cannot rely solely on the rather general information in the textbook, but need to use additional sources in the school library. Regarding the evolution of modern Egyptian nationalism, this textbook breathes the spirit of anti-colonialism, a further pillar on which the legitimacy of the current Egyptian state was built. The trilogy of Civics textbooks designed for the preparatory level discussed in this chapter thus represents all the three main components of official state ideology: Egyptian patriotism, Pan-Arabism, and anti-colonialism. The Grade 9 textbook contains sections on the reign of Muhammad 'Ali; his successor Isma'el and the Egyptian Nahda (enlightenment); Ahmed 'Urabi and other leading personalities of the Egyptian national movement of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While foreign influences are acknowledged, the textbook stresses the anti-colonialism of all the personalities mentioned and presents the military coup of 1952 as a national revolution and the culmination of the Egyptian national movement. It is remarkable that the years of Nasser's reign and the political turmoil of that era remains largely out of focus, and the murder of his successor Sadat by militant Islamists in 1981 is barely mentioned in one sentence ('killed by a criminal hand', Vol 2, P 88). The rule of current Egyptian President Mubarak is of course mentioned, but never explicitly discussed. One unit deals with the evolution of parliamentarism in Egypt since the constitutional monarchy (Vol 2, P 92-95). The legislative power, according to this account, assists the government in administering the country and is to be 'consulted' by the government concerning the formulation of laws and other issues (P 94). The role of the president as 'head of state' is indicated as being above all the legislative, judicative and executive powers, but his role is not explicitly discussed.

The term 'democracy' is not mentioned at all in this unit. At the same time, the paragraph stresses that the judiciary has issued rules that allow women to actively participate in political life and be elected to office. Such cursory remarks appear to stress the independence and the power of the constitutional powers in Egypt despite



being subject to the president. In addition, women here serve as symbolic markers of the modernity of the Egyptian governing system.

In the secondary level, some Civics textbooks feature under the headline ‘patriotic education’ (*Tarbiyya Wataniyya*). They are less illustrated and contain longer texts than the textbooks designed for lower grades, but the exercises and questions attached to the various sections are purely repetitive, indicating the normative function of these textbooks as transmitters of official state ideology. In fact, a Grade 10 Civics textbook dealing with ‘Egypt and its civilisational role’ dating from 2001/02, explicitly mentions this as its central aim. As such, it contains chapters focusing on selected aspects of all phases of Egyptian history, thereby reinforcing the curriculum of lower grades. It presents Egypt as a nation that includes minorities like Copts and black Africans, as the first ‘real’ nation and first ‘real’ state in human history (P 14/15), as a breeding ground of Christianity and a centre of Islam (P 16), the importance of Egypt as a mediating power between the Mashreq and Maghreb, its crucial role in fighting the crusaders and the Mongols, it being a centre of intellectual life and promoter of sciences, etc. In what seems like an implicit message to contemporary Egyptians, ‘the ancient Egyptian people’ during the Pharaonic era are said to have developed an organic relationship with their rulers (P 27). At the same time, the term ‘democracy’ is introduced as a political concept imported to Egypt from Europe, which had been adopted by Egyptian intellectuals since the Nahda period and gradually realised in Egypt (P 58).

A slightly different emphasis is evident in the narrative that is presented in a Grade 11 Civics textbook dating from 2005/06 and focusing on ‘Egyptian society and civilisation’, insofar as it explicitly discusses the mutual influences between different civilisations, namely Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. The textbook also puts more emphasis on cultural and intellectual developments than on anti-colonial struggles. It clearly belongs to a new generation of Civics textbooks; with shorter texts containing less information, but more illustrations. Learners are asked to write essays on various topics instead of simply repeating information contained in the text. Still, it clearly fulfils the same function of disseminating official ideology, though in a subtler manner than previous textbooks.

Egyptian Civics textbooks contain an explicit focus on countries and regions other than Egypt from the preparatory level onwards. Thus, a Grade 8 Civics textbook dating from 2005/06 focuses on all continents and selects one country from each which is discussed in detail. Each section contains general information on the geography and the natural resources of each continent, its demography and economic structures. Historical issues are hardly discussed in all the sections; political issues concerning the specific countries portrayed in each section are presented only in passing. Pupils are often asked to write essays or compare different countries, based on the information contained in the text and additional materials. The book contains numerous illustrations and figures; texts are relatively short and concise.

Ethiopia represents Africa in the study of continents with the unit mentioning its special place in Islamic history as a safe haven for the first Muslims who were offered asylum by the country's Christian king, when Muhammad was forced to leave Mecca. It acknowledges Ethiopia's long tradition of national independence, which it defended against European powers and shortly outlines the founding of the Republic in 1975 and the secession of Eritrea in 1993. Remarkably, the textbook fails to mention the long history of Egyptian-Ethiopian relations, which have not always been friendly, but were often shaped by rivalry and conflict until the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, the support Egypt extended to the Eritrean national movement under the banner of Pan-Arabism during Nasser's reign is not mentioned at all. Korea and the so-called tiger states (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore) are depicted as examples for the Asian continent. Regarding Korea, the existence of two Korean states is mentioned, but the book fails to discuss any reasons and does not present any historical background information explaining this situation. France is depicted as an example for a European country; the text deals exclusively with contemporary France and contains only very general information. In the sections dealing with European colonialism in Egypt, the textbook acknowledges the intellectual and cultural influence of France and other European countries on the evolution of modern Egyptian intellectual and political culture as well as its economic development, even while stressing the anti-colonial struggle of the Egyptian national movement and the exploitative nature of Europe's interest in Egypt during the colonial era.

The second volume of this textbook depicts the United States as an example of a North American country and Brazil represents South America. It also contains one unit discussing Egypt's membership of international organisations like the UN, UNESCO, etc. The information in each of these sections is fairly shallow. Learners hardly stand a chance of developing any meaningful understanding of the continents and countries presented in this textbook, without the use of additional materials. Furthermore, the lack of information on political or historical matters concerning the various case studies is likely to prevent pupils from developing anything more than a vague understanding of the world outside Egypt, however progressive these textbooks might be compared to earlier generations of textbooks.

A Grade 10 Geography textbook and a Geography textbook designed for the general secondary level, both dating from 2005/06 deal with contemporary issues – like global warming, urbanisation, population growth, sustainable development or challenges of a knowledge-based society – from a global perspective and in a complex way. Questions and exercises attached to these books ask the learner to engage in independent research and make comparisons between different countries. Remarkably, both textbooks fall short of discussing issues considered political in the stricter sense of the word, and both hardly relate to the Egyptian context. Pupils will understand the implicit message not to apply their capabilities for independent and critical thinking, which these books foster, both in the domestic context and concerning controversial political issues.

One such highly politicised issue is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, Israel might be considered the most significant 'Other' in Egyptian textbooks, even though it doesn't occupy a prominent space in the texts. The high profile that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Arab-Israeli relations in general occupy in Egyptian public discourse and the fact that Egypt struck a controversial peace treaty with Israel in 1978, explain the political sensitivity of the issue. Textbook narratives on Egyptian and contemporary world history either tend to ignore Israel and its relations with Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, or they deal with these issues in a highly selective manner. In a Grade 11 textbook on 'the civilisational role of Egyptian society' dating from 2005/06, a chapter on Arab national movements and Pan-Arab unity shortly mentions the 'Palestinian issue' as a 'new danger', without mentioning Israel by name, and asks students to write an essay on the topic using news items

taken from the media (P 76). A Grade 9 Civics textbook on ‘world geography and studies in modern Egyptian history’ dating from 2005/06 contains an elaborate narrative on Egyptian history since 1952 and discusses the Arab-Israeli conflict in some detail (P 78-91). The unit initially covers the period from the Balfour Declaration until the war of 1948 and the founding of Israel from an Arab nationalist (i.e. anti-Zionist) perspective and, while it discusses World War Two in this context, it does not mention the Holocaust. The unit moves on with short paragraphs on the wars of 1956 and 1967. The latter is defined as a painful defeat; its results are mentioned, but not the domestic political turmoil following the war. The war of 1973 is covered extensively (including descriptions of the various battles), and the ‘lessons of the war’ are discussed in a detailed manner as a turning point in the conflict and a strategic defeat of Israel. The analysis covers mostly military aspects, but it also mentions the impact of Soviet financial aid, oil as a political weapon and the Arab boycott of Israel. The text is full of eulogies for the heroic Egyptian armed forces. A further paragraph deals with the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. President Sadat is quoted from his speech in the Knesset, stating that Israel needs peace and therefore must retreat from the territories occupied in 1967 and respect Palestinian rights (P 87/88). The peace treaty is described as a net gain for Egypt, which recovered the Sinai Peninsula. As if to pre-empt potential opposition to the treaty, the text stresses that it also contained clauses regarding a Palestinian autonomy in the Westbank and Gaza. The period since the peace treaty is described in some detail as a great Egyptian success, regarding the absence of war, economic development, tourism, and Egypt’s strengthened international role. Its regional role is positively described as a mediator, for instance between Palestinians and Israelis. Egypt’s opposition to nuclear weapons in the region is highlighted, and the text expresses the hope that a regional economic integration will finally be made possible through regional peace.

In sum, this unit presents in a detailed manner the official Egyptian reading of the events. It is apologetic about Egypt’s heroic role, not least of all as a staunch defender of Palestinian rights. The defence of Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel notwithstanding, the latter is presented as an aggressor and a danger to regional peace. Students in this unit are asked to repeat and rearrange the information given in the text, but they are not asked to use additional materials for further independent research on the subject. When it comes to domestically sensitive political issues, the MoE apparently prefers to either ignore them or impose the official line.

### 2.2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The textbooks discussed here offer mostly normative accounts, mirroring different components of official state nationalism like Egyptian patriotism (including respect for indigenous minorities such as Copts who are declared part of the nation), Pan-Arabism, Islamic values, anti-colonialism and developmentalism. Gender sensitivity is definitely not a priority on the MoE's agenda.

Didactically speaking, the textbooks foster active-learning skills to some degree, but this does not include incentives to develop independent and critical thinking on historical or political issues, particularly concerning Egypt's recent past and contemporary regional issues. The textbook narratives contain only selective and highly condensed information with no mention at all of many crucial issues. Representations of external 'Others' remain superficial and silence is maintained on historical and political issues of 'Others'. Presumably, the MoE seems to stress learning about Egypt's past and present to educate Egyptian citizens loyal to the state.<sup>34</sup> Domestic political developments like the demise of Nasserism after 1967 and the tensions between secular nationalists and Islamists, or the huge social inequalities existing in Egyptian society are not discussed in the textbooks.

Thus, the textbook narratives do not adequately reflect the life experiences of learners and the collective memory of Egyptian society in general, a fact that raises questions regarding their relevance to learners. The MoE's attempt to impose a normative and highly selective version of Egypt's past and present indicates a certain weakness of a policy that strives for national integration.

Further questions arise from a technical perspective: Given the concise and often superficial information provided in the school textbooks, students need to have access to additional materials to meaningfully engage with the issues discussed. But given the poor material conditions of many schools in Egypt, school libraries are often poorly equipped, ICT facilities are rare, and teachers are often not acquainted

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<sup>34</sup> Regarding the Nasserist era, when this agenda was particularly strong, see Meital, Yoram (2006), "School Textbooks and Assembling the Puzzle of the Past in Revolutionary Egypt", *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 2: 255-270.

with modern didactics, and they may follow their own ‘hidden curriculum’.<sup>35</sup> Private schools could try to circumvent the use of these books. Thus, the impact such textbooks may have on learners’ worldviews remains unclear.

International donors promote the decentralisation of education system management as part of a neo-liberal agenda of privatising education. Egypt has partly adopted such strategies in recent years, particularly the introduction of public-private partnerships into the public school sector, but it has remained hesitant regarding decentralisation. The MoE’s current strategic plan signals the intensification of these policies in the coming years, but questions remain about its willingness to implement decentralisation. Decentralising education system management is among the pre-conditions for the empowerment of local communities and individual schools in the educational process, but the MoE’s longstanding centralised structure and the authoritarianism of the Egyptian government in general have until now prevented it from delegating meaningful authorities to the districts and local levels. Decentralisation in Egypt thus seems to aim mostly at introducing market elements to the education system. Introducing public-private partnerships, supporting private contributions to school funding like tuition fees, among other things, means fostering the emergence of high quality education for privileged social strata. Rather than reducing the trend towards private tutoring, which has been criticised as leading to a highly unequal distribution of access to education and which is officially opposed by the MoE, Egyptian educational policies seem to follow an agenda that leads to a further privatisation of education. Such policies will intensify the stratification of educational achievements along class lines.

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<sup>35</sup> The term describes a set of practices observed in the implementation of the official curriculum at school. Schooling is a process of socialisation where students pick up messages through the experience of being in school, not just from things that they are explicitly taught. At times, various forms of discrimination, indoctrination, and cultural inculcation are imposed on students by teachers along with the formal curriculum. The term is also used to explain how the environment of educational institutions structures affect the conditions of learning that taken place within it. Finally, the term describes unstated rules necessary for successful completion of formal education studies. See for instance, Mac Laren, Peter (2009), “Critical Pedagogy: A Look at Major Concepts”, in Darder, Baltodano, Torres eds., *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, second edition. New York/London. Routledge, 61-83.

It remains to be seen to what degree this will support a sustainable economic development of the country and ultimately foster democratisation processes, both of which figure high on the agenda of international donor institutions.

Finally, progress towards achieving quality education for all Egyptian pupils depends on sufficient funding in all relevant parts of the education system. Thus, despite notable progress in securing access to education in the last 15 years through opening new schools, average class sizes in Egypt are still far too big, many schools lack ICT facilities and libraries are not systematically developed. Therefore, curriculum and administrative reforms need to be combined with material development to achieve quality education for all. For successful implementation on the ground, curriculum reforms need the active participation of adequately qualified teachers. Introducing market principles like linking salaries to performance combined with authoritarian pressures by the MoE is unlikely to improve the quality of teaching in public schools. The state needs to invest in teachers through school-based training and reform teacher-training at university. Raising basic salaries would create a meaningful incentive for teachers and reduce reliance on additional incomes, for example through private tuition, and motivate them to invest more energy in their work at school.

## **2.3 Lebanon**

### **2.3.1 Structures of Educational Sector**

In comparison to some of its Arab neighbours, Lebanon is relatively well off educationally.<sup>36</sup> Here both boys and girls have access to schools throughout the country. Adult literacy is above 90 percent (Arab average: 70 percent). Lebanon provides 'educational services' to other Arab countries by 'exporting' teaching staff and enrolling learners from there at Lebanese schools and universities. The number of pupils in a class varies from an average of 20 at public to 22 at private schools. While drop-out rates are as high as 8 percent, pupils often leave a secondary school during the intermediate stage to enrol at a vocational school.

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<sup>36</sup> Data in the case study on Lebanon rely on the findings of a PhD study conducted by the author between 2006 and 2009. See Kriener, Jonathan (2009), *Lebanese but How? Secular and Religious Conceptions of State and Society at Lebanese Schools*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Bochum.

Although this cannot really be considered a drop-out, it is recorded as such in the official educational census (see CRDP statistics). Maths and Science lessons are in English or French at least from Grade 7 because they are the main languages of instruction at the leading universities in the country and because of the strong orientation of Lebanon's educational services towards training for employment in the Western abroad.

Because of its liberal educational legislation and weak enforcement of legal restrictions (see below section 3.3.2) Lebanon allows a large variety of schools which would neither be found in Arab countries, nor in most parts of the world. The constitution (1943) of the newly independent state allowed the founding of schools by anybody as long as public order is not disturbed and none of the confessional groups offended (§10). So, in Lebanon, the worldwide trend to private education, which neighbouring Arab states have only begun following recently, enters an environment which is traditionally receptive to it. Unlike in Arab states, no new legislation had to be passed to allow new universities that are especially focused on providing workforce to the international labour market, like the American University of Science and Technology (AUST, founded in 1994, gained the status of a university in 2000), the Arab Open University (2002), the École Supérieure des Affaires (1996), the Matn University (1999) and the Global University (1992).

Long established universities have followed this trend by establishing new branches, like the American University of Technology (1998), which belongs to the American University of Beirut. Old and newly-founded schools adapt to this trend, which leads to a stronger orientation towards Maths and Science in the school curricula and a side-lining of the arts and humanities<sup>37</sup>. The establishment of strongly ideological institutions, like the Islamic University of Lebanon (1996), and schools with a political Islamic outlook, like the Mahdi, Mustafa, and Abrar schools, is rare. Besides the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoE), private associations with an ideological, for the most part religious, mindset administer a large proportion of the private school sector. Their inner structure resembles the neighbouring Arab systems to a varying extent: They are organised in a more or less centralised manner. Some of them, particularly among the Muslim ones, adhere to or identify with a male leading figure of the political realm who does not obtain his position, either inside his

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<sup>37</sup> Hamada 2003



educational subsystem or within his political movement by vote, but by clientele relations and/or religious authority. The proportion of pupils enrolled in the public sector has fluctuated between 30 and 45 percent since independence. In 2004/2005, a total of 916,946 pupils were enrolled in Lebanon's schools – 36.8 percent at public schools, 50.7 percent at private schools charging tuition fees, and 12.5 percent at private primary schools free of charge (see CRDP statistics).

The foundations of the Lebanese education system were laid before the emergence of the first Lebanese Republic in 1926. Catholic, Christian Orthodox, Muslim Sunni, Protestant associations and liberal nationalist initiatives founded numerous schools during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Druze and Shii schools were first founded during the 1920s. In 1939 enrolment was less than a hundred to a few hundred pupils at schools which worked under very simple conditions, with few ties to the central authority and clergymen deciding their curriculum. These have widely been replaced by modern schools in the technical-institutional sense, with many having enrolments of 1,000 and more. The schools keep more or less in line with a curriculum generated by the state, in which subjects are separated and thus at least formally secularised.

For their high level of instruction and their Western cultural heritage, Christian schools were and still are particularly attractive to middle class families of all confessional and ethnic groups. Conversely, Muslim schools are hardly frequented by Christian students, partly for their supposedly lower level of education and partly for their rather strong Islamic ideological outlook and organisation. According to the location of a given Christian school, Muslim learners may represent a minority, half, or even the majority of its learners. At most of them only Christian pupils are obliged to participate in religious education. Often Christian schools with a majority of Muslim pupils abandon religious education or provide Islamic religious lessons. Several religious institutions avoid co-education from the primary level on: the Shii Mahdi, Mabarrat, and Mustafa schools, the Druze Irfan schools, and few Catholic institutions. At the Mabarrat, Mahdi, and Mustafa schools, all girls must be fully covered from the age of 12. An attempt to increase state control of the school curricula under the presidency of Fouad Shihab (1958-1964), did not strongly affect the curricular policy of private schools. During a reform in 1969-71, the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CRDP) was established as a body affiliated to but partly autonomous from the MoE.

It supports the educational administration through teacher-training, statistical, curriculum, and pedagogical research and consulting, but is not trusted with curriculum enforcement as was a previous commission that was shut down in 1959.

It is true for the whole Lebanese welfare system that public institutions suffered more damage during the civil war than the private confessional ones because the latter were often protected by the militias of their respective sect, while the public institutions suffered because they were used as military quarters and manoeuvre posts. As the lower classes and the rural populations which mostly consist of Shii were the main beneficiaries of the public welfare system, religious Shii stakeholders started founding welfare institutions, including schools, in the late 1970s, and particularly since the Iranian revolutionary government began supporting the Shii in Lebanon.

**Figure 1:** School types in Lebanon (see Kriener 2009) – to be continued next page

Type of school <sup>38</sup>	First school opened in	Secondary degree <sup>39</sup>	Number of schools	Number of pupils (source)	% of all pupils in Lebanon	Institution's denomination	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of all pupils in Lebanon
Public schools	1926	L	1405	337,436	36.8	Public	1405	337,436	36.8
Private schools other than in curriculum commission			855	244,562	26.7	Non confessional or Muslim	855	244,562	26.7
Catholic	1655	L, F, US, IB	361	190,000	20.1	Catholic	361	190,000	20.7
Protestant	1860	L, US, IB	40	20,000	2.2	Protestant	40	20,000	2.2
Christian Orthodox	1833		27	24,000	2.6	Orthodox	27	24,000	2.6

<sup>38</sup> Schools, at which both Muslim and Christian students are enrolled, are lined grey.

<sup>39</sup> L = Lebanese, F = French, US = American, IB = International Baccalaureat.

(continuation of previous page)

Type of school	First school opened in	Secondary degree	Number of schools	Number of pupils (source)	% of all pupils in Lebanon	Institution's denomination	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of all pupils in Lebanon
International College	1936	L, F, IB	1	3,400	0.4	None	15	19,838	2.2
American Community School	1905	L, US, IB	1	1,000	0.1				
Collège Louise Wegman	1965	L, F	3	1,838	0.2				
Rawda High School	1961	L	1	1,600	0.2				
Lycée National	No record								
Mission Laique Francaise	1909	L, F	9	12,000	1.3				
Hariri Foundation	1982	L	4	3,800	0.4	Sunna	49	18,800	2
Makassed	1878	L	45	15,000	1.6				
Irfan	1971	L	5	4,500	0.5	Druze	5	4,500	0.5
Amiliyya	1923	L	3	2,310	0.25	Shia	48	57,810	6.3
Amal	1986	L	12	11,000	1.2				
Mabarrat	1978	L	14	19,000	2.1				
Mahdi	1993	L	13	17,500	1.9				
Mustafa	1989	L	6	8,000	0.9				
Total			2,799	916,946	100				

### 2.3.2 Educational Reforms

Over the course of the latest reform which started in 1997, the structure of the school grades was adapted to the internationally prevailing 6-3-3 system. Schooling is compulsory until Grade 6, the age of 12, which is the minimum age for gainful employment. It is planned to extend compulsory schooling until the age of 15. The intermediate stage can be concluded with the *brevet* exam, which qualifies for the secondary stage. The secondary stage is divided into two branches – humanities and sciences – from the second year. These are split into four branches – humanities and literature; social and economic studies; general sciences; and biology – in the last year of secondary school, Grade 12.

**Figure 2:** System of educational careers<sup>40</sup>

Labour market	Vocational in-service training	Vocational and technical education (3 or 5 years)		Universities			Age/ years	
							18	
	Higher vocational qualifications (agriculture, industry, or services)	Technical sec. education, (agriculture, industry, or services)	3 <sup>rd</sup> sec. grade, life science	3 <sup>rd</sup> sec. grade, sciences	3 <sup>rd</sup> sec. grade, economy & social studies	3 <sup>rd</sup> sec. grade, humanities/ literature	17	
			2 <sup>nd</sup> sec. grade, maths/sciences		2 <sup>nd</sup> sec. grade, humanities/ Literature		16	
			1 <sup>st</sup> secondary grade (Grade 10)					15
	Specialised vocational training		Intermediate stage, Grades 7-9					14
								13
								12
	Primary stage, 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle, Grades 4-6							11
								10
9								
Primary stage, 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle, Grades 1-3							8	
							7	
							6	
Kindergarten							5	
							4	
Day nursery							3	

An equivalence committee consisting of the MoE, the presidents of the six largest universities in the country, and a representative of the Ministry of Justice decides if degrees that are not designed by the domestic authorities, but are part of European, American, international, or other curricula equal the Lebanese baccalaureate.

<sup>40</sup> Data according to CRDP 1995, p. 29; CRDP 1997, §§ 3 and 4.

Since many schools offer such degrees in addition to the Lebanese ones and because of the mushrooming of schools and universities, this body is continuously under a critical strain.

Teacher-training schemes are offered by the educational departments of all major universities. The Faculty of Education of the Lebanese University specialises in the preparation of teachers for service in public schools. During the war years, the training of teachers by the state was fundamentally disrupted and even completely stopped for several years, which led to a severe lack of qualified teachers and a large number of unqualified or poorly qualified ones.<sup>41</sup> In 1995 a law was passed making it compulsory for anybody wanting to be a teacher to first graduate from university. However, after the year 2000 at least 44 percent of all teachers, including those at kindergartens, still held only a high school diploma or less, while only 10 percent had a university degree. Courses for in-service training are held during the summer vacations at 23 public teacher-training institutions in all parts of the country for one or two weeks. In 2001, for instance, the CRDP launched a special programme to train teachers in the use of the new curricula and textbooks. The private school associations, too, provide in-service training during the summer vacations to support their particular pedagogical profiles, in addition to the public teacher-training and the training for foreign language instruction at the *Centre Culturel Francais* and the *British Council*.

Schooling causes considerable financial burdens for Lebanese parents. Around the year 2000 parents spent 11 to 25 percent of their income on expenses related to their children's education, an average of US\$1,800. Education became the second priority in their budget, after nutrition and above housing and health. Families' spending on education has risen dramatically from the 1990s. In the past, parents were happy when holidays were over so that their children would be occupied in school while they went to work, but nowadays parents dread school time more than holidays because of the large sums they have to pay for tuition fees, textbooks, stationery and school uniforms. The yearly per capita income in Lebanon is about \$6,000.

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<sup>41</sup> The LU provides higher education for roughly 50,000 students, approximately half of all university students in Lebanon, and has by far the largest department of education. At the end of the war, only half of the teachers in service had got any sort of education beyond secondary school.

Tuition fees of \$2,000 per year are not unusual at private schools and at some schools even amount to more than twice this sum. The state raised the education budget from \$176 to 482 million between 1993 and 1998, which accounted for a rise from 6.6 percent to 8.4 percent of the national budget, and to \$600 million in 2006. In 1998, 85 percent of the education budget went into the financing of the public sector, of which the largest share, 72 percent went to the LU's budget. The second largest entry, 11 percent or \$14 million, was used for the support of free private primary schools, and the third, 9 percent, went into the CRDP's budget. According to the World Bank, the transitions of money connected to these purposes are not transparent.<sup>42</sup> Expenses at state institutions, other than the ministries responsible for education, increased by a factor of six during the 1990s. Such costs comprise the financing of special educational institutions, for example those catering for handicapped children and children with special needs, by the Ministry of Social Affairs, or payments by other ministries for education in their particular field, like agricultural, police and medical services, transport, etc. They further include loans and grants for particularly skilled students, as well as children of civil servants. Thus, state expenditure on private education is higher than the 11 percent of the educational budget make it seem, because many of the institutions supported by the other ministries are private property. Moreover, about two thirds of the loans, grants<sup>43</sup>, and tax reductions the state grants its servants and families of highly talented students, go into private education as well. So the state could do more to empower public institutions simply by giving them preference in spending on grants and subsidies. Chances are, however, that by doing so it would weaken the loyalty of its servants, which it has to share with family, community, and sect more than other states do already.

As the state also subsidises private primary schools, it tries to control their expenses. Since 1981 a law exists obliging them to submit an annual budget. Another law passed in 1992 obliged the schools to freeze their tuition fees to mitigate the financial burden for families.

The private institutions in turn demanded higher subsidies, arguing that they take upon them responsibilities that fall under the duties of the state. They receive additional support from private sponsors, individual as well as institutional.

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<sup>42</sup> *Daily Star* 2007-01-22. Data on public spending for education taken from Abu Rujeily 1999.

<sup>43</sup> 90 percent of the grants.

Some schools name some of their sponsors in their PR media. But there is no transparency about their sponsoring.

Like welfare institutions and political parties, private schools and universities in Lebanon rely on foreign sponsors to a large extent – particularly for the construction and maintenance of their buildings and equipment – from Iran, the Arab Gulf monarchies; and from Christian churches and other welfare institutions in the Western abroad.

### **2.3.3 Recent Curriculum Developments**

From the very start of an autonomous Lebanese educational policy, the government and the MoE have on many occasions declared their intention to make education contribute in shaping a national Lebanese consciousness and a sense of unity. Their range of action to achieve this is limited by the constitutionally (§10) guaranteed freedom of education, which the confessional groups defend with vigour. The Peace Accord of Taif (1989) between the parties to the civil war explicitly demands that textbooks for the subjects of History and Civic Education be centrally produced. The educational administration formed teams of authors, made up of high school teachers, and supervisory commissions for every subject, made up of subject experts from the leading universities of the country, to work out curricula and textbooks. In addition to qualification, participation of all sects was a central criterion for choosing the members of these bodies. Although Christian educational associations provide school education for four times the number of students Muslim schools enrol, the number of participants from Muslim associations was nearly as large as the number of teachers from Christian associations in order to keep the confessional balance between the religions that is prescribed for all public institutions. These commissions prepared textbooks for Grades 1 to 12 for all subjects besides History, including Civic Education. The CRDP published the books between 1997 and 2002.

A core curriculum for history was completed in 2000. Coming to an agreement was a lot more difficult here than in the other subjects. Between 2000 and 2001, textbooks for Grades 2 to 6 were drafted and revised. The new approach to teaching History is different from the old curriculum insofar as it does not start with a chronological presentation from the beginning. The second grade and part of the third were

designed to take the children from issues of the present, such as generations of the family, living conditions and consumer habits (clothing, transportation, household appliances, etc) to the concept of time. Compared to the older textbooks, the new books are more picture and graphics based and with less text. The proportion of text increases with the age of the target group. Most of the exercises in the lessons ask pupils to recapitulate the contents of the lesson, while some require them, for example to match inventions and events to the time of occurrence, or to categorise communication media according to certain criteria. In the last two lessons of the second volume (Grade 3), pupils are required to search for information in media outside the textbook. Only once are they asked to give their opinions about what else they would like to figure out.

The process of publishing the history textbooks came to a halt in October 2001, when the MoE attacked the supervisory commission for the way they had dealt with several points in the volume for Grade 3. Muslim stakeholders, in particular, considered the section about the Arab-Islamic conquest of the country in the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the context of Lebanese independence and with other historical issues at odds with Islamic and Pan-Arab conceptions of history. The controversy started to unfold in the public. The minister suspended the new History textbooks in December 2001 and announced that for the coming semester History lessons were to be replaced with Civic Education. Another team of authors and a new supervising commission were formed that worked from 2003 to 2005. Its results were likewise not admitted for application. Ever since there has been no regulation on what grounds History should be taught. History and Civic Education are obligatory subjects in Lebanon. Exams are still held according to the curriculum of 1971. Hence, the majority of schools continue using History textbooks published in the 1980s and 1990s but according to the 1971 curriculum.

Awit (2001) considers three different formulae the Lebanese education system could adopt for its politics of history education at schools: 1. Going on with free textbook production according to a central curriculum that only prescribes the thematic foci. 2. Prescribing one standard textbook, in which everything, the content, methods etc, are centrally defined. 3. Prescribing a unified textbook that offers the pupils different readings of historical events by a critical method. The debate rather evolves around the first two formulae: There are intellectuals and educational leaders who generally



object to the unification of the history texts as an inappropriate interference by the state with educational affairs or for fears that unification will only produce a smallest common denominator, which will necessarily be of extremely poor quality. Many support the idea of a unified textbook on principle, but mention differences that seriously obstruct this process. Others object to the third formula, because they consider it inapplicable to the age group of school learners in Lebanon. In the general objectives for History (2000) and National Civic Education (NCE) of their General Curriculum (1997), the MoE highlights their purpose is to strengthen a sense of national unity and belonging among the pupils on the one hand, and scientific accuracy, multi-perspectivity and concepts of independent learning on the other, but, quantitatively, pay much more attention to the inculcation of national values than to the other aspects.

Concerning their curricular policy there is a basic difference between the three associations of Christian denomination, the Hariri Foundation and the secular associations on the one hand and the seven religious associations of Druze, Shii, and Sunni denomination on the other: The latter display a uniform intellectual-spiritual profile for all their schools and oblige them to follow a uniform textbook policy, while the Christian and secular umbrella associations do not. The public schools are obliged to use the textbooks issued by the CRDP for all subjects.

While until the 1980s it was usual for Christian schools to sue for the freedom of education, demanding that the state should finance their work, but not exert control over it, today religious Shii schools, too, display indifference towards national identity and value politics. These schools tend to give out religious rather than national slogans. Teachers and representatives of Catholic, Shii and Protestant schools admit that their schools do not teach the NCE curriculum to its full extent, partly for ideological dissent, but also because of its extensive amount of information, its didactic awkwardness, and lack of relevance. Slogans of Lebanese or Arab identity politics are least likely to be found in Christian and Shii educational aims and principles. The Mahdi school association openly favours the Iranian concept of Wilayat al-Faqih, which contradicts the Lebanese parliamentary system. Lebanese national concepts are salient in the public educational philosophy, Arab and Lebanese in the philosophies of the Islamic associations who have any kind of affinity to secularism or liberalism: Amiliyya, Amal, Irfan, the HF, and Makassed. There are also smaller Sunni Islamist school associations, like the Ahbash, the Jam'iyyat an-

Nahda al-Islamiyya al-Khayriyya, and the Abrar schools, and smaller commercial institutions, like the Ras Beirut International School in the Tariq al-Matar.

These had no part in the curriculum development and research on them was beyond the scope of this study, although they deserve attention. The Shii and the Catholic subsystems are the ones growing most swiftly.

### **2.3.4 Textbook Analysis**

As there are about 40 different series of history textbooks currently in use at various types of schools in Lebanon, a sample of three particularly prevalent ones has been chosen for the analysis in this report. Public schools, as well as the Makassed and the Mabarrat schools, resort to textbooks published by the CRDP in the 1980s under the title *At-Tarikh* ('History', further on abbreviated HC), which have been reprinted several times again until 2003 without changes in content. The series does not provide books for the grades above 7. From Grade 8 Makassed complements them with books by the Malayin publishing house titled *Al-Musawwar fi at-Tarikh* ('Illustrated History' – HM). The Mahdi and Mustafa schools rely on the series *Nahnu wa-t-Tarikh* ('We and History' – HS) that the Society for Islamic Religious Teaching, which runs the Mustafa Schools, published in the mid 1990s. I chose *At-Tarikh al-'Ilmi* ('Scientific History' – HH) by the Habib publishing house as a third example, because it appears on the lists of Irfan, as well as different Christian and secular private schools, and shows the highest number of occurrences at schools in the greater Beirut area<sup>44</sup>. Only the volumes for Grades 6 to 9 are regarded, since they contain a cycle of narration from prehistoric times to the 1970s<sup>45</sup>. Their range of influence is very wide, because more than 80 percent of pupils enrolled in Lebanon attain a brevet. The unified NCE series by the CRDP are the item of analysis on this subject.

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<sup>44</sup> Salameh 2001, p. 22

<sup>45</sup> As exams follow the 1971 curriculum there is no common ground for teaching history beyond 1970 whatsoever in Lebanon. Books for the secondary stage deal with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries more extensively.

Besides the Lebanese national idea, also Arab and Western as well as religious and confessional concepts of identity and society formation are highly influential in Lebanon and must be regarded in any reflection on humanities instruction media in Lebanon. I further question whether any of these preferences are accompanied by a certain measure of historical consciousness, i.e. an awareness that research and discourse in the



*A Lebanese textbook displays the close proximity of the church Mar Yuhanna-Murkus to a mosque in the city of Jebeil (Patriotic and Civic Education Grade 7, 2003)*

humanities are subject to changes in perception, and that one's own conceptions of society, state, and world order compete with others, and will either change or be replaced by others in the future – for better or for worse. The question is urgent especially in Lebanon, because a future change in the conception of state and society is implanted in the constitution: 'The abolition of political confessionalism is a basic national aim ...' (preamble, section h).

Values and institutions are presented as facts or necessities in the NCE textbooks. Inner Lebanese dissent is affirmatively addressed by recalling its negative consequences (civil war, NCE7, pp. 43-48) and by invoking a supposed sense of unity and solidarity among the citizens in the face of aggression from outside (ibid, pp. 110-115). Differing opinions about the role Israel, France and other states have played in Lebanon – common among the Lebanese – are no issue.

The family, as another example, is presented as the only valid model of living together that society can rely upon. In the primary and intermediate stage, children's rights and duties are focused on, like being treated non-violently, being heard concerning decisions that affect them, helping with the housework and behaving in a considerate manner. In the secondary stage, ways of dealing with differences of opinion in the family are explored, in which non-violence, tolerance and the equality between the family members is emphasised. Then there is a focus on family planning in the secondary stage that emphasises the participation of women in the job market and

the decision-making inside the family as factors for security and a balanced growth of the family<sup>46</sup>. There is no differentiation between ideal and reality. The focus is on the desired state of affairs supported by values and legislation. The only exception to this rule is the question of abortion: Islamic and Christian institutions are quoted with their attitude towards marriage and abortion. Besides these, also liberal legislations of several European states and the United States on abortion are mentioned (p. 82). Reasons are given only for the religious positions: 'Abortion is religiously interdicted because it kills an innocent soul ... and endangers the life and health of the mother, particularly in the developing countries.' Thus, in this case alternative legal traditions like the Western legislations on abortion are not excluded from the discussion in principle, although the religious positions are still put forward in a positivistic manner.

Other lessons are dedicated to the ethics of labour, different professions, and trade unions. But unemployment is no issue, neither in the units on labour nor in those on global problems. Similar observations apply to the relationship between the citizen and the state, elections, education, etc. The complex conception of the Lebanese Republic, as set by the constitution and the National Pacts<sup>47</sup>, is the perspective that underlies the picture of society and the state. The separation of its powers, its administration, the electoral system, etc, is explained several times in the course of this subject matter. Lebanon's conceptualisation as a democracy based on principles of freedom, equality, solidarity and justice is traced back to the religious heritage of Islam and Christianity on the one hand<sup>48</sup>, and ascribed to the secular tradition of European enlightenment<sup>49</sup> and Western democracies on the other. Thirdly, its membership in international organisations and its commitment to international law, above all the International Declarations of Human Rights, is emphasised in numerous contexts.

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<sup>46</sup> NCE10, unit 3, lesson 1

<sup>47</sup> National Pacts is the common term for an unwritten agreement between the first President of State and the first Prime Minister in 1943 and for the paragraphs of the Taif Accord that set the standards for the distribution of political mandates and offices among Lebanon's confessional groups.

<sup>48</sup> As in a quote by Umar b. al-Khattab (NCE6, p. 57), quotations from the Bible, John 8:32, and the Koran 2:256, in the context of the Freedom of Belief (NCE7, p. 25), the Prophet Muhammad and Pope John Paul II (NCE8, p. 27), and more in the secondary and primary grades.

<sup>49</sup> Like in the French declaration of civic rights of 1789 (NCE6, p. 36), in quoting Montesquieu (NCE6, p. 57 and NCE7, p. 121), Rousseau (NCE8, p. 52), John Locke, (ibid. p. 54), Machiavelli (p. 55), a reference to Mirabeau (NCE6, p. 62), and more in the secondary grades.

Lebanon's membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), however, is not referred to. Extensive passages on the Freedom of Belief focus on the protection of the confessional communities against violation by others.

The scarce and purely factual dealing with political confessionalism leaves the recipient alone with questions about the benefits and the disadvantages of this political order. Learners are not taught how confessionalism is manifest in the distribution of political power and jobs and the regulations of marriage and family issues, how it produces inequalities between the sexes and the sects, and why its abolition is envisioned in the constitution. Confessional multitude is stressed as Lebanon's wealth, though, but the different confessions are neither described nor even named in lessons about Lebanon's cultural heritage or elsewhere in the NCE books. The terms secularism and secular do not appear, and the immanent contradiction between democracy and religious rule, which the religious institutions exert in matters of personal status, is no issue either. The Lebanese democracy appears as a coherent concept. Its inherent tensions and the controversies about it, and even its political parties are invisible. So in its frame of interpretation, NCE keeps a one-dimensional perspective and overlooks some essential matters of Lebanon's reality and debates of Lebanese public life.

The Lebanese constitution is the most often quoted source, followed by the UN Declarations of Human Rights. Further sources are other Lebanese laws, international conventions; polling cards and administrative forms; sayings and biographical sketches of Lebanese and international politicians, literati and scientists; statistics, surveys and other inquiries; and a multitude of pictures. Most sources serve as illustrations, few are referred to in the author's text or in the questions and exercises at the end of a lesson. Among the questions and exercises in NCE there is about an equal share for content, skills and values. A small minority of them is open-ended. Where they are, such questions and exercises never touch upon controversial issues like the confessional system, the role of religion in society, the relationship to the Western and the Arab worlds, the relationship between the sexes or the like. Pupils' activities in the NCE textbooks, where they are process oriented, do help them gather information autonomously, like learning to use an encyclopaedia or an atlas, or searching for information in a newspaper. But only rarely are questions

or work instructions designed to make the pupils practise discussion or form their opinion autonomously, as the General Curriculum suggests.

A uni-dimensional record is generally kept up also in all the three history publications of our sample. The emergence of Islam and Christianity, for example, are reported from the viewpoint of the respective religion. In the context of Christ's life and teaching, 'the Jews' are accused of fighting Christ and his followers. In their reports on the pre-modern stages of history, the history texts converge in proposing the establishment of Arab-Islamic rule over the Middle East as a historical progress and in purporting central myths of Islamic historiography. Typical of that is the claim that women's status in society was enhanced by Islam<sup>50</sup>, which is historically disputed, and is done with different measures of enthusiasm. The most sceptical approach to early Islam is HH, which tersely points to slavery and social stratification in early Islamic society (pp. 129-130, 140). The Arabian tribes who revoked their alliance with the Muslims after Muhammad's death and were forced back into it, for instance, are accused of apostasy (*ridda* or *irtidad*, HS6, p. 153, HC6 p. 129), part of their leaders denounced as false prophets (*mutanabbiyin*, HH6, p. 120). HS6 (pp. 103-106) defames Judaism and Christianity as forgeries of the divine message, which was re-established in Islam. It hails early Islam as having liberated the woman and established equality and just government (p. 150).

So, a simplified and idealised, purely scriptural religious understanding and terminology are applied to the formative periods of the two religions established in Lebanon.

Tensions among the Lebanese sects become visible only when comparing between the different reports. The reports on the Crusades are particularly characteristic for that: While the Shii textbook<sup>51</sup> blames collaboration with the crusaders solely on the Maronite Christians and draws a direct connection to the alliance between the Maronites and the French in modern times, the textbook used in Christian and secular schools<sup>52</sup> rejects the accusation, stating that the Maronites' relationship with the crusaders was ambiguous and that also the Shii Ammar tribe at times collaborated with them.

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<sup>50</sup> HS, p. 176; HH, p. 129

<sup>51</sup> HS7, pp. 79 and 85

<sup>52</sup> HH7, p. 69

Both HS and HH view political interventions by European powers, from the Crusades to the French Mandate, basically with refusal<sup>53</sup>. But while HH appreciates also the economic and cultural advantages that these interventions brought for the region, HS judges these achievements as an inseparable part of Western imperialist strategy, too. More than that, HS follows an anti-modern course, regarding the loosening of family ties a calamity rather than a chance, for which HH seems to take it. Nowhere can the Shii authors' pessimism towards modernisation be sensed stronger than in connection to the educational institutions that were induced by Western influences: Both HS and HH habitually point to the erection of Christian schools when depicting the cultural effects of certain historical periods. And while HH describes them as achievements for the country, linking them to great personalities of the Lebanese arts<sup>54</sup> and to the repulsion of feudalism (p. 132), HS is very ambivalent about them. It views them foremost in the context of missionary<sup>55</sup>, crusaders' (pp. 93, 94), and imperialist (p. 112) purposes, and stresses the contribution of Islamic institutions instead<sup>56</sup>, which was, in fact, hardly measurable at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>57</sup>. Consequently, in its assessment of the *mutasarrifiyya* period (1860-1916) HS8 lists a rank of the most renowned Lebanese institutions of secondary and higher education under 'debts' (p. 168-169), their graduates, the protagonists of the intellectual awakening that resulted from the educational movement of that era under 'assets'. HH8, conversely, lists some of the very same institutions in an enthusiastic additional lesson on the *nahda*, the Arab cultural awakening of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (pp. 135-139).

Frequent mentioning of the confessionally mixed, allegedly balanced bodies of consultation, administration, and representation, and of the confessional laws and courts throughout the ages in all three history curricula makes this kind of organisation look self evident and considerations about its abolition superfluous. However, the absence of any reference to the confessional demography and of confessional legislation from the lessons about the 20<sup>th</sup> century on, in both HS and

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<sup>53</sup> See for example the lessons on the crusaders, about the struggle for independence, further HS8, pp. 136, 139, 146, and many more; HH8, 115, 126, 127, and many more.

<sup>54</sup> HH8, pp. 42, 82, 114, 127

<sup>55</sup> HS8, pp. 58, 59, 62

<sup>56</sup> HS7, p. 144

<sup>57</sup> In 1932 over 80 percent of the Shia and over 60 percent of the Sunna were illiterate. Most Lebanese who knew to read and write, including many of the Muslims, had graduated from Christian schools. See KOBEISSY 1999.

HH, and the depiction of confessionalism as a French invented formula in HS9, contradict this. The Habib authors depict the so called National Pact of 1943 as a compromise between the Lebanese, a concession made by the Christian as well as by the Muslim groups, out of which Lebanon emerged as a country that is neither Western nor Arab affiliated<sup>58</sup>. In the Shii history book the confessional system is never termed National Pact, but appears as something France foisted on Lebanon as a last act of colonial arrogance, whilst the Lebanese leadership, after gaining independence, unanimously turned to the alliance with the neighbouring Arab states<sup>59</sup>. Why then, one could ask, did the first independent government not abolish confessionalism immediately?

Two historical texts, HC and HH, interpret local history as Lebanese from its earliest stages. The third, HS, interprets it by Islamic paradigms most of the time, and only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century adapt to nationalist terms of interpretation. Thus, HS does not share the story of the centuries old Lebanese will for autonomy but rather views it as a brainchild of European imperialism. HS contains information about the local and international Shia that has no parallel in the other history texts. Where these report the history of local groups they rather focus on the Maronites and, to a lesser extent, the Druze, but overlook the Shia entirely.

Convergence between the three analysed history series is greater than differences between them, perhaps due to the curriculum of 1971, which still constitutes the basis for History exams after Grade 9. Neither of them sticks to an overall frame of interpretation that it applies throughout. Neither one practises historical consciousness either, in the sense that it would narrate history as an open ended process pointing to alternatives or to differing aspirations in its different stages.

Instead, all three textbook series try to integrate different concepts of identity occurring in Lebanon by adopting their founding myths: Biblical concepts are the basis of the story about Christ and early Christianity; the Islamic tradition is tapped for the narration of the early time of Islamic rule in the Levant. Both religious traditions are adopted including their immanent, historically unfounded defamations against other religious groups and beliefs, which, in fact, contradict §10 of the

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<sup>58</sup> HH9, pp. 91-93

<sup>59</sup> HS9, pp. 104-107



Lebanese constitution<sup>60</sup>: against Jews, and, in the case of the Shii textbook, also against Christians and Polytheists. Reporting the foundation of the Lebanese Republic in 1926, the two chosen examples<sup>61</sup> depict it as a kind of renaissance, the re-establishment of something former, to which, in fact, no reference exists –neither in the textbooks, nor in any other work of historiography. Thereby a myth of Lebanon as deeply rooted in the past is constructed. In HH, this myth perpetuates the dominantly Lebanese frame of interpretation applied to the historical periods before. In HS, it contradicts the prevailing attitude that Lebanon in its current borders was induced by French intrigue and that Lebanon’s independence movement was strongly oriented towards affiliation with the Arab World.

The still relevant history curriculum of 1971 allots four out of 32 lessons of history teaching in Grade 6 to Europe during the Middle Ages, three out of 28 lessons in Grade 7 to the Crusades, nine to the European age of renaissance, and nine out of 34 lessons in Grade 8 to Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among the great old civilisations depicted in Grade 6, there are the Greek and the Romans with five out of 13 lessons, the remaining of which are dedicated to the oriental civilisations of Mesopotamia, Persia and Egypt. In Grade 9 Europeans (and Americans) further feature as main actors of the First and the Second World War and as imperialist and mandatory powers in the context of Lebanon’s and other Arab countries’ decolonisation. The sheer amount of information about Europe indicates that it is by far the most important ‘Other’ in the eyes of the educationalists and historians who designed the history curriculum<sup>62</sup>. By the same token, the Palestinian problem must be considered the most important among the Middle Eastern issues. The Palestinian problem receives an extensive treatment – as compared to other Arab countries – of two to three chapters ranging between the stories of Lebanon’s independence and the decolonisation of other Arab countries in Grade 9.

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Education is free as long as it does not ... object to the dignity of one of the religions or confessions ...’. This includes Jews, because they are one of the 19 officially acknowledged confessions in Lebanon. Since 1970, however, there is no organised Jewish community in Lebanon anymore.

<sup>61</sup> HS9, p. 71; HH9, p. 65

<sup>62</sup> The same is certainly not the case vice versa in European textbooks. See for instance the French-German textbook edited by Daniel Henri and Peter Geiss (2008), *Histoire/Geschichte – Europa und die Welt vom Wiener Kongress bis 1945*. Stuttgart: Klett. The book follows a similar chronological order as HH9, HS9 and HM9 do. In it, the most significant amounts of information regarding non-European nations are given on China in the context of European Colonialism, which is allotted only 30 out of 380 pp, Soviet Russia in the context of democracy and totalitarian rule, and Japan in the context of World War II.

Even Syria's story of independence, a country to which Lebanon is narrowly linked concerning their history, political and social affairs, is regarded with only one chapter as are all other Arab countries and regions<sup>63</sup>. The above mentioned narrative approach applies also to these topics. A dichotomy between Orient and Occident takes different shapes before the recipient: The Romans appear as persecutors of the Christians, Byzantium as the adversary of subsequent Muslim states, the crusaders as a major intrusion into an area and an era of Muslim rule.

The reports on the Palestinian problem converge to a far extent in all three analysed history textbooks. They all open with a statement that Zionism was a colonialist, expansionist, and/or racist movement striving to turn Palestine into a Jewish state or homeland<sup>64</sup>. HS9, however, goes farther than that: In an introductory remark of one page, the Shii authors link Zionism to the expulsion of Jews from Palestine by the Romans and state that the dream of return was paramount to Jewish religious belief and political action ever since. They hold the European Jews fully responsible for their isolation alongside the European societies, disregarding the oppressive attitude of the European Churches and monarchies towards them entirely: 'This conviction made them ... feel foreign in their exiles, so they shut themselves up and lived in quarters special to them. ... (and it made them) start building up huge fortunes that should help them make their dream come true, so they exploited the other peoples with usury, greed and (the accumulation of) monopoly until they became hated by all parts of society.' Like in other parts of the three history texts, the narrative focuses on political positions and decisions and on the chain of events from Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weitzman over the British mandate and the Arab-Israeli wars to the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1978. Zionism and Israel are depicted as partners of imperialism. Other driving forces of Zionism, like the rise of romantic nationalism in Germany and Eastern Europe, by which both Arab and Jewish nationalism were inspired, and the horrors of European anti-Semitism are completely ignored. The Western powers, particularly Britain, appear as unambiguously supporting the Zionists and Israel, or as conspiring<sup>65</sup> against the Arabs.

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<sup>63</sup> The three chapters about the Palestinian problem take 30 pp. in HS9, while Syria's independence takes 12 pp., Egypt 14 pp. The relation is 22 pp. (2 chapters) to 10 to 13 in HH9, 20 (2 chapters) to 10 to 10 in HM9.

<sup>64</sup> HS9, pp. 172-173; HH9, p. 132; HM9, p. 210

<sup>65</sup> HS9, p. 176; HH9, p. 143

Factors that cannot be ascribed to the political aspirations of either party, like the originally Ottoman law of land taxation still in force during the British mandate that made it unfavourable to cultivate land instead of speculating on it, are irrelevant in this plot. The West and Zionism appear as cold and sovereign actors – the Arabs as righteous and heroic, but nevertheless powerless reactors.

The reports end with sections that conjure the alleged expansionism inherent to Israel as a constant danger to the Arab states, particularly Lebanon, although there were hardly any problems between Israel and Lebanon from 1948 until 1969, when Egyptian president Nasser urged Lebanon to grant the Palestinian guerrillas freedom of military action on its soil, which Egypt, Syria and Jordan denied them. HM9 (pp. 226-227) mentions this fact and the agreement between Nasser, the PLO, and the Lebanese government. Repeated Israeli assurances they were willing to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and had no aspirations to its soil are interpreted as a scheme in order to sow discord between the Lebanese.

The picture of the Western powers is a bit more coloured concerning the period of late imperialism when it does not concern Palestine immediately. The chapter on the mandatory period in Syria, for instance, and on the Syrian struggle for independence in HS9 (pp. 202-213) provides information about US-president Woodrow Wilson's initiative to send a commission of enquiry (King-Crane-Commission) to the Levant in order to figure out what the political aspirations of the local peoples were.

The commission's recommendations were not implied, though, because Wilson "...subdued to British, French, and Jewish pressure" (p. 203). Similarly, in HM9 (p. 251), the cabinet of French Prime Minister Leon Blum adopted a decision to release Syria from the mandate in 1936, which, alas, his successor's government cancelled again. On the other hand, HS links imperialism repeatedly to the Crusades and thereby draws a picture of Europe as a quasi naturally expansionist cultural entity<sup>66</sup>. The overwhelmingly negative picture of Europe of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries contrasts the abundant references to European thinkers of the renaissance and enlightenment in the NCE texts.

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<sup>66</sup> HS9, p. 156; HS7, p. 116; HS8, pp 36, 50, 59, and 112

### 2.3.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Even high-ranking officials and intellectuals in Lebanon seem perplexed by the impasse the History textbook reform ended up with. Some of them wonder why it should not be possible to ‘simply tell the facts’<sup>67</sup>. This state of mind is mirrored in history teaching. History textbooks show a strict concentration on the enumeration of facts. The intellectual backgrounds by which these are selected and assessed in the text, are not transparent to the recipient, let alone contrasted against each other in a discursive manner. In all three History series, visual as well as verbal sources function as illustrations or explanations to the authors’ text only, not as a resource for students to work with them. A row of five to ten questions at the end of every lesson merely ask the pupils to recapitulate the conveyed events and terms. The origin of the information in the authors’ texts is not given in either of the history texts. If measured by the examined textbooks, no ‘historical communication’<sup>68</sup> is likely to take place in History classes. Neither do the History textbooks show the difference between a religious narrative and a scientific approach to history, nor encourage learners to follow a scientific approach autonomously. Or, as several pupils I spoke to in 2007 have put it: History, if it’s not according to books from the West abroad, is learning by heart.

As for NCE, the CRDP has made some effort to regard the learners’ interests and living context, particularly as concerns questions about family and social behaviour. Considering that confessionalism is central to the understanding of Lebanon’s political and judicial system, hence crucially important for the adolescent citizen, the NCE text on it is extremely scarce. This is particularly striking, because, on the whole, the NCE authors’ text is very extensive, and quotations of sources, though short, are very large in number. So there is a tremendous amount of the total text compared to the limited time of one hour per week assigned to the subject in the general curriculum. Calculating that, political confessionalism, a highly influential peculiarity of the Lebanese Republic, would be allotted a few minutes only twice over the course of 12 years.

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<sup>67</sup> This way or similarly I heard it said by Kamel Dallal, Director General of the Department of Education of the Makassed welfare organisation in April 2004, Michel Badr director of the department for NCE at the CRDP in March 2006, as well as Massoud Daher, director of the history department at the LU in July 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Pellens 1994, pp. 9-24.

Some educational research from within has been conducted in Lebanon since the 1950s and since 1995, educational researchers are organised in the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (LAES, see [www.laes.org](http://www.laes.org)), the most important sponsor of which is the Ford Foundation. It conducts statistical research, curriculum assessment, teacher and student surveys, and more. Studies are conducted partly on the members' own initiative and responsibility. Moreover, the LAES has also been commissioned with various works by organisations such as UNESCO as well as public and private institutions in Lebanon and other Arab countries. It published a bibliography of educational studies (LAES 2005) and runs the Arab Educational Information Network (Shamaa, [www.shamaanet.org](http://www.shamaanet.org)). Also, a number of textbook analyses have been written in Lebanon since the 1970s. Part of them<sup>69</sup> criticise the top down approach chosen by the textbook authors. This as well as the affair about the suspended new history curriculum prove that the positivist approach to history teaching still prevalent in Lebanon is not owed to a lack in pedagogical potential but to political reasons.

To overcome this state of affairs it seems critical to foster awareness among educationalists and decision makers that the very different perspectives on history and society anyway exist in Lebanon: Through the current multiplicity of History texts, each of which provides its recipients with only one view of the past, the class does not become the place where pupils learn to discuss differences peacefully, but where they are armed with the arguments of only one side of them. For the young people to cope with the sharp historical controversies going on in their country, textbooks would have to provide the different views in one comparative approach that teaches them the skills to shape their own opinion without defaming others. Ideological reservations on the sides of the religious establishment, the strong political influence of whom is inherent in the Lebanese confessional system, are a major obstacle on this way, as the debates around religious<sup>70</sup> and sex education<sup>71</sup> have shown.

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<sup>69</sup> e. g. Abou Moussa 1996, Wehbe/Amine 1980.

<sup>70</sup> Freyha 2004.

<sup>71</sup> Baydoun 2008

## 2.4 Oman

### 2.4.1 Structures of the Educational Sector

Until 1970 the educational system of Oman consisted of Qur'an schools (*kuttab*) which were restricted to mediate Qur'an exegesis, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Arabic language, grammar and history. Religious and non-religious knowledge was imparted in a circle of reception and production in mosques and their courtyards. This system brought forth many religious scholars and authors (*udabeh*), but the schools cleaved to the self-contained system of education.<sup>72</sup> In this context there were – and still are – several traditional educational institutions, such as the mosque, the scholar house and local community councils (*as-seblah*).<sup>73</sup> In 1970 there were only three public schools in Oman, namely in Maskat, Matrah and Salala. Schooling concluded with Grade 6 of primary education. In 1970 the total number of pupils was 909 and the total teaching staff 30.<sup>74</sup>

The year 1970 was the most important turning point in the educational sector and contributed to its rapid change after Sultan Said bin Taimur, who was considered as conservative and hostile to modernisation, was overthrown in a palace revolt initiated by his son the reigning Sultan Quabus bin Said al-Said. Within a short period Sultan Quabus changed a dictatorial regime into a monarchy of modern character, heralding the so-called 'age of Omani reformation' (*asr an-nahda al-omaniyya*), which is perceived to be a continuous developmental project.<sup>75</sup>

The progress and modernisation of the educational system can be attributed to Sultan Quabus. He plays a decisive role in the transformation and the 'modern' re-orientation of education and is often quoted as saying that 'it is important to also learn in the shadow of the trees'<sup>76</sup>. His action and words form the basis of the changes

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<sup>72</sup> Issan ca. 2005, 105-116.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>74</sup> Freyha 2007, 57.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Freyha 2007, 58.

in the educational system in the last four decades. The number of schools attended by both boys and girls has increased steadily while illiteracy has declined sharply.

In 2004 the literacy rate for the male population had risen to 87 percent and 74 percent for female. Although schooling is not compulsory more than 90 percent of children attend schools, which are generally free.

In 1971 there were 16 schools with a total number of 7,000 pupils. In 1972 a total of 15,000 pupils were enrolled in 45 schools.<sup>77</sup> Higher education was introduced in the school year 1972/73 and followed secondary education. In the year 1985/86 there were 606 schools attended by a total of 221,695 pupils – 79.14 percent of all students attended primary school, 15.16 percent middle school (Grades 7 to 10) (*i'idadiyya*) and 5.63 percent secondary school. At least 42 percent of all learners were female. During this time the number of teaching staff totalled 1,013.<sup>78</sup>

Due to Oman's previously high illiteracy rate (at least 95 percent) it was forced to employ numerous foreign teachers, especially from Egypt, Sudan and Jordan to ensure the federal running of schools as it began to develop a new educational system in 1970.<sup>79</sup> However, the number of foreign teaching staff has decreased in recent years. In 2006 it dropped to 18.2 percent or 6,832 of the total teaching staff 37,500.<sup>80</sup>

### **The education system of Oman: 2001-2008**

The following part describes the structure of the school educational system for the period 2001 to 2008. The system is divided into two levels, primary and secondary which are termed basic education (*al-ta'lim al-am*). The secondary level concludes with the examination 'basic diploma' (*ash-shahada al-ama*).<sup>81</sup> The primary level, which provides all pupils with a standardised education is organised by the state and comprises 10 years and grades. It aims at imparting general knowledge, information and know-how. Education after the primary and lower secondary level, i.e. Grade 11 to 12 provide education which is adjusted to the students' needs and skills. It picks up

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<sup>77</sup> Daher 2008, 93; Freyha 2009; Issan 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Issan 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Freyha 2007, 58.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Issan 2009.

the primary level and deepens its contents by improving technical knowledge and preparing students for working life or for studying at university.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from basic education, schools also offer technical and vocational education. In this context, a 10-year-plan was developed in 1990 to educate Omani specialists. The plan was deliberately aimed at linking primary, secondary and university level education with meeting the needs of the market.<sup>83</sup> The number of schools providing technical and vocational education increased during the 90s. Today, there are six technical universities and four centres of vocational education. The main objective of their curricula is to link theoretical knowledge with practical training. Learners who are accepted at vocational schools are supposed to have reached Grade 9 of basic education. Education at a vocational school lasts three years. In 2003 the number of graduates was 1,197; in 2005 it had risen to 1,859. In 2005 at least 4,710 pupils were educated at vocational school while 9,750 learners attended vocational school without having met enrolment requirements.<sup>84</sup> The state has changed several colleges of education into Technical Universities because of the huge interest in the courses they offer. At least 13,320 students were enrolled at these universities in the school year 2005-2006. This number is set to increase because of market demand and also due to the wide variety of courses on offer.<sup>85</sup>

### **The development of the educational system of Oman from 1970 to 2006**

The following table shows the development of the numbers of schools, students and teachers as well as the development of the federal education budget from 1970 to 2006.<sup>86</sup>

	1970	1976	1980	1990	2000	2006
Number of schools	3	207	273	779	993	1046
Number of students	909	55,752	106,032	355,986	554,845	568,074
Number of teachers	30	1,980	5,150	15,121	26,416	37,500
Education budget (in million Rial)	1,3	-	37,9	135,5	230,6	383,706

<sup>82</sup> ebd.

<sup>83</sup> Freyha 2007, 49.

<sup>84</sup> Freyha 2007, 50.

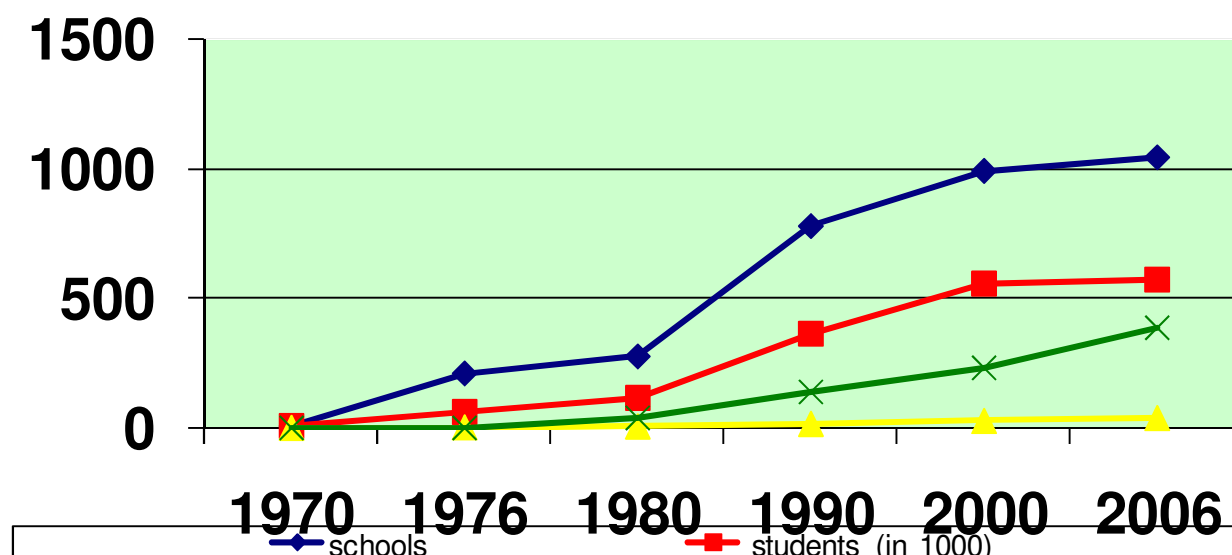
<sup>85</sup> Freyha 2007, 50.

<sup>86</sup> Freyha 2007, 33.



The previous table is based on statistics compiled by the MoE in 2006<sup>87</sup>.

The following graph is based on these statistics to further illustrate the development of the school, student and teacher numbers as well as the increase of the education budget from 1970 to 2006.



In 2008 Oman's population was 3,31 million with most people living in the cities. The following table, which is taken from a social studies textbook for Grade 11,<sup>88</sup> shows the development of the education budget of Oman from 1970 to 2000. In 1980 the education budget represented 4 percent of the national budget and exceeded health.

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
general education budget (in Mio. Rial)	1.3	9.4	73.9	99.3	135.5	183.9	230.6
share of federal budget in %	2.8	1.8	4	5.1	7.3	7.9	8.7
health budget (in mio. Rial)	2.8	14.8	28.3	86.6	92.9	121.7	146.8
share of federal budget in %	6.1	2.9	3	4.5	4.9	5.3	5.5

<sup>87</sup> Freyha, 33.

<sup>88</sup> Social studies schoolbook for the 11th grade, 2006, p. 106.

According to Freyha, Oman also had 158 private schools by 2006 attended by 28,183 pupils. Furthermore, there are three schools, catering for learners with special needs and attended by 281 pupils.<sup>89</sup>

The production of textbooks is organised centrally by the state. The MoE is responsible for the funding, conception and development of curricula and textbooks. In 1996, as part of its aim of implementing a coherent and efficient educational system, the MoE set up the Department of Textbook Production to ensure the quality of textbooks.

UNESCO supported the MoE in evaluating and licensing new textbooks published by the department. A second body, the Educational Technology Department, was established later. Since 2003 these two departments have been in charge of the production of textbooks and teaching material. They were incorporated by the MoE to eradicate duplication of duties. The new centre for the licensing and production of textbooks which emerged from this process consists of the six departments: Textbook Design and Editing, Textbook Production and Follow-up, Technical Support, Educational Aids, Learning Resources and Educational Technology.<sup>90</sup>

#### **2.4.2 Educational Reforms**

Official Omani sources tend to emphasise that the educational reform has been based on the following principles after Sultan Quabus came into power: Education is compulsory, free and the right of each person. It serves to construct society and assure the development of the country. Since the change of government in 1970, educational reforms in Oman have been officially divided into three stages<sup>91</sup>:

##### **The first stage: 1976-1995**

The main objectives of this stage were to rapidly and quantitatively increase the number of schools and pupils. Schooling comprised all 12 grades divided as follows: primary level (*at-ta'lim al'ibtida'i*) from Grade 1 to 6, intermediate level (*at-ta'lim al-I'dadi*) from Grade 7 to 9 and secondary level from Grade 10 to 12. Since 1976 the

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<sup>89</sup> Freyha 2007, p. 33.

<sup>90</sup> Issan 2009 a.

<sup>91</sup> Issan 2009 a.

development of the educational system has been based on five-year plans. In her book *Education in the Arab Gulf States and the Sultanate of Oman*<sup>92</sup>, Issan presents the following outline of the development and main points of the first stage:

A. Plan (1976-1980)

- Free education for all
- The availability of education everywhere in Oman
- The delivery of a high quality of education

B. Plan (1980-1985)

- Expanding vocational and technical education
- Developing Higher Education into two levels
- Introducing two-year programmes in secondary college
- Approving the establishment of a modern university

C. Plan (1986-1990)

- Quantitative expansion of educational services
- Expansion of vocational and technical education
- Establishing the foundations for special education

D. Plan (1991-1995)

- Quantitative expansion of educational services
- Supporting investment in private education
- Upgrading the training and preparation of teachers
- 'Omanisation' of the teaching staff
- Quantitative improvement of all educational services

## **The second stage: 1995-2000**

During this stage the MoE focused on the qualitative development of the educational system, i.e. its modernisation and adaptation to the developmental needs of the country as well as to urgent new scientific challenges. To achieve quantitative and

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<sup>92</sup> Issan 2007, p. 127.

qualitative advancements, the main priority of the second stage was to abolish the afternoon shift classes in primary schools that had resulted from high number of learners. New schools were built and existing ones expanded. The number of pupils per classroom was restricted to 30 in Grades 1 to 4, and 35 in Grades 5 to 10.

The introduction of English lessons from Grade 1 onwards and the use of computers were meant to lay the modern foundations for the opening. Basic changes in the educational system became necessary due to new curricula and methods in all subjects. Measures were taken to improve the expertise of the school staff, including education and further training of teachers as well as technicians and specialists responsible for the administration of resources at schools.<sup>93</sup>

At the beginning of the 90s, the MoE had already prepared a plan for the implementation of a general education in schools from Grade 1 to 10. In 1998 the plan was implemented in selected schools. The first generation of pupils to graduate under the new primary school system completed Grade 10 in 2007.<sup>94</sup>

### **The third stage: 2001-2008**

This stage was characterised by a new reform policy. The sixth five-year plan (2001-2005) represents the first part of the third stage, which had the following aims:

- Prioritise government spending on higher education as well as upgrading and expanding basic education.
- Raise the rate of enrolment in higher education institutions and the upgrading and spreading of basic education.
- Supporting programmes aimed at promoting the activities of the youth sector as it is considered the cornerstone for the building of society.<sup>95</sup>

According to Issan, additional new reforms were implemented which can be summarised as follows<sup>96</sup>:

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<sup>93</sup> Issan 2009.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Issan 2007, p. 133.

<sup>96</sup> Issan 2009.

First: The educational system was restructured and is now divided into two types of schools:

- (A) The primary school now comprises 10 instead of the nine grades of the old educational system (six years of primary plus three years of secondary school).
- (B) The secondary school lasts only two years (Grades 11 and 12).

Second: Methods and curricula have been reformed, textbooks have been revised and both teaching and class conditions have improved.

Third: New subjects (information technology/information processing, development of environmental awareness) were implemented and education in Mathematics, English and the sciences has improved in all grades.

Fourth: The two teaching units in the morning and the afternoon were redesigned and both school day and school year were lengthened.

Fifth: Exam and evaluation modalities were modernised.

Sixth: The MoE has been restructured to concentrate on the planning of education policy and on the consistent implementation of decisions in the educational institutions and the ministry itself.

Advancements in the development of the educational system during the third reform stage can be seen in the enrolment numbers of schools in 2003 (December, with figures in percent) – 89.7 of boys and 88.4 of girls aged six, 93.6 of boys and 91.9 of girls aged six to seven, 91.2 of boys and 89.1 of girls aged 13 to 15 and 82.7 of boys and 81.8 of girls aged 16 to 18. According to MoE statistics, the number of pupils in the school year 2006/2007 was 560,000 and the number of public schools 1,053. Only 20,000 learners attended private school.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Issan 2009.

### 2.4.3 Recent Curriculum Developments

Since no Omani curricula were available at the beginning of the reform, textbooks from Qatar were used for the primary and secondary levels (*al-Tailim al-am*) while books from Saudi Arabia were used in adult classes (*Talim al-Kibar*). This was done to concentrate on guaranteeing a general school education as soon as possible. During the 80s a policy of ‘Omanisation’ of the education system was started to account for the historical context of the country and the Omani identity. To realise the ‘Omanisation’ of the educational system, new curricula, textbooks and methods for all subjects and all levels were designed. Furthermore, the preparation of the development of curricula for the general education (from Grade 1 to 12) began in 1994.

The tendency to develop new curricula for Social Studies and History during the last stage of reform can be attributed to Sultan Quabus’s speeches and recommendations as they represent a source of inspiration for the curricula. His ideas and beliefs about education received priority within the conception of the educational reform.<sup>98</sup> As a second reference, the constitution of Oman influences general principles of the cultural and educational system as well as recommendations for the development of curricula for the teaching of Social Studies and History. The textbook reform (including the curricula) reflects different guidelines of the constitution. In this context, the following principles are important to the reform of the curricula of the subjects Social Studies and History: Oman is an independent Arabic country; Islam is the state religion and the *sharia* is the source of the constitution; authority is based on equity, *schura*, equality and the right to participate in public life; adherence to the loyalty to the home country and the sultan; the sovereignty of the law and the independence of judiciary; the national economy is based on equity and the free market; and emphasis is placed on the importance of the family and the support of their members.<sup>99</sup>

In addition, the MoE has been supporting a new educational programme since 1997, which attaches importance to the quantitative and qualitative development of

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<sup>98</sup> e.g., social studies curricula for the 8th grade (in Arabic), 2003, p. 7-8; social studies curricula for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (in Arabic), 2006, p. 8-9.

<sup>99</sup> e.g., social studies curricula for the 8th grade (in Arabic), 2003, p. 7-8; social studies curricula for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (in Arabic), 2006, p. 8-9.

education. The efforts have led to textbook revisions, reforms of curricula and the new schooling system (primary school: Grade 1 to 4 and Grade 5 to 10; and high school: Grade 11 to 12).<sup>100</sup> In this programme the educational objectives of Oman are ascribed to the principles of the Islam, to local tradition, i.e. the Ottoman cultural heritage (history, geography, Omani conventions and customs) and to the constitution of the state.

#### **2.4.4 Textbook Analysis – Images of Self and Other**

In recent History and Social Studies textbooks the Omani society and its contemporary constitution and historical development is emphasised and references to important topics of the Pan-Arabism and strong images of Europe and the West are excluded. Instead, the unity of mankind and the variety of cultures are emphasised and connected to the reinvention of an individual Omani identity. The issues which are dealt with in Omani textbooks, such as the belonging to the human race, the belief in universal values (justice, equality, freedom, etc.) and the adjustment of society to new scientific developments show that students are taught to see themselves as active members of mankind. The universal dimension of the 'Self-image' has a different presence in History and Social Studies textbooks. A second dimension of the 'Self' or the topic of identity relates to the question of the authenticity of local values and the particularity of the Omani society. First, the universal dimension of membership can be illustrated with the help of different history and social studies textbooks.<sup>101</sup>

As far as the issue of universal values is concerned, the following concepts can be reconstructed reading between the lines of the Grade 12 History textbook *The world around me* (2007): Initially, the theme of belonging to mankind constantly recurs in Omani textbooks. It is often imparted that the 'good' Omani citizens perceive themselves as part of humanity. The universal dimension of history is defined as a history of the interdependence of cultures, which aspires a worldwide awareness of history.<sup>102</sup> In the debate on the coexistence with other cultures, particular emphasis is placed on the belief in universal values, such as minimal norms, which enable the

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<sup>100</sup> e.g., social studies curricula for the 12th grade, (in Arabic), 2006, p. 8-9.

<sup>101</sup> *The world around me* 2007.

<sup>102</sup> *The world around me* 2007, ch. 1.

coexistence of human beings – for example, justice, equality and freedom. The image of the human being makes up the key focus of the third unit of the first half of the school year.<sup>103</sup> The limited knowledge of human beings about themselves (self-reflection) results in a more intensive perception of others and in coexistence. Human beings are perceived as a part of the universe; but they are also part of a culture: on the one hand, they belong to the human race; on the other hand, they are also part of human history. In this context, human beings are supposed to live and communicate with other human beings in order to become human. This cultural experience can be made by everyone and aims at ensuring a basic participation in human history. The following quote emphasises the point in the Grade 12 History textbook: “*Thus, culture is a group experience. It mustn’t be monopolised by anybody and nobody must abstain from its participation.*”<sup>104</sup> However, not only the universal dimension of values is emphasised but also the universal dimension of knowledge. Textbooks also focus on the pursuit of knowledge in a cross-cultural context. Furthermore, the adjustment of new international scientific developments to the local educational system is also of importance to textbook authors.

It must be noted that the universal aspects of human identity mentioned above should be perceived in a dynamic and active sense. This includes the evolvement of cultures and their achievements in space and time rather than their character. The third unit of the first chapter of the Grade 12 History textbook contains a unit on the topic of *Our world, cultural variety and new ideas*. Based on this topic, the main focus is on the dynamics of cultures, their historical development and their reference to both nature and human beings.<sup>105</sup> Thereby, the book mainly focuses on the peaceful and open cultural self-description and on a reflection on the accomplishments of Omani culture in the course of history and its contemporary vitality in the century of the rapid technical and digital development of mankind.<sup>106</sup> In addition, the mutual influence of cultures shall be perceived. Based on dialogues and communication, the fourth unit of the Grade 12 History textbook alludes to the importance of the dialogue within and across cultures. It is of special importance to identify the cultural, ethnic and religious values in order to conduct a constructive

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<sup>103</sup> The world around me 2007.

<sup>104</sup> The world around me 2007, p. 99.

<sup>105</sup> The world around me 2007, p. 99-119.

<sup>106</sup> The world around me 2007, p. 119-132.



dialogue within or between cultures. These values are deduced from a right-positive as well as from a right-religious background.<sup>107</sup>

History and Social Studies textbooks aim at giving pupils a strong sense of the local and national dimension of the 'Own' or in this case 'Omani' place in the world. It is striking that the Civics, History and Social Studies textbooks set a considerable amount of value on the historical and cultural traditions of their country as well as on its modern development and the openness towards other cultures. Hence, the historical representation of the cultural heritage in Omani schoolbooks plays a decisive role to clarify the 'cultural identity'<sup>108</sup> of the country and to make students understand the 'educational' role of Oman.<sup>109</sup> In the first topic of the fifth unit of Social Studies for Grade 11 the development of the 'Omani culture' is divided into two correlating periods<sup>110</sup>: The period prior to Islam refers to the different cultures which existed in Oman before the spread of Islam and the Islamic era refers to the development of Islam and the Islamic culture in Oman since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, the schoolbooks emphasise that it was the free choice and belief of the Omani people that made them convert to Islam. The story of *Mazin ben Gathoubah* represents an important proof of the construction of the Omani identity<sup>111</sup>. The fifth unit of the Grade 11 Social Studies textbook *This is my home country* deals with the issue of cultural identity and shows how the people of Oman were converted to Islam: *When the Omani people heard of the proclamation of Islam in the Hedschas on the Arabian Peninsula they wanted to know how this new religion was defined. Mazin ben gathoubah, who was not satisfied with the predominant religion in Oman, emigrated to Mekka where he met the prophet Mohamed and converted to Islam. After he had returned to Oman, he began to spread Islam there. As a result, Islam has been one of the most important pillars of Omani cultural identity ever since its emergence.*<sup>112</sup> The construction of Omani identity is thus intensely characterised by Islam and its history is told as a story of a personified transfer of education. On the basis of the Grade 11 History and Social Studies (titled *Islamic civilisation*) textbooks, the discussion on the individual values of the Omani identity can be clarified.<sup>113</sup> It is argued that the Islamic civilisation shapes specific skills, which characterise the

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<sup>107</sup> The world around me 2007, p. 139-177.

<sup>108</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, ch. 5, p. 110.

<sup>109</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, ch. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006.

<sup>111</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, p. 113.

<sup>112</sup> Social studies, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 2006, p. 113. see also curricula for social studies, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 2007, p. 144.

<sup>113</sup> Islamic civilization, 2005 (chapter?).

Omani identity fundamentally. Among these skills there are four characteristics which constitute the distinctiveness of the Islamic civilisation from the official Omani point of view: a) The Islamic civilisation is religious and ethical because it is based on the belief in God and the engagement in Islamic ethics. Islam does not consider life as an ideal or an aim itself but as an intermediate stage or an assessment, which needs to be passed correctly and positively. b) The Islamic civilisation is comprehensive and well-balanced for it comprises all areas of human life (intellectual, spiritual and physical) and its rationality contributes to a well-balanced culture and civilisation. c) The Islamic civilisation is liberal and creative due to the fact that it is a world culture and that it plays a decisive role in the development of world history. d) The Islamic civilisation features a humanistic tendency because human beings are in the foreground of Islamic civilisation. It represents both starting point and destination of all ambition. Since human beings are of special importance to Islam it does not support discrimination and racism.<sup>114</sup>

Another aspect of the construction of identity is the role of women in Omani culture. Women play a decisive role in the cultural history of Oman, whereas recent textbooks feature fewer figures of women than of men. As far as the mentioning of individual female personalities is concerned, the emphasis is placed on the contribution of Omani women to the cultural development of the country.<sup>115</sup> Thus, the woman is predominantly considered as the educator of mankind rather than only the bearer and carer of children. She participates in cultural life and contributes to the development of society. Examples from Omani history suggest that the scientific role of women is deeply rooted in the history of Oman. In this context, the famous women – *Aicha bint Rashed ben Hasib al-Rayamiya*, *Thoraya bint Mohamed ibn Azan al-Bousidiyya* and *Nasraa bint Rasched ben Hamid al-Habsiya* – are mentioned as examples in the fifth unit of the Grade 11 Social Studies textbook on the topic of cultural identity.<sup>116</sup> These women were involved in the cultural and educational field in the course of the history of Oman. However, the textbook does not contain detailed information about their activities.

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<sup>114</sup> Al-hadara al-Islamiya, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 2005, p. 2005.

<sup>115</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, ch. 5, p. 124.

<sup>116</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, ch. 5, p. 124.

Oman's geographical location in relation to the regional history is of special importance to the reinvention of the Omani nation. The presentation of the place presupposes not only decisions on the belonging to a region but also implicitly drawn borderlines to other regions such as neighbouring Islamic countries because the mission to spread an 'educated' Islam is aimed at South East Asia and Eastern Africa. Based on the topic *The role of the Omani people in the spreading of the Islamic culture*<sup>117</sup>, the role of the 'Others' with regard to the formation of the Omani identity is outlined. The chapter presents the Omani people as the bearers of Muslim culture who are supposed to spread it peacefully all over the world.

The 'self-image' of Omani people being educators and bearers of Muslim culture is supposed to characterise the identity of Omani people today. This self-image is directly connected to values such as peace, tolerance, loyalty and honesty. They are primarily defined as Muslim values.

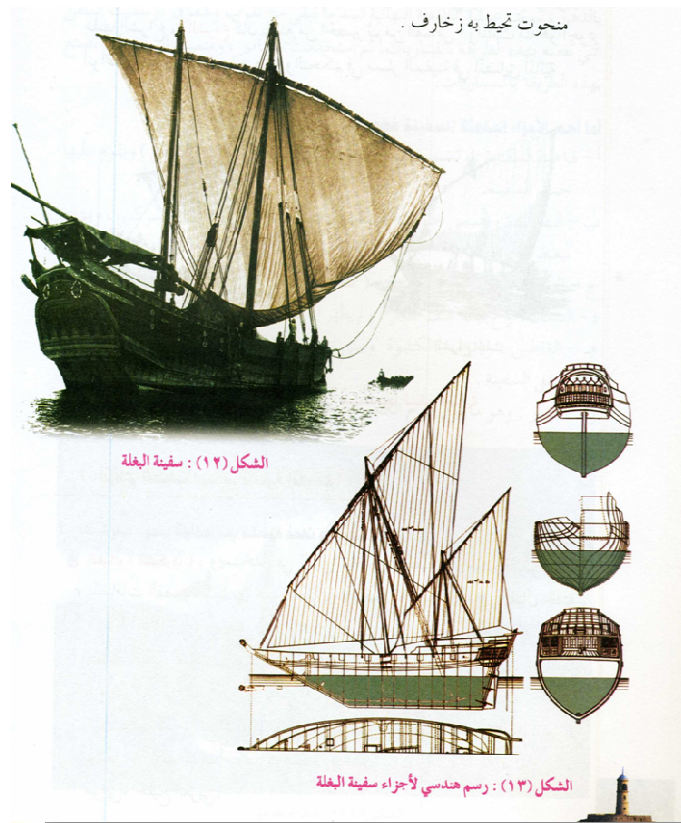
According to the textbooks these values were of great influence in Eastern Africa where the Omani people had been actively operating for a long time and to a lesser extent in South East Asia and Eastern Africa<sup>118</sup>. The self-portrayal of the Omani people as mediators of culture is connected to their activity as tradesmen.

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<sup>117</sup>Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, ch. 5, p. 124.

<sup>118</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, p. 128.

*The Omani role in history is symbolised by the ship that was used for inter-costal trade in regions of the Indian Ocean Source: Social Studies textbook for Grade 9, vol 2 (2005), p 62.*



Omani societies existed along the Indian Coast as well as in today's Pakistani region where they peacefully proclaimed Islam as faith and culture. This contact resulted in the development of a cultural exchange between Oman and the southeast Asiatic countries (China, some Japanese islands and Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines) in the fields of art and science (medicine, geography, astronomy and mathematics) as well as philosophy. The mediation of Islamic values and culture made up the key focus of these relations.

On page 128 it says: *In return, the Indian tradesmen received knowledge about the principles and basis (Taalim) of the Islamic culture when they came to Oman. Due to the loyalty, honesty, good treatment and tolerance which the Omani people showed them they wanted to know where these values originated from. The scholars told them that Islam was their source.*<sup>119</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, p. 128.

The relationship between the people of Oman and the East African countries developed prior to the spreading of Islam. Omani tradersmen and sailors established good contacts to the east African people. With the emergence of Islam these contacts were intensified. Hence, East Asian tradersmen spread Islam in East Africa. Thereby, the East African people were influenced by the ‘principles of justice and the positive behaviour of the Omani tradersmen’<sup>120</sup> and converted to Islam. It is not only

important to emphasise the role of the Omani people as mediators of culture but also to express the idea of ‘coexistence’.

The fact that Omani people have become a part of African society can be regarded as a proof of its openness towards this culture.

Regions in which Omani people have existed are Lamu (since 802), some regions in Mogadishu, Mombasa, Zanzibar, etc. Schoolbooks often focus on European-Arabic relations to outline the effect of the Arabic-Islamic culture on the development of the sciences in Europe. It outweighs the illustration of European influence on the Arabic culture.

The representation of the Arabic influence refers to different levels: the reception of Arabic-Islamic works in the fields of medicine, mathematics, chemistry, physics, botany and optics by the Europeans; the adoption of the technical knowledge of the Arabic people and its mediation in European universities; and the active participation of Muslims in world history.



Map presenting extended Omani trade relations throughout the Indian Ocean Source: Social Studies textbook for Grade 12. This is My Country. On Tradition and Glory (2007), p 23.

<sup>120</sup> Social studies, 11th grade, 2006, p. 130.

A first contribution of European culture is connected to the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, the European enlightenment is evaluated positively. The schoolbooks also point out that the Industrial Revolution was important for bringing about changes in the way people worked and lived. Thus, the first chapter of the Grade 11 History textbook talks about new inventions that changed the world. The achievements of various European scientists are honoured, including Alexander Graham Bell who is credited with inventing the first practical telephone. The Industrial Revolution is also linked to the development of intellectual, literary and artistic life and according to Omani schoolbooks, all of these scientific and cultural aspects represent a key dimension of the European enlightenment which needs to be perceived in a universal sense. Page 30 of the History textbook describes the period as follows: *An intellectual movement emerged in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe; it was called enlightenment. It aimed at educating people about science and knowledge/awareness and changing their social conditions. It originated in France.*

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A second contribution of the European culture is connected to the technological revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and represents the main focus of the perception of Europe and the West in Omani schoolbooks. The discovery and exploitation of oil as an energy source, atomic research, expeditions to space and the development of means of transport and communication are regarded as catalysts and phenomena of modernisation. The digital turning point which is considered to be the most important revolution of our century has been further supporting this process recently. In this context the internet is presented as a new way of communicating, constituting a new scientific culture.

Europe and the West serve as role models for scientific developments in this regard. The Omani society is portrayed as a part of humanity affected by the digital turning point which, like any other contemporary society, has to cope with the technological developments and their value within the Omani context.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> History textbook for the 12th grade The world around me (2007), p. 30.

<sup>122</sup> History textbook for the 12th grade: The world around me (2007), ch. 1.

## **2.4.5 Conclusions**

At first glance, the Omani modernisation and reform project seems to be successful. Today both access and management efficacy follow high international standards. Likewise, an analysis of History and Social Studies textbooks shows that curricula aim at imparting universal values such as tolerance and equality and associated national concepts of identity to Omani learners. In the case of Oman the strong state consists in absolute monarchy which invests considerable amount of resources in education and tries to make the national narrative compatible to the globalized requirements of cultural openness. Yet, it is unclear in how far the ‘clean’ message of the positive role of the Islamic Oman – resulting from the image of its people as friendly and educating – will succeed in competing with differing interpretations of Islam of neighbouring states or with the typical issues of Arabic Nationalism or in how far the Omani people will be able to cope with conflicts within their own society. Such issues are not addressed in schoolbooks. There seems to be a perception that conflicts and violence do not occur in Oman and learners are thus not provided with skills that would help them to cope with difference and dissent. Still, the cohesive message of the Omani concept of identity is put at risk by the existence of non-Omani immigrants (about 30%), majority of whom are of South Asian origin, and are excluded from the national belonging in the first place. Those immigrants constitute more than half of the national labour force in the private sector, employed as unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The recent policy of ‘Omanisation’ of labour has privileged Omani nationals above immigrants in public sector employment but there is still high competition between Omani graduates of secondary education without work experience and immigrant labourers who work for lower wages in the private sector. The transfiguration of the Omanis’ cultural mission in the regional history could probably add to an affirmation of the low and secondary status of South-Asian expatriate workers in Oman and postpone the issue of their sustainable integration into Omani society. The tabooing of religious deviations between Ibadis who make up about 75 percent of the Omani population and other Muslims and the conflicts which have been surrounding the abolishment of the Ibadi Imamate by the sultanate since 1959 also still carry a potential to jeopardise the Omani concept of identity.

### **3. Findings and Conclusion**

In this report we have presented four case studies which looked at the most recent developments of the national educational sectors of Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Oman. It sheds light on the change in direction of the contemporary national political strategies of the MENA region in the context of international educational development programmes. The results of these efforts in the four countries are examined at the level of educational reform including the improvement of access to schooling, management efficacy and quality. The studies look at the main characteristics of contemporary education systems in MENA and analyse state performance in the educational sector, with particular focus on curriculum development in the humanities and the current transformation of the various images of the national 'Self' and of significant 'Others' based on textbook analysis. They provide insights into the most recent state approved versions of the cultural positioning of the national collective as related to 'Others'.

Against the background of our findings and the point of departure of this study, our final conclusions revert to the questions in the introduction:

**a) Have the reforms in the four MENA countries resulted in an upgrading of quality of curricula in the humanities? Does the upgrading include a move away from a previous negative stereotyping of 'Others' – especially 'Europe' and 'the West'? Is there a different portrayal and recognition of European cultural heritage and mutual transcultural transfer?**

The latest reforms of curricula have resulted in all four countries placing special emphasis on teaching Mathematics, Science, foreign languages and ICT skills to promote the creation of modern internationally compatible labour forces. The teaching of humanities now falls under the new subject Civic Education and the older subjects of History and Geography have undergone numerous changes visible in textbooks. The new curricula and the new generation of textbooks have successfully upgraded teaching of humanities, with teachers encouraged to use new approaches such as opening up discussions on pupils tasks and promoting research on designated websites. But a closer look at the textbooks reveals some shortcomings.



From an academic point of view the teaching of aspects of classical subjects like History and Social Science under Civic Education diminishes the status of single disciplines since all are taught as a mere grammar of short cut topics without portfolio of teaching special scientific and reflexive skills to critically revise social and political present and past. Civic Education seems to have been created as an instrument for shaping loyal citizens, defusing social conflicts, levelling off differences in the own population if taught as a subject of scattered content, blurred profile and consequently low prestige inside the educational programme.

Concerning the images of 'Self' and 'Other', the new textbooks have strategically redesigned representations of the national 'Self' to integrate references to local patriotism and universalism as well as to older notions of Pan-Arab identity and Islam in a vague manner. The four narratives of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Oman have mainstreamed the narrative of the national 'Self' towards a self-identification of a peace-loving, modern, tolerant and open-to-the-world nation of Arab and Muslim heritage – each in a local variation of the general message. The ensemble of text and voids sustains the reshaping of the new transfiguration of the national collective 'Self' and even the given images of the 'Other' seem to be mere appendixes of the modernised narratives. There is a limited reservoir of patterns to be used, but out of the local or national reservoir of images and narratives the selection does not remain contingent on second sight. European or western countries are in all cases mentioned in a positive way as a source and creator of modernity and science, but this at times serves to simultaneously mention the Arab Muslim contribution to European enlightenment and science as a *condition sine qua non*.

The classical topics of Pan-Arabism like crusades and colonialist destruction are not the dominating narratives of the 'European Other' anymore.

Politically sensitive issues are generally ignored or presented only superficially in the textbooks. Thus, previous portrayals of Israel as an aggressor and an occupying power have become cursory at best on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Israeli-Arab wars and mostly refrain from open incitement.

At the same time however, the new textbooks try to keep up national cohesion by retelling the narrative of the national 'Self' moulded as a minimal consent inside the contemporary societies and among the elites.

They thereby balance voices of political critique towards the state – be they secular or religious. One of the most important findings here is that the homogenous new narrations remain not only silent about outside ‘Others’ but in fact obscure inner lines of conflict and contain almost no references to the continuity of historical conflict potentials or from persistent inequalities inside the nation: boundaries and misrecognition in Lebanese society are not critically discussed as a feature of the national self; in Egyptian textbooks one only finds hidden references that try to balance symbolic markers of modernity with Islamist demands on religious integrity; Jordanian textbooks ignore the inner ‘Others’ – Palestinian or Iraqi refugees – and prefer to sustain the peaceful Jordanian ‘Self’ as against ‘Others’ who threaten peace; the Omani narrative of the ‘Self’ is similarly short on the understanding of conflicts in the own local history. In no case do the collective memories officially remember conflicting actors in local or regional history and the divergent voices of critique, but try to balance state criticism and different ideologies in an indirect way.

**b) What links can be identified between authoritarian state control of curricula, liberalising markets for educational providers, upgrade in quality of education and changes of the images of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’?**

The current History and Civics textbooks in the four countries do not support claims made by some that a culture of anti-Westernism is promoted in textbooks used in Arab countries and paralleled with non-democratic or authoritarian features of the states. A closer look at the textbooks suggests rather complex links between authoritarian or weak state control, and transfigurations of the national community achieved through positive or negative representations of the ‘Self’ and ‘Others’. The specific structure of the education systems presented in the four case studies shows the need to differentiate between centralised state control of curricula and the diversification of the educational sector in terms of allowing for a private sector of education and for different providers of teaching and textbooks. Calls for the decentralisation of education system management are met with varying degrees of reluctance by most MENA countries. A deregulation of schooling, including partial decentralisation of system management, is often coupled with continuous centralised government control of the education system as a whole.

The four studies suggest that there is no conditional link between authoritarian rule and negative images of western and non-western 'Others'. On the contrary – in some cases reforms of curricula and textbooks implemented under rigid state control (Egypt, Jordan, Oman) have resulted in the eradication of outrightly negative presentations of external 'Others' and more thorough ideological reconstructions of the national 'Self' found in earlier curricula of these countries. In the course of such reforms, some specific symbolic markers of modernity have been introduced to the textbooks, for example the recognition of the new roles for women in society.

Questions thus remain regarding the degree to which the officially proclaimed aims of educational reforms, like promoting quality education, tolerance and human rights, educating pupils to become active learners and independent critical thinkers, are going to be achieved under the present political conditions. Quality education for all, for example, is among the official aims of educational reform policies promoted by national governments in the region and international donors alike. At the same time, an important aspect of the educational reforms pertaining to education system management implemented in most countries of the region is the introduction of market elements and the gradual privatisation of public education systems. But such a process tends to result in a diversification of educational opportunities along class lines, particularly in countries where opportunities remain scarce in general. Such tendencies might be more pronounced regarding Egypt as compared to the much smaller and affluent Oman. Thus, the reform agenda itself seems to be contradictory and will therefore most likely lead to mixed results.

Liberalising market policies for education and different providers does not promote better access to quality education – instead it may decrease the value of public institutions and state organised education. Without state control of curricula, the liberalisation of the educational market may, as in the Lebanese case, continue negative stereotyping of 'Others' since ethno-religious ideologies and heterogeneous narratives go together with the political and ideological fragmentation of the national 'Self' and a parallel segmentation of the market shares of providers of educational services.

**c) What, as a consequence of the latest reforms in curricula, can be concluded about options for further textbook revision and intercultural dialogue about education?**

Textbooks alone cannot reveal the full picture of the reality at schools. But through this research we can highlight that textbooks often obscure the daily problems of pupils and teachers more than they reveal – by ignoring problems of unemployment among the young, poverty and unequal distribution of opportunities along lines of class, ethnicity, religion or gender. We also don't know much about the way textbook content is negotiated between pupils and teachers in classroom communication nor can we explain a general imbalance between the new narratives issued by states or local educational organisations on one hand and counter-conceptualisations of outside 'Others' that are propagated by ideologies that contest the state and are still prevailing in public space and other media outside schools. A centralised control of curricula and the rigid implementation of 'tolerance' may create a certain ambivalence and latent conflict potential regarding the values transmitted at school. References to democratic rules and human rights in textbooks of countries who themselves neither practise democracy nor respect human rights are likely to be perceived as unconvincing by learners. The numerous self-documenting voids and the mostly normative character of textbook narratives visible in the four case studies indicate that pupils capable of independent critical thinking are really not what curriculum planners have in mind when it comes to politically sensitive disciplines like History and Civics. As the textbooks contain highly moderated discourses that only partly reflect the life experiences of students, questions remain regarding the relevance they might have for the formation of learners' worldviews.

In this context, it is important to remember that teachers might be unable to implement a reformed curriculum due to lack of qualifications or lack of resources at school, or they might choose to follow their own 'hidden curriculum' instead.

Even if the analysis of textbook narratives does not enable us to understand the dynamics of the educational process in MENA countries, or does not allow for wide-ranging conclusions regarding the formation of learners' world views through schooling, the textbooks do shed light on contemporary negotiations of national identities and cultural constructions of the national 'Self' against internal or external 'Others'. The case studies portray the ensembles of texts and voids and the implicit

references made towards political discourses found outside school textbooks. To gain a thorough understanding of the educational process in MENA countries, textbook revision needs to be combined with an assessment of how the curriculum is implemented at school and how textbooks are received and debated in classrooms. Our analysis needs to address the wider context of educational reform policies in the context of ongoing debates on democratisation and the transformation of civil societies in the region.

This means that because of the complexity and big differences between the various local and national contexts that are presented here, there is no simple recipe for a further textbook revision nor is there a specific road for a reciprocal dialogue about mutual stereotyping in images of 'Self' and 'Other' between Arab MENA countries and European countries. The dialogue cannot in any case evolve around the aim for a revision of single negative depictions of the 'Other' in European or Arab textbooks but should take the shape of an informed dialogue grounded in knowledge about the different economic, social and political environments that the educational reforms and the content of textbooks are situated in.

The local or national elites – be they representatives of the current educational policies in the different countries or even of criticism from the point of view of civil society – should be perceived as important actors in contemporary negotiations in the battlefield of education where the current regime is contested and new features emerge. They may hold critical positions against Western influence and domination of the educational discourse, but at the same time be more occupied with an agenda of change for their own societies that is not intimately linked with positive or negative perceptions of the West or of international organisations. It is important to support civil society initiatives in the region that include a critical review of the local and world history without obscuring lines of conflict. In the case of didactics of History and Civic Education, continuous networking between academics and political practitioners and an informed dialogue among them could result in affecting further educational reforms.

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