

Schoolbooks Ingrain Israeli-Palestinian Enmity

Israelis and Palestinians depict each other in schoolbooks as an enemy and largely deny their adversary's history and existence, according to a U.S. government-funded study published on Monday.

Young minds are inheriting a century-old struggle for land and legitimacy through their **schoolbooks**, said a panel of **Muslim, Jewish** and Christian social scientists from the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land.

Countries who give donations to the **Palestinian Authority** have studied **Israeli** allegations of incitement to violence and even **anti-Semitism** in Palestinian schoolbooks for over a decade, but the report said both sides bore blame for ingraining **enmity**.

"The schoolbooks offer narratives to motivate members of society to be part of the **conflict**," Daniel Bar-Tal of Israel's Tel Aviv University, one of the lead researchers, told a news conference. "In conflict societies, people not only shoot at each other, but struggle for the narrative, the image of the other and of themselves."

The conclusions drew strong reaction from the governments of each side, with Palestinians happy to have Israel included in a comprehensive study and Israel, which boycotted the investigation, calling it "biased and unprofessional".

A bilingual research team examined 168 textbooks, homing in on cases in which the other side is discussed and assigning the passages with one of five labels, from "very negative" to "very positive."

In a double blind study, researchers agreed on the

designations in over 90 percent of cases, a degree of unanimity that authors say lent a degree of scientific rigour lacking in previous, more subjective examinations of the subject.

Among passages describing the other, the study classified 84 percent as “negative” or “very negative” in Palestinian books, compared with 49 percent in Israeli state schools and 73 percent in Israeli religious schools.

But of the passages designated “very negative,” most characterised the other “as the enemy,” rather than “de-humanising” or “demonising” them, the study by the Jerusalem-based think-tank found.

Along those lines, a 12th-grade Palestinian textbook described “Zionist occupation and its usurpation of Palestine and its people’s rights” as “the core of the conflict”. A fourth grade Israeli religious textbook teaches that “Israel is a young country surrounded by enemies, like a little lamb in a sea of seventy wolves.”

The study also found that Israeli state schools more directly tackled negative aspects of its own past – such as a 1948 massacre of unarmed Palestinian civilians – than Israeli religious and Palestinian schools did.

Maps Ignore the Other Side

A vast majority of maps in Israeli and Palestinian textbooks either totally omitted the other side, or showed interim borders without naming the other side.

Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in a 1967 war. It annexed East Jerusalem in a move not recognised internationally and has accelerated settlement in the occupied West Bank, while withdrawing from Gaza in 2005.

Palestinians want to establish a state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as their capital. Peace talks have

been frozen since 2010.

Exercising limited self rule in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority has struggled to build a national identity and institutions.

It recycled Jordanian and Egyptian schoolbooks until it began to write its own curriculum in 2000, progressively erasing confrontational references to Jews and celebrations of martyrdom.

But Israeli and U.S. officials have not been convinced by these changes, and say that Palestinian school materials continue to promote hatred.

Israeli non-governmental organizations have repeatedly presented findings alleging incitement to the U.S. Congress as well as the European and Canadian parliaments.

The U.S. State Department provided \$500,000 for the latest research, after a study it performed itself in its annual rights review of the Palestinian Territories in 2009 faulted Palestinian textbooks for “imbalance, bias and inaccuracy”.

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad “welcomed” the results of the new study, according to a statement from his office, saying it “absolved Palestinian textbooks of the flagrant accusation that they incite hatred toward the other”.

Israel’s education ministry said that the findings’ “attempt to draw a parallel between the Israeli and Palestinian education systems is baseless and has no grounds in reality.

“The result of the ‘research’ shows that the decision not to cooperate with the investigation was justified,” the ministry said in a statement sent to Reuters.

Reporting By Noah Browning; editing by Mark Heinrich.

