

**Jerusalem, the "Right of Return" and Violence
As Currently Taught at UNRWA Schools
In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip**

By

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was created in the wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. It provides education, health and social services to a unique type of population in the whole world: the descendants of the Palestinian refugees of that war who have been kept for generations in makeshift camps under poor conditions and in whom this agency has nourished the false hope of their return to their forefathers' former houses in present-day Israel that no longer exist. In the 2017/18 schoolyear it operated 276 schools in the Gaza Strip with over 270,000 students and 96 schools in the West Bank with some 50,000 students. The textbooks used in UNRWA schools in those areas are provided by the Palestinian Authority (PA). As far as their attitude to the Jewish-Israeli "other" and to the issue of peace with this "other" is concerned, these books follow the PA's three educational fundamentals: Delegitimization of Israel's existence and the Jews' very presence in the country, demonization of both Israel and Jews in various contexts, and advocacy of a violent struggle for the actual destruction of Israel – camouflaged under the slogan of "Palestine's liberation" – instead of a peaceful coexistence with it. This article focuses on three elements studied in UNRWA schools within this threefold approach: Jerusalem, indoctrination to violence, and the "Right of Return" issue. The source material for this article has been the newly-published textbooks of the PA within its current operation of rewriting its whole curriculum that started in 2016. All these books are presently used in UNRWA schools.

I. Jerusalem

Jerusalem is presented to UNRWA students as an Arab city from its very establishment thousands of years ago and it is a holy city to Muslims and Christians alone:

"Jerusalem is an Arab city built by our Arab forefathers thousands of years ago.

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Jerusalem is a holy city for Muslims and Christians."

الْقُدْسُ مَدِينَةٌ عَرَبِيَّةٌ بَنَاهَا أَجْدَادُنَا الْعَرَبُ مِنْذُ آلَافِ السِّنِينَ.
الْقُدْسُ مَدِينَةٌ مُقَدَّسَةٌ عِنْدَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمَسِيحِيِّينَ.

(*National and Social Upbringing*, Grade 3, Part 1 (2017) p. 28)

Jews have no ties to it whatsoever, neither nationally nor religiously, and the Jewish holy place of the Wailing Wall there is presented as a Muslim holy place taken over by Zionists:

"Illumination: The Al-Buraq Wall [the Wailing Wall] was thus named after [the divine beast] Al-Buraq that carried the Messenger [of God, i.e., Muhammad] during the Nocturnal Journey [Israa' -from Mecca to Jerusalem] and the Ascension to Heaven [Mi'raj, according to Muslim belief]. The Al-Buraq Wall is part of the western wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Muslims alone have an absolute right to it."



حائط البراق

إضاءة: سُمِّي حائطُ البراقِ بهذا الاسم؛ نسبةً إلى البراقِ الَّذِي حَمَلَ الرَّسُولَ ﷺ فِي رِحْلَةِ الْإِسْرَاءِ وَالْمِعْرَاجِ، وَحَائِطُ الْبِرَاقِ جُزْءٌ مِنَ السُّورِ الْغَرْبِيِّ لِلْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى وَهُوَ حَقٌّ خَالِصٌ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ وَحَدَهُمْ.



(*Islamic Education*, Grade 5, Part 1 (2017) p. 54)

"They annexed the Islamic features [of Jerusalem] to the list of Zionist heritage [as] they transformed the Al-Buraq Wall into the Wailing Wall."

(*Social Studies*, Grade 7, Part 1 (2017) p. 62, and see the exercise on p. 63 with the following sentence: "The Zionist occupation changed the name 'Al-Buraq Wall' into 'the Wailing Wall [*Hait al-Mabka* in Arabic - the place of mourning]' with the assignment: "I will specify some of the Zionist measures aimed at erasing the Arab and Islamic features in the city of Jerusalem.")

Jews residing in that city are called "infiltrators":

"I am hers [Jerusalem's] even though the flag of misery has fallen on her... I shall not accept its humiliation by occupiers and infiltrators."

(*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2017) p. 52)

Jerusalem is occupied by the "Zionists", who strive to erase its centuries-old Arab character and give it a "Zionist" one:

"This is Jerusalem, and it will remain stubborn against the aggressors, the more the tyranny meanness sticks to it, as well as the malice harbored by the forgers who infringe on its Muslim and Christian holy places and on its history and its archaeological sites that attest its genuine Arab origin since thousands of years."
(*Arabic Language*, Grade 10, Part 1 (2017) p. 20)

II. Violence

Violent struggle for the liberation of Palestine from "Zionist occupation" is the only option discussed in UNRWA schools to ending the present conflict. It is never restricted to the areas of the West Bank and Gaza. Rather, it covers specifically pre-1967 Israeli cities such as Jaffa and Haifa:

"Let us sing:

I am a lion cub;¹ I am a flower;² we gave [our] soul to the revolution³
Our forefathers built for us houses in our [formerly] free country
I am a lion cub; I am a flower; we carried the revolution's ember
To Haifa, to Jaffa, to Al-Aqsa [Mosque], to the [Dome of the] Rock"



أَطْفَالُ فِلَسْطِينِ

إبراهيم الغلي

أَنَا شَيْبَلٌ أَنَا زَهْرَةٌ	وَهَبْنَا الرُّوحَ لِلثَّوْرَةِ
بَنَى أَجْدَادُنَا دَوْرًا	لَنَا فِي أَرْضِنَا الْحَرَّةِ
أَنَا شَيْبَلٌ أَنَا زَهْرَةٌ	حَمَلْنَا جَمْرَةَ الثَّوْرَةِ
إِلَى حَيْفَا إِلَى يَافَا	إِلَى الْأَقْصَى إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ

(*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 2, Part 1 (2017) p. 42)

¹ *Shibl* in Arabic - a term denoting male members of the al-Fatah youth movement.

² *Zahrah* - a term denoting a female member of that movement.

³ *Thawrah* – a term denoting the activity of the Palestinian al-Fatah organization that started in January 1965, that is, before the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israel in 1967.

Indeed, Israel's pre-1967 territories are considered "occupied" as well:

"Activity 1-A: We will observe the following map, draw conclusions and then answer." The map, titled "Map of Palestine", is devoid, as usual, of cities established by Jews in modern times. The first assignment on the right reads: "We will distinguish between the Palestinian cities occupied by the Zionists in 1948 and the ones that they occupied in 1967."

نشاط (١-١): نلاحظ الخريطة الآتية، ونستنتج، ثم نُجيب:



- نميِّزُ بين المدن الفلسطينية التي احتلتها الصَّهْيانية عام ١٩٤٨م، وتلك التي احتلتها عام ١٩٦٧م.
- نستنتجُ كثرة المدن في وسط فلسطين وشمالها وقتلتها في جنوبها.

خريطة فلسطين

(*Social Studies, Grade 7, Part 1 (2017) p. 56*)

This violent struggle for the liberation of the whole of Palestine is made more binding in the books used by UNRWA by adding to it Islamic religious motifs, such as Jihad and martyrdom, and by emphasizing the need to liberate the Muslim Al-Aqsa Mosque from "the Devil's aides":

"Focus: I am a Muslim; I will make a sacrifice for the liberation of Al-Aqsa Mosque."



(*Islamic Education, Grade 5, Part 1 (2017) p. 56*)

"Where are the horsemen [who will ride] towards Al-Aqsa [Mosque] to liberate it from the fist of unbelief, from the Devil's aides."

(*Arabic Language, Grade 7, Part 1 (2017) p. 66*)

The violent struggle also includes the extermination of the defeated "foreigners", that is, Israel's 6 million Jewish citizens:

"Let us sing and learn by heart: The Nobles' Land [*Ard al-Kurama*]
[Photograph of the Old City of Jerusalem with the Dome of the Rock]
I have sworn! I shall sacrifice my blood
To water the nobles' land

And I shall remove the usurper [*ghaseb*] from my country
 And shall exterminate [*ubid*] the foreigners' scattered remnants [*fulul al-ghuraba'*]
 O land of Al-Aqsa [Mosque] and the sacred place [*haram*],
 O cradle of pride and nobility
 Patience, patience, for victory is ours
 And dawn will peep out from darkness"

نُغْنِي وَنَحْفَظُ: أَرْضُ الْكُرْمَاءِ



قَسَمًا سَأُضْحِي بِدِمَائِي لِأُرُوجِي أَرْضَ الْكُرْمَاءِ
 وَأَزِيلُ الْغَاصِبَ مِنْ بَلَدِي وَأُيَيْدُ فُلُولَ الْغُرَبَاءِ
 يَا بَلَدَ الْأَقْصَى وَالْحَرَمِ يَا مَهْدَ النَّخْوَةِ وَالْكَرَمِ
 صَبْرًا صَبْرًا فَالْتَنْصُرْ لَنَا وَالْفَجْرُ يُطِلُّ مِنَ الظُّلَمِ

(*Our Beautiful Language*, Grade 3, Part 2 (2017) p. 64)

The burning of Jewish passengers in a civilian bus with Molotov cocktails is described as a "barbecue party":

"The neighbor: "The curfew does not include us in Al-Sharafah [neighborhood]. It is imposed on Al-Natarish [neighborhood]. It seems that there is a barbecue party [*haflat shiwaa'*] there with Molotov cocktails on one of the buses of the Psagot colony [*musta'marah* - Jewish settlement] on Mount Al-Tawil."

الجارُّ: حَظَرُ التَّجَوُّلِ لَا يَشْمَلُنَا فِي (الشَّرْفَةِ) مَفْرُوضٍ عَلَى
 (التَّارِيشِ) عَلَى مَا يَبْدُو هُنَاكَ حَفْلَةٌ شِوَاءٍ بِالْقَنَابِلِ الْحَارِقَةِ لِإِحْدَى
 حَافِلَاتِ مُسْتَعْمَرَةٍ (بَسَاغُوتِ) عَلَى الْجَبَلِ الطَّوِيلِ.

(*Arabic Language*, Grade 9, Part 1 (2017) p. 61. The "barbecue party" expression is underlined in red.)

Terror against Israeli civilians is also part and parcel of this struggle as proven by a piece exalting a female terrorist – Dalal al-Mughrabi – who led a terrorist attack

against another bus on Israel's Coastal Highway in 1978 in which over thirty Israeli civilians – men, women and children – were slain:

"...Dalal al-Mughrabi who commanded the *Fidai*⁴ 'Deir Yassin' operation on the Palestinian coast in 1978 in which over thirty soldiers were killed..."
(*Social Studies*, Grade 9, Part 1 (2017) p. 74)

III. The "Right of Return"

The so-called "Right of Return" forms another part of that violent struggle. It claims that today's 5-million descendants of the Palestinian 700,000 refugees of 1948 are entitled to return to their forefathers' former places of residence and reclaim their property in full:

"It is the right of the Palestinian refugee to return to his homeland."
(*National and Social Upbringing*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2017) p. 40)

"The Palestinians were forced to leave their cities and villages in Palestine in 1948 because the Zionist occupier harassed them and killed many of them, so they came to live in refugee camps and they are still there. The Palestinians who were driven out of their land have been called refugees. They still keep the keys to their houses and the ownership documents of their lands and houses from which they were forced to emigrate, and it is their right to return to them."
(*National and Social Upbringing*, Grade 4, Part 1 (2017) p. 33)

Resettlement of these people in the places where they mostly were born and lived all their lives is totally rejected. Moreover, their "return" is described in violent terms and it is hinted more than once that the areas to which they will return – Israel's pre-1967 territory – will be part of sovereign Palestine:

"We shall return; we shall return with the soaring vultures; we shall return with the strongly blowing wind; we shall return to the vineyard and the olive trees; we shall return to raise the flag of Palestine... on our green hills."

سَنَعُودُ، سَنَعُودُ مَعَ النُّسُورِ الْمُحَلَّقَةِ، سَنَعُودُ مَعَ الرِّيحِ الْعَائِيَةِ، سَنَعُودُ
إِلَى الْكَرَمِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ، سَنَعُودُ؛ لِنَرْفَعَ عَلَمَ فِلَسْطِينِ، إِلَى جَانِبِ زَهْرَةِ
الْحَنُونِ عَلَى رَوَابِنِ الْخَضْرَاءِ.

(*Arabic Language*, Grade 5, Part 1 (2017) p. 82)

"...I am the owner of the great right, from which I create the morrow
I shall reclaim it; I shall reclaim it as a precious and sovereign homeland
I shall shake the world tomorrow and march as a consolidated army
I have an appointment with my homeland and it is impossible that I forget that
appointment."

⁴ *Fidai* - Historical term denoting self-sacrifice and used today to describe members of the Palestinian armed organizations and their activity.

صَرَخَةُ لاجِيٍّ

هارون هاشم رشيد

أنا لن أظلُّ مُقَيِّداً	أنا لن أعيشَ مُشَرِّداً
خَفْتُ نائراً مُتَمَرِّداً	أنا لي غَدٌّ وَغَدًا سَأَزُ
صِيفٌ وَهِيَ تَجْتاحُ المَدَى	أنا لن أخافُ مِنَ العَوا
تَرْمِي دَمَاراً أَسوداً	وَمِنَ الأَعاصيرِ الَّتِي
رِ وَصانِعُ مِنْهُ الغَدا	أنا صاحِبُ الحَقِّ الكَبي
وَطناً عَزيزاً سَويِّدا	سَأُعيدُهُ .. وَأُعيدُهُ
وَأَسيرُ جَيشاً أَوَّحدا	سَأُزَلِّلُ الدُنيا غَداً
هَياتِ أَنْسى المَوعِدا	لي مَوعِدٌ في مَوطِني

(Excerpts from the poem "A Refugee's Cry" by Harun Hashem Rashid, *Arabic Language*, Grade 5, Part 1 (2017) p. 85)

In fact, the mere idea of returning to the homeland under occupation is rejected:

"Is he not crazy, the one who is driven out of his homeland and then is ready to return to it as a guest with the robbers who had seized it?"

(*Arabic Language*, Grade 10, Part 1 (2017) p. 57)

The foregoing list of items taught in UNRWA schools is incriminating. Beyond the rejection of the Jews' historical ties to their ancient capital and the fostering of the belligerent "Right of Return", UNRWA educates generations of young Palestinians to violence against Israel's very existence and against its Jewish citizens to the point of incitement to committing war crimes. That type of "education" stands against UN principles related to world peace and coexistence and should be stopped. Otherwise, it would be only reasonable to demand that UNRWA cease its educational activity completely.

The Author

Dr. Arnon Groiss is a scholar of Middle Eastern studies holding a Ph.D. degree in this field from Princeton University. Since 2000 he has been researching the attitude to the "other" and to peace in various Middle Eastern curricula, including the Palestinian Authority, and has authored numerous reports on this issue. Dr. Groiss presented his findings to policy makers, think tanks and the press in Israel and abroad.