

## A Call for Unitary History Textbook Design in a Post-Conflict Era: The Case of Lebanon

*We lived a war with no name and escaped. We now belong to a culture that has no name.*

- Haas H. Mroue, *Beirut Seizures: Poems* (2012)<sup>1</sup>

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THIS PAPER investigates the history textbook fragmentation in the post-Lebanese Civil War era. Within the post-colonial scope of history curriculum, Lebanon is still in jeopardy regarding unitary history textbooks. The existing textbooks continue to be a catalyst for mono-ethnic centrism. The paper presents an argument that is developed throughout different sections, calling for serious history curricular reforms, as a prelude for ethnic acceptance of the “Other,” ethnic group integration, and peaceful co-existence. It explores new history curriculum dimensions that are required in order to reconstruct Lebanese unitary textbooks within a post-colonial framework. A reconceptualised history textbook design is proposed within the notions of cultural studies and globalization.

The paper embodies nine main titles. 1) A synopsis of the history textbook fragmentation and clashes is presented, followed by 2) a review of post-1975 Civil War policies, specifically, the Ta’if Accord and its implications on history textbook production. 3) A historical background of the value-laden politics and education that goes back to the early 1500s sheds the light on the religious and political roots causing textbook fragmentation; this is characterized by the colonial

era and the rise of sectarian missionary schools. 4) The impact of non-Lebanese interference with national values is portrayed next. 5) A global coverage on history education in a post-conflict era is discussed to propose a post-colonial framework to resolve the textbook dilemma. 6) The rationale behind a post-colonial contextualization is also endorsed, with post-colonial approaches to 7) textbook design and 8) curriculum organization together providing a post-conflict framework. 9) Finally, a comprehensive reconceptualisation of a Lebanese unitary textbook is proposed.

### **1) History Textbook Fragmentation and Clashes**

Lebanon has gone through a political trauma embodied by the 1975 Civil War. The Lebanese were involved in fifteen official years of war through 1990, with millions of Lebanese forced to escape their country and 200,000 persons killed. I have written previously about the trauma:

Having witnessed sixteen years of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991), and as a teenager, I always wondered why people were unable to live together peacefully and bridge their ethnic, religious-sectarian, and cultural differences. Is this possible? Could it be implemented? I posed these questions without answers. In the midst of this chaos, I witnessed more and more aggression in the name of religion, sectarianism, and ethnicity. The civil war seemed endless; the agony was beyond description.<sup>2</sup>

To conclude the country's war, The Ta'if Accord was signed in 1990. The accord stipulated that the history curriculum needed deconstruction and a unified new curriculum had to be introduced. The accord stipulated the principle of mutual co-existence among the different Lebanese ethnic groups. Under the Education section of the Ta'if Accord, "The curricula shall be reviewed and developed in a manner that strengthens national belonging and fusion, spiritual and cultural openness, and that unifies textbooks on the subjects of history and national education."<sup>3</sup> Despite this, Lebanon has failed to produce a unitary history textbook to embrace nineteen different ethnic groups. The history curriculum became a no man's land or a no-go zone due to the bloodshed and physical confrontation over the history textbook content.<sup>4</sup> The Lebanese Ministry of Education undertook responsibility for developing the new curriculum. The

teaching of history was left untouched with all its ethnic, religious, and national pitfalls. It was left an unresolved arena for blame and rescue. For political reasons, it was decided that the teaching of history was too complicated to be redesigned. History is a threatening zone of massive offensiveness in a country like Lebanon, so fragile in its ethnic, religious, and sectarian infrastructure. Until this point in time, it is still standing in a national fragmentation vacuum. Therefore, no unitary national history was agreed on.<sup>5</sup>

On March 12, 2012, physical opposition took place in downtown Beirut between students belonging to different political parties. This was due to the ongoing battle and controversy over a modern history textbook that was taught in government and a few private schools.<sup>6</sup> An elaboration on the conflict over the history textbooks was portrayed in 1974, with a sample of history textbooks that were taught in various Lebanese private Christian, private Muslim, and public schools. Nakhle Wehbe and Adnan El Amine studied historical and civic education jargon that was endorsed in textbooks. The jargon selected embodied national, political, and religious values, and, hence, were perceived as instilling ethnic conflicts. Wehbe and El Amine reported the following: a) there were noticeable differences between Christian and Muslim textbooks as far as the religious, political, and national jargons covered; and b) national and political key terms inferred and conveyed in Lebanese government textbooks were similar to those covered in the Christian schools, yet distant from the key terms covered in private Muslim schools. To elaborate, textbooks employed by Lebanese government and private Christian schools portrayed the independence of the nation, whereas textbooks used in private Muslim schools portrayed the notions of Arabism more than notions of Lebanese patriotism and Lebanese national identity. Moreover, notions of patriotism and heroic acts varied between textbooks used in private Muslim schools and private Christian schools. Textbooks in private Christian schools emphasized Phoenician culture and civilization and the fact that the Phoenicians were referred to as the ancestors of the Lebanese. On the other hand, textbooks in private Muslim schools highlighted Arabism, Pan-Arabism, and Islamism. In addition, in Christian textbooks, there was marginal coverage on the Palestinian cause in comparison to the Muslim textbooks, where the Palestinian cause was presented as the core constituent of contemporary Arabic history.<sup>7</sup>

Nemer Frayha conducted another study in 1980s. The study reflected an association between religious affiliation and featured national heroes. To elaborate, different textbooks have different representations of heroes depending on religious and sectarian belonging. Consequently, this projected disunity and ethos of war spirit rather than ethnic integration and co-existence among the nineteen Lebanese ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> Ethnic groups and religious sects include Alawite, Armenian Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic, Copts, Druze, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Isma'ili, Jewish, Latin Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Sunni, Shia, Syriac Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox.<sup>9</sup>

Lebanon's modern history textbook narratives stopped in 1943 (this was the year of independence), leaving the 1975 Civil War and post-1975 Civil War historical coverage astray.<sup>10</sup> Though under the 1989 Ta'if Accord, history textbooks reforms were anticipated, two decades later, the state continued to give schools the freedom of choice in history books. This contradicted the Ta'if Accord, but was in alignment with Article 10, which was never denounced in the accord. Article 10, issued as part of the 1926 Constitution, stipulates that sectarian communities are allowed to open their own private schools and have academic freedom in what curriculum these schools can teach, history curriculum inclusive. Within the parameter of Article 10 and in line with political affiliation and sectarianism, Lebanese parents and families send their children to schools that are aligned with their religious, sectarian, and political affiliation. This has disintegrated the Lebanese nation, since schools usually select their textbook in line with their religious, sectarian, and political affiliations, thus leading the youth to religious-sectarian segregation.<sup>11</sup>

In the midst of a sectarian history curriculum, the post-Civil War era witnessed political decisions to consolidate the Lebanese youth, and though there were various effects, the Ta'if Accord originally stipulated the ethos of peaceful co-existence and ethnic integration.

## **2) The Ta'if Accord and History Textbooks**

The Ta'if Accord and its inclusive embody five points on education. Point number five addresses curriculum revision—in particular, the curricula that touch on national identity and cohesion:

“Revision and development of curricula in such a manner as to strengthen national identity and social integration encourage spiritual and cultural openness....Unification of textbooks in the two subject matter areas of history and national education (is a must).”<sup>12</sup>

Followed by the Ta’if Accord, the Lebanese Ministry of Education delegated the Educational Centre for Research and Development (ECRD) to develop a new history curriculum. The ECRD undertook the task of curriculum revision, with a work team of around 350 persons forming committees. In the beginning, the aim was to deconstruct the educational system. Committees dealing with various subject matters were appointed to work on history text revisions and writing new content. History as a school subject was assigned to a committee with members representing various religious, political, and ethnic groups. Conflicts among the history curriculum committee members quickly surfaced.<sup>13</sup>

The new curriculum for all subjects was approved on May 8, 1997; nevertheless, the Lebanese Parliament denied approval of the history textbooks, with Presidential Decree No. 10227.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the reviewed textbooks were enhanced and employed in public schools, while private schools were given the freedom to choose their own textbooks (history textbooks inclusive). This effectively defeated the purpose of point five in the Ta’if Accord.<sup>15</sup>

Due to the divergent perspectives of members in the first two assigned committees, a third committee was appointed on June 20, 1997. This new committee included members from several sectarian groups and history specialists. By 2000, the Lebanese Parliament Cabinet received a brief history textbook, *General Principles and Specific Goals for the Teaching of History*. Nevertheless, the ECRD history committee continued to disagree on what historical events, narratives, and stories should be portrayed, especially as far as the 1975 Civil War period and its aftermath.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, on June 22, 2000, the new history curricula for grades two to six were published with Presidential Decree No. 3175.<sup>17</sup>

In 1997-1998, history textbooks were not distributed in public schools, and the government decided to put them on hold until 2001. Additionally, distribution of history books was immediately suspended by the Minister of Education over a narrative on the content of a chapter entitled, “They Had All Gone and Lebanon Remained: Independence of a Country.”<sup>18</sup>

The first batch included two textbooks under the title, *A Window on History*, one for grade two and another for grade three. Unfortunately, another clash over the content emerged. The clash targeted chapter 11 in the third-grade book, the chapter covering Lebanese independence. Another textbook, *They All Went and Lebanon Stayed: Independence of the Nation*, illustrated various nations and states that occupied Lebanon at different points in time. The conflict was relevant to the Arabs' period, referred to as "Arab conquest" and "*Al Fatih Al Arabi*." These words were interpreted by some as equating the Arabs (in particular, Syrian forces in Lebanon) with other invaders. According to critics, the words "All Went and Lebanon Stayed" meant that Lebanon was conquered by an Arab country. Following this, the ECRD removed page 88 from the textbook.<sup>19</sup>

The Minister of Education then objected the book for personal reasons rather than academic:

When those politicians started to interfere and stop the history book, they were actually killing this attempt to create a common memory for the postwar generation. They were perpetuating the ideas, values, and negative attitudes of the war because they were symbols of the war, participated in it, and committed crimes against Lebanon during the war.<sup>20</sup>

Following this clash, a new committee of ten historians was formed. Though textbook writing was completed in 2005, the book wasn't published. Several religious, sectarian, and political groups declined the textbook. In 2008, private schools were using more than twenty history textbooks that portrayed sectarian fanaticism. These textbooks lacked historical authenticity. Consequently, students continued to associate themselves with sectarian leaders, images, and views. Current history books continue to be divided among political affiliations and don't have a common historical content.<sup>21</sup>

Five different books for grade five were scrutinized by UNESCO. Three of the books were created before the breakout of the Civil War, and two were constructed during war. The study concluded that these books show different perspectives and sectarian affiliations based on a school's religious and missionary affiliations.<sup>22</sup> Within this scope, Lebanese University History Professor Mounzir Jabber remarked:

[I]dentity in Lebanon remains sectarian, it's [impossible] to talk about history on a patriotic basis...At the Green Space School, which lies on the edge of Christian, Druze and Shi'ite neighborhoods, [school

principal] Kassem says sectarian affiliation makes history lessons sensitive: ‘Sometimes we have to skip certain lessons or summarize them, to avoid some discussions that might cause troubles between the students’...Especially when it comes to the 15-year civil war, in which all sects suffered losses and atrocities took place. The country is still recovering physically and emotionally.<sup>23</sup>

The suspension of history textbook production in Lebanon has been expressed by Education Professor Munir Bashshur from the American University of Beirut:

We can say that after more than 12 years; since the Ta’if Accord, teaching of history in the country remains as it has always been: subject to the interests and shifts of different groups, and that agreement to unify curricula and textbooks as a means to unify the people and the country have produced nothing new, except more of the same debate and casuistry that goes as far back in the history of the country as the farming of the Lebanese constitution in 1926.<sup>24</sup>

This fragmentation and failing to produce unitary history textbooks go back to the sectarian infrastructure that Lebanon’s education system was subject to. The history textbook dilemma was beyond the Ta’if Accord. Historically speaking, the problem extends its roots to the religious and political polarization of the 1500s. This will be explained in the following section.

### **3) History of Value-Laden Politics and Education**

The creation of sectarian education system in Lebanon went back to 1516, when the Ottoman Sultan Salim I occupied Greater Syria, hence, Lebanon became under Ottoman control. The Ottoman Empire introduced the *millet* system that gave religious sects the right to look after their affairs, such as welfare institutions and educational systems. Under the *millet* system, all religious sects and creeds are respected and guaranteed protection of their free religious practices, provided that they do not interfere with public stability and order.<sup>25</sup>

The first private school in Mount Lebanon was opened by the French in 1636. After that, a series of French Jesuit missionaries’ schools were founded in 1734. These missionaries opened their schools to preach their own religious creed and practice.<sup>26</sup> Since 1846, the Ottomans allowed sects to open schools, categorized either as public schools run by the state or as private schools administered by

welfare social groups and sponsored by individuals. The Americans established around 132 schools; the British-Syrian missionaries opened forty schools before World War I; the French Jesuits were also active; and the Muslims started their own religious schools, but on a narrower scale than the Christians. The diversification of school systems and curriculum acted as a double-edged sword in terms of enhancing academic freedom and instilling sectarianism.<sup>27</sup>

Foreign education paved the way and encouraged missionaries to establish religious and sectarian educational systems that emphasized students' cultural and sectarian allegiances to countries other than their own Lebanese one. By 1919, Lebanese religious sects commenced in organizing their own schools and educational systems, whether in collaboration with local or foreign authorities.<sup>28</sup>

On May 23, 1926, the French introduced the Lebanese Constitution, including Article 10, which indicated:

Education is free insofar as it is not contrary to public order and morals and does not interfere with the dignity of any of the religions or creeds. There shall be no violation of the right of religious communities to have their own schools provided they follow the general rules issued by the state regulating public instruction.<sup>29</sup>

Hanna Ziadeh added that Article 10 intensified the existence of religious-sectarian schools. Though a few constitutional articles were amended and others were cancelled, Article 10 of the 1926 Constitution continued to protect the right of communities to perform their religious and educational affairs without state intervention.<sup>30</sup>

After independence in 1943, the government amended the educational system. In an attempt for unification, a new legislation was issued in order to: a) create new curriculum that strengthened the use of Arabic language, and b) restructure the Ministry of Education. However, the independent Lebanese government didn't change or amend Article 10 of the Constitution. Educational curricula were further deconstructed in 1968; nevertheless, revisions gave private schools more freedom to promote their perspectives of civic allegiance and national identity, provided there was no violation of religious or ethnic sects.<sup>31</sup>

Given the dynamics of sectarian institutions, the religious milieu, and ethnic affiliations that existed since the 1500s, reconciliation, co-existence, and civil peace were shaken. Currently, the Lebanese history textbook remains a source of national fragmentation and



segregation. A rhetorical question is raised whenever Lebanon goes through another scene of violence threatening an outbreak of another civil war. Colonial and post-colonial experiences in Lebanon have influenced and shaped national, ethnic, and cultural teachings and have resulted in ethnic fragmentation conveyed through history textbooks, leading to a schism of national identity building.

The emancipative and reformatory role of education in Lebanon needs to explore further academic options within a post-colonial paradigm. A bridging localized and globalized curriculum through a fundamental change proposed by educators needs to be adopted by policy makers.

#### **4) Interference with National Values and History Teaching**

The beginnings of nation-state in Europe gave way for history textbooks to emphasize the teaching of nationalism, glorifying the past and referring to it patriotically in an assimilative manner. Many studies in the West show that history textbooks have generated ethnocentric views, myths, stereotypes, and prejudices. In spite of this, history textbooks played a significant role in shaping and moulding national and ethnic group integration. Education was used as a means of national values exposure, to develop national integration and enhance the spirit of nationalism through culturally loaded subjects, including history. By the twentieth century, after de-colonization and due to demographic changes in the inter-ethnic movement as well as clashes, the notion of nation building became outdated and was replaced by the post-colonial notion of national-ethnic group integration, multiculturalism, and globalism as new outlooks for history teaching.<sup>32</sup>

As noted in the previous section, historically speaking, foreign interference in Lebanon had impacted the Lebanese educational system, which contributed to the lack of a unitary history teaching and absence of community national values and nation building in history textbooks since the 1500s.<sup>33</sup>

Within the perspective of the sectarian infrastructure of education, Michel Foucault notes that there is no autonomous individual or socially and politically self-detached individual. Individuals construct their beliefs through their exposure to their own religious and political authorities and milieu; hence, they are the product of

the existing religious-political power and they are driven blindly by the dominant system and institutions. In other words, the state formulates laws and modes of expectations to practice its power on citizens. This power pushes institutions to produce a regime that takes for granted the realities, truth, behaviors, and disciplines that repress individuals and prevail in a dominant system. Given the above, teaching-learning in schools takes place through formal instructional planning and delivery of lessons; therefore, students are mandated by means of religious-political systems.<sup>34</sup>

Within Foucault's framework, Lebanese institutions become blindly affiliated to sectarianism and political affiliation, and the educational system is under the mercy of sectarian, religious, and political powers. Hence, schools can select history textbooks that describe the French as colonialists or as liberators, or portray the Ottomans as conquerors or as administrators. The history content is thus impacted, and when it comes to contemporary times and the 1975 Civil War, Lebanon history simply comes to a dead end.<sup>35</sup> Professor Ohaness Goktchian from the American University in Beirut states, "We are raising another generation of children who identify themselves with their communities and not their nation... History is what unites people. Without history we can't have unity."<sup>36</sup> Lebanese historian Antoine Messarra concurs, "For the sake of the future, we need to create one narrative that all of us will be able to believe in...we came very close [to a unified narrative] and we tried very hard but at the end of the day politics won."<sup>37</sup>

History writing and historical content in Lebanon is therefore still undergoing ethnic and religio-sectarian clashes. A remedy is required for national integration in a post-conflict trauma.

### **5) History Education in a Post-Conflict Era**

Post-conflict politics and post-ethnic clashes are fundamental concerns that are taken into consideration for curriculum deconstruction and innovations. Such politics and clashes can react with various types of catastrophes, such as interracial and religious wars, as well as famines, natural disasters, and genocide. For example, South Africa and Rwanda went through moving from a state of war into a post-trauma period of reconstruction. In these societies, the educational authorities had to deal with the issues of

war, national identity, and co-existence and ethnic integration of their citizens. The issue is multi-layered and it directly impacts and shapes the national values and on teaching-learning.

Concerns about transition societies and their reconstruction of history curriculum, during or after political clashes, has escalated. This brings links to history teaching in Rwanda, South Africa, Germany, Northern Ireland, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where history textbooks have instilled hatred, stereotypical images, and prejudice, leading to national segregation.<sup>38</sup> In line with the above, Gail Weldon states, “I was acutely aware of the use of history to serve a particular, Afrikaner national identity and of the hegemonic role played by the Afrikaner nationalist narrative in school textbooks. History as interpretation, as a construct, is no more clearly presented than through the filter of school curricula.”<sup>39</sup>

Within the context of post-colonialism, South Africa considered reconciliation and globalization as new outlook for history curricula. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was founded in the early 1990s for this mission. The TRC made a massive contribution to South African historiography and the rewriting of academic history. June Bam indicates that the TRC included:

[O]ral testimony of both victim and perpetrator, post-modern conceptions of the “truth”—the “truth” for reconciliation; rewriting South Africa’s history not only for nation building, but also for the world as an audience. South Africans have attempted to confront the apartheid ghost through this process; they have tried to (and they still attempt to) deal with the grief, guilt, humiliation and pain of its very own Holocaust.<sup>40</sup>

The TRC aimed at helping shape historical understanding in order to mitigate historical fallacies and distorted history teaching and learning for the sake of ethnic and national group integration and promotion of pan-Africanism through academic history writing.

In Rwanda, a distortion of history curriculum was presented to the Hutus and Tutsis, after the civil clashes that the country had gone through. This created post-trauma violent clashes among various conflicting ethnic groups due to intensified unacceptance of the “Other.” To minimize the ethnic tension, a project was conducted to address the educational challenges; hence, history material was produced for the secondary schools to avoid segregation within the nation.<sup>41</sup>

Post-colonial studies focus on the enhancement and innovational implementations of educational reforms. Thus, school textbook revision becomes fundamental in the systemic and theoretical scope of post-colonial history teaching-learning. Currently, a number of global organizations, such as international governmental institutions and academic and pedagogical institutions, are involved in projects working on the revision of history teaching in post-conflict societies within a post-colonial context.<sup>42</sup>

Lebanon shares with the above-mentioned countries post-trauma clashes in a post-colonial context and the need for unitary and cohesive history curricula to promote peaceful co-existence and the acceptance of “Others.” A Lebanese TRC version may be required as a catalyst for Lebanon’s history rewriting, similar to that of the South African one in its national and ethnic post-colonial context.

### **6) Post-Colonial Contextualization**

This paper fits within a broad branch of contemporary critical and cultural perspectives, which include post-colonial interpretation to explore and understand the socio-educational organization of the colonized, de-colonized, and neo-colonized nations. Michael Payne describes post-colonialism as a study as “A vast terrain that tends to study the de-colonized/neo-colonized cultures that may have witnessed the end of one phase of Western imperialism—the formal dismantling of colonial/political administrative machinery.”<sup>43</sup>

One early manifestation of the post-colonial type of thinking was the Negritude movement. This movement was to have an impact throughout Africa and among African Americans, in art and literature as well as in politics. African American writers and intellectuals seemed divided between those who insisted that their culture was more American than African, and those who looked toward a worldwide spiritual and ethnic unity of black people and a polemic against the dominant values and what is considered the superior ideals of Western civilization.<sup>44</sup> A similar case exists in Lebanon, where the past constitutes the bulk of polarized social and political history writings, impacting the nation building and national identity that remains in limbo.

Despite the availability of studies on curriculum transformation from colonial to post-colonial regimes, there are not abundant studies

that examine societies that have undergone salvation from the trauma phase, due to oppositional racial and ethnic conflicts.<sup>45</sup>

The story of the Lebanese history textbook is situated within the educational post-colonial framework awaiting reconstruction. A post-colonial textbook design is proposed in the next section.

## **7) Post-Colonial Context and History Textbook Design**

History teaching should serve both the individual and the society. It should enhance an understanding of the human experiences and developmental changes occurring in the society of the individual. The scope of the history curriculum needs to embrace learning experiences relevant to multiculturalism, globalism, peaceful co-existence, and ethnic group integration. History content should act as a vehicle for vitalizing social cohesion among fragmented and segregated nations. Its core mission is to bridge multi-ethnic and mosaic societies. Consequently, curriculum changes and amendments are necessary to occur to fulfill the above-mentioned goals and aspirations. The affective implication behind post-colonial history curriculum is that it should show students how to detach themselves from prejudice and racist (mis)representations of others.<sup>46</sup>

Post-colonial synthesis and evaluation of history texts and content allows students to question stereotypical ethnocentric and monocultural definitions of people, and to deconstruct cultural notions in order to understand the political, legal, social, and religious discourse of various historical events and contexts. The mission of history text within a post-colonial context is to hear, interpret, and accept contradictory voices and experiences that might not fit in the narratives of a monolithic culture. Therefore, pedagogical and educational frontiers where blacks, whites, Latinos, Arabs, Jews, and other ethnicities meet ought to demonstrate multi-centric perspectives that allow students to recognize and analyse how the differences within and between various groups can expand cultural acceptance and co-existence.<sup>47</sup> Cultural versatility and criticism are required in curricular history academic writing. Edward Said states:

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly

left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale....Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about.<sup>48</sup>

Within the post-colonial scope of history curriculum, Lebanon is still in jeopardy, since history teaching continues to be a catalyst for mono-ethnic centrism. The above section illustrates what type of history Lebanon needs in a post-colonial context; that renders this paper significant in terms of exploring:

1. New history curriculum dimensions required to reconstruct Lebanese unitary history textbooks within a post-colonial context.
2. A new reconceptualised history textbook design that promotes unitary national identity for the multi-ethnic groups in Lebanon.

To address the above questions, and in order to situate a post-colonial textbook design, various types of curricular organization need to be scrutinized.

### **8) Post-Colonial Context and History Curriculum Organization**

Three approaches to curriculum organization are presented: 1) subject-centred, 2) value-centred, and 3) inquiry-centred. The subject-centred approach is characterized by the curriculum viewed as a body of content, or subject matter, that leads to achieving the “what” learning outcomes. The value-centred history curriculum places emphasis on moral and ethical education and characterization of values. The inquiry-centred curriculum infers that the questions students address may be deeper than the boundaries of the implicit theoretical discipline and that these questions may go beyond the direct content focus; hence, this can be positioned within the realm of the “how” and the learning process. This third approach presents a strong case that students need to use discipline-specific ways of thinking to discover in-depth answers to their questions and make sense and connection to their world through investigating and interpreting points of view. The discipline of academic history needs

to be at the core of the value-centred and inquiry-centred approaches. As Barbara Stripling and Sandra Hughes-Hassell state:

Inquiry in social studies tends to ask, “Why?” “Who?” “Where?” “How good or bad?” and “What consequences?” In math and science, the same set of circumstances lead to the same results; in historical inquiry, the same set of circumstances seen through a different point of view or from a different cultural perspective might lead to widely divergent interpretations. Instead of searching for one truth, social scientists search for truths interpreted through multiple perspectives.<sup>49</sup>

The history curriculum leads to evaluating and analysing cause and effect, with problems and solutions that are based on evidence and that represent different perspectives within an inquisitive ethos of teaching and learning. Seeing historical narratives from different perspectives and reflecting on them, as well as considering characterization of values, is prioritized as means to enhance common grounds for national identity building, accepting the “Other,” and co-existence.

In places that have witnessed political conflict and civil clashes—such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Germany, Guatemala, Japan, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Rwanda—the revitalizing history content and curriculum has been expected to establish the foundation for social and civic cohesion through employing inquiry-centred and value-centred history curriculum.<sup>50</sup>

In terms of the above-mentioned perspective and even in the midst of history curriculum rewriting, Lebanon continues to adopt a subject-centred, text-based approach overlooking the inquiry process of reflective, constructivist, and value-centred history teaching. Therefore, adopting the value-centred and inquiry-centred dimensions and aligning them with appropriate resources and methodologies is required.<sup>51</sup>

The following section elaborates explicitly on the landmarks of a unitary Lebanese history textbook.

## **9) Reconceptualising a Lebanese History Textbook**

History textbooks play a vital role in learning. But this role can be educationally beneficial, harmful, or null. For example, textbooks can fail to represent ethnicities or misrepresent specific cultures. Careful considerations should be made on how to construct, tackle, and address history texts and content. History textbooks can often

be misused or underused. More efforts need to be invested on an international level, as far as capacity-building programs to produce textbooks and pedagogical materials that underpin and encompass a range of hidden curricular concepts, values, and attitudes such as ethnic/cultural acceptance, peace, friendship, cooperation, non-violence, sincerity, and trustworthiness. Conceptual approaches such as hands-on activities, simulation games, web-quests, storytelling, role playing, drama, debates, and drawing, based on child-centred approaches and pedagogies of teaching and learning need to be integrated in order to produce beneficial and positively educative history textbooks.<sup>52</sup>

Textbooks can portray socio-political prejudices and stereotypes. These stereotypes have negative destructive and segregational effects on matters relevant to learning, living together, national identity, and national integration. Both positive and negative stereotypes can produce discriminative images, unfair treatments, and violence among the learners and public masses. Consequently, this will hinder peace education, co-existence, and national integration. History textbooks ought to pay special attention to the development of critical thinking skills and characterization of values as channels to fight discrimination, segregation, and textbook bias and manipulation. A call for stereotype-free textbooks is raised by Dakmara Georgescu and Jean Bernard.<sup>53</sup>

Keeping the above-mentioned inquiry-centred and value-centred dimensions in the twenty-first-century post-colonial context of history curriculum, a conceptualized framework for a unitary Lebanese history curriculum is proposed:

1. Emphasise social history.
2. Emphasise inquiry-centred learning, where knowledge processing and analysis through historical documentation and multi-perspective analysis of primary and secondary sources of history evidence are employed.
3. Emphasise value-centred teaching and value characterization rather than content and textbook-based knowledge.
4. Emphasise commonalities rather than differences among historical narratives, thus tackling the civil war topics objectively with no blame/victim tone.



5. Represent ethnic groups through literary narratives and art work to envisage empathy and cultural and ethnic acceptance in order to build constructive human relations within multi-ethnic communities.
6. Promote affiliation to the state rather than political parties, ethnicities, and religious sects through integrating civic education and value characterization in history teaching-learning.
7. Promote interactive and reflective methodologies with inspiring and adequate content.
8. Promote problem-based learning through which students can be critical and creative in addressing and finding resolutions for problems encountered in their communities on the cultural and ethnic levels.
9. Avoid of forms and images that underpin negative prejudices, stereotypes, and cultural and ethnic judgments that instill insensitive attitudes, as well as forms of discrimination and marginalization.
10. Avoid of usage of inappropriate and offensive language and expressions in textbooks.

In line with the conceptual framework for history curriculum, the parameters of history textbooks should address the following praxis in reconceptualising history textbooks: a) areas of disagreement, b) reflections and use of primary and secondary historical sources, c) accounts from oral history, d) accounts from social history, e) historical empathy, and f) side-by-side narratives. Within the context of these dimensions is a call for prioritizing the how to teach history rather than the what.

### *Determining Areas of Disagreement*

Among the remedies to be considered to produce a unitary history textbook, the following features are adapted from the scheme designed by Elizabeth Cole and Judy Barsalou for determining areas of disagreement in academic history writing:<sup>54</sup>

### The Nature of Truth

Historical truth is hard to define. In the true ethos of history, one can't construct a single "true" narrative, especially in times of war clashes, where many political parties have committed acts of violence and instilled hatred. Commissions can prove that many have been involved in bloodshed and are to an extent responsible for causing mortality, evilness, harm, and destruction. Commissions also can note how certain institutions inflicted injustice and demonstrated a blame game in order to distort the truth in historical narration. In times of wars, all parties engaged are equally harmful.<sup>55</sup>

### Tempering Truth

This notion is related to whether certain truths must be tempered in order to enhance reconciliation, co-existence, cohesion, and inclusion. Sometimes, one party may be blamed to be more responsible for causing violence. History education needs to acknowledge that all the parties participated in the violence, regardless of religious, social, political, and ethnic affiliations. Tempering the truth will help construct well-balanced historical narratives, without taking into consideration the highlights of the harm and the level or amount of harm produced by a specific political or ethnic group. Consequently, this will help bridge differences and contributes towards the building of a common identity that mitigates anticipated violence and national fragmentation. Despite the fact that the historical narrative should not be shaken or distorted, it should be harmonized with the societal needs in order to create the foundations of a social trust and construct; that is, materialized through tempering and moderating the bitter truth.<sup>56</sup>

### Avoiding Moral Relativity

It is controversial how learning opportunities should be given to students in order to explore differing narratives without being indulged in moral relativity. As stated by Cole and Barsalou:

A narrative that strays too far in the direction of "angels and maggots" is not most useful for a post-violence society. Evil may not be evil to another—it all depends on one's point of view or nihilism. It is clear that the production of history textbooks that include different narratives should be constructed by historical scholarship that is widely respected by researchers that represent both sides of the conflict that has existed or continues to exist.<sup>57</sup>

### Nation Building

Another debate revolves around what history textbooks can/should aim at and whether history textbooks are constructive vehicles for enhancing nation building or state building. To what extent should history textbooks serve the “national” agenda? It may be a good idea to allow ethnic freedom and ethnic identities to develop within a society and at the same time give the chance for a common national identity to be explored and constructed. Consequently, all ethnic minority groups will be narratively represented as a nation.<sup>58</sup>

### Healing

This notion addresses whether history education has therapeutic impact in societies that have witnessed widespread suffering. Does history education contribute to the creation of empathy and take part in decreasing hatred and revenge? Is the history class the appropriate venue where moral values and critical thinking are embraced? Does the history class strengthen and show the relationship between history education and citizenship? All these rhetorical questions need to be posed within the scope of the history textbook and its role in mending the ill feelings produced by ethnic and religious clashes in times of war.<sup>59</sup>

### Reconciliation

History textbooks play a role in the innovation and enrichment of thoughtful and sensible citizens for the creation of a cohesive society—however, is the notion of reconciliation embedded in the goals and conceptual framework of history content that addresses post-conflict societies? Reconciliation is a complex notion because of the unclear meaning and terms it endorses. Does reconciliation portray social justice and fair accountability in the post-conflict state? To what extent does reconciliation carry implications of compromises? Is reconciliation joined with giving up and marginalizing an ethnic group’s rights and existence? These grey areas need to be addressed while discussing reconciliation endorsed in history textbooks.<sup>60</sup>

The above parameters need to be considered and materialized for mediating areas of disagreements for constructing a new design for the history textbook as a unitary catalyst for the Lebanese youth.

*Reflections and Use of Primary and Secondary Historical Sources*

Accounts from primary sources that represent various ethnic, religious, political, and sectarian groups who witnessed the sufferings at different political crises in Lebanon need to be brought heavily on board to the history textbook. Autobiographies, photos, and newspaper clippings need to be integrated in the history narratives as primary historical evidence. Students need to construct historical knowledge through primary and secondary source evidence and reflect on these evidences rather than adopt ideas from the stereotypical content of the textbook. Moreover, integrating reflections on war—including relevant literary pieces and art pieces as both primary and secondary sources of history—offers rich textual, pictographic, and non-verbal sources through which empathy and teaching about “Others” can promote co-existence and integration.<sup>61</sup> War literary pieces need to be integrated with history textbooks as accounts for human sufferings in time of war. Consider the following excerpts from Mroue:<sup>62</sup>

How a stray bullet chooses a neck, a temple  
and buries itself in gut  
how a mother waits in the dark  
for her son—fifty pieces in a  
sack delivered to her doorstep...

After the cease-fire  
young men with black beards  
munch on a dozen ladyfingers  
dripping with syrup...  
after the cease-fire  
grandmothers sweep spent bullets  
from balconies  
and plant geraniums in empty Nido cans.  
after the cease-fire  
prickly pear vendors  
with swollen fingers  
scream for business.  
after the cease-fire,  
old ladies dye their hair  
at corner salons.

Promises after the cease-fire.  
I release them from damp shelters...

Another source of reflection is ephrastic poetry, used by art historians as a means to promote and teach empathy and compassion. Ephrastic poetry implies reflection on art work and art pieces. Through practicing reflective poetry, one can understand and accept the “Other” by means of situating an individual within the scope and context of the work produced by the individual in times of civil clashes and wars. Integrating ephrastic poetry in history curriculum and textbooks in post-conflict situations, where individuals had been harmed by ethnic, religious, and sectarian clashes, acts as a therapeutic technique in bringing the nation together.<sup>63</sup> Reflecting on art work, such as ephrastic poetry, integrated in history textbooks encourages reconciliation and acceptance of “Others” and, hence, national integration.

### *Accounts from Oral History*

Oral history plays a fundamental and significant role in national cohesion and ethnic co-existence. Oral history endorses a humanitarian dimension. It deals with history teaching as a catalyst and tool for co-existence. Through the diaries and narratives of people and communities, oral history paves the way for socio-ethnic cohesion and understanding of the “Other.” In history content, oral history is basically absent and overlooked, though it is a vital source for deconstructing and constructing historical narratives. The narratives of sufferings that ordinary people go through during violent war clashes are fundamental for understanding, synthesizing, and evaluating historical phenomenon, events, and causes. Oral history is valuable for portraying the social and human perspective in the teaching and learning of history. Accounts of extreme human experiences, dilemmas, and tragedies in times of crisis and wars are inevitable for history teaching and learning. For example, narratives of survival and flight as a reaction towards mass atrocities and massacres, or diaries written by victims, survivors, and ex-combatants of war constitute the core of history teaching and learning. Oral history as curriculum means was integrated in post-conflict unitary textbooks in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina and has proved to be effective and functional in bridging historical areas of disagreements and conflicts.<sup>64</sup> Such an example is to be followed in redesigning the parameters for the Lebanese history textbooks.

### *Accounts from Social History*

History has always been conveyed within a political scope and dimension. Social history has been overlooked and marginalized. Social history needs to be revived as a mean for reconciliation and accepting the “Other.” The sufferings of individuals are always the same, regardless of their sectarian, political, and ethnic affiliations. Unfortunately, social history teaching is totally overlooked in the Lebanese history textbooks, though social history as a branch of the academic history discipline is considered a core constituent of national history teaching. Through social history, students can acquire more of a heritage awareness and integrative acceptance of the culture of “Others.” Social history, to a big extent, provides a depoliticized history teaching, where social impacts and consequences of wars and conflicts on the community are portrayed. The sufferings and daily hardships that civilians go through in order to survive in times of war—rather than the causes of wars, progress of battles, and political victories and losses—need to be prioritized and taken on board to consolidate the social history component. For example, rationing food supplies, standing in the queue to get bread or petrol or medicine, rushing civilian casualties to hospital, and making a safe trip to school under heavy bombardment—regardless of who is the enemy and who are the parties responsible for the war or taking part in it.<sup>65</sup>

### *Historical Empathy*

Historical empathy is a core skill requirement in history teaching and learning. Students need to acquire the skill of building historical empathy for comprehending the multi-layered perplexity of how history teachings explain the past. Historical empathy is characterized by the ability to realize how the past and present are differentiated and how multiple perspectives from the past can be employed to explain present events, defended with historical evidence. Historical empathy doesn’t imply passing judgment on historical people based on contemporary and controversial ideals. Within the context of historical empathy, students need to understand why, historically speaking, a person had adopted certain actions based on the socio-cultural frame of that period studied. This will

allow students to develop historical empathy, consequently accepting the “Other.”<sup>66</sup>

It is significant that students develop historical empathy through using a unitary textbook along with a variety of primary and secondary sources as documentation and evidence. Students with more historical resources are able to synthesize the historical data and hence are able to construct their own evaluations of the historical content instead of adopting the writer’s/author’s perspective coming from one source/textbook.<sup>67</sup>

Within the perspective of historical empathy, discussions and debates are employed to assess students’ historical empathy. Jill Jensen stated that in grade five history classes, she has used the following criteria for empathy assessment: “a) the past is different from the present, b) there are various perspectives and scopes of various narratives from the past, c) understanding of the context under which past events and dilemmas took place, and d) the information used for debate must be based on historical evidence.”<sup>68</sup> Findings indicated that using Jensen’s historical empathy criteria has helped students overcome historical misunderstanding, exploring ideas from several perspectives and thus accepting historical facts that are considered a source of disagreement and that are not in harmony of their own views or aligned with their ethnic and cultural backgrounds or social and political milieu.<sup>69</sup>

Historical empathy criteria need to be integrated in redesigning the history textbook anticipated for the Lebanese youth, regardless of whether we are seeking one unitary textbook or adopting a variety of historical resources to achieve co-existence and national integration in a post-conflict era.

### *Side-by-Side History Narratives*

History textbooks need to be based on the side-by-side history narratives approach in order to accommodate notions of the “Other.” In this approach, textbooks present various narratives representing different points of view (in the case of Lebanon, different political parties, beliefs, and standpoints). Hence, the students need to investigate, inquire, and construct their historical knowledge rather than adopt an indoctrinated point of view. Side-by-side history narratives may seem to be mythical—nevertheless, they have been

practiced by nations who have gone through conflict/post-conflict, such as with the Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, and Afrikaans and blacks in South Africa. Sitting together with political opponents to produce a unitary history textbook seems to be impossible in a country like Lebanon, where politics and religion seem to have poisoned and paralyzed the nation.<sup>70</sup>

Within the same context, Elie Podeh stated, “Nearly twenty years ago, a joint Israeli-German education project led to the mutual scrutiny of history and geography textbooks, with both teams recommending revisions in respect to the presentation of Israeli-German relations. Surely, shortly after the Holocaust the prospects for such a venture would have appeared dim.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, the production of a joint history textbook to integrate and promote ethnic cohesion among the Lebanese community may be complicated and unachievable. However, given the new dimensions of a post-colonial history curriculum parameter, a new outlook for Lebanese history can be proposed in an attempt to promote national reconciliation.

Another example where side-by-side narratives have been sought is a Palestinian-Israeli case:

In 1998, Professor Dan Bar-On of the department of behavioural sciences at Ben-Gurion University and Professor Sami Adwan, a lecturer in education at Bethlehem University, founded the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME). Their mission has been to create a series of workbooks, the third volume of which is to be published shortly, presenting the central historical narratives of Israelis and Palestinians side-by-side...The books are meant to help secondary school students understand the complexity and contentiousness of their history and help expand their awareness of the “other.”<sup>72</sup>

As indicated by UNESCO, another example of a collaborative effort to minimize ethnic conflict is featured by the cooperation between Palestinian and Jewish scholars in terms of developing a project that aims at producing a common history syllabus for students studying in mixed Jewish-Arabic classes.<sup>73</sup>

Producing side-by-side narratives would help students understand multiple perspectives and accounts of non-distorted, non-assimilative history. This will help in bridging gaps in portraying historical knowledge, where students can see how different standpoints and



perspectives are claimed and viewed by different political parties and ethnicities.

### Conclusion

Lebanese educators and policy makers need to propose value-centred and inquiry-based history curriculum to bridge and integrate ethnic diversities instead of solely promoting a content-based curriculum of the 1975 Civil War period and post-1943 modern history. The modern history component of Lebanese history textbooks needs to be framed within the above-mentioned elements suggested for a new reconstruction and unitary design. A curricular remedy is required, where history teaching does not have a null impact on the cognitive and affective development of the students, especially in terms of value characterization, critical thinking, and problem solving. Nevertheless, the remedy is impotent until it is harmonized with methodologies and resources matching the curricular design proposed in this paper.

A pilot study on the suggested design and as proposed in this paper needs to be taken on board by the Lebanese Ministry of Education. As mentioned, the conceptual framework of history textbooks needs to include the following dimensions: a) areas of disagreement, b) reflections and use of primary and secondary historical sources, c) accounts from oral history, d) accounts from social history, e) historical empathy, and f) side-by-side narratives. The pilot study needs to be accompanied with resources and teachers' training that is in harmony with the curricular and pedagogical demands for this design, including historical narratives situated in a post-colonial contextual framework for twenty-first-century history teaching.

Efforts by international institutions, such as the World Bank and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), should work for the sake of overcoming the negative effects of post-conflict historical knowledge. These global institutions should utilize further research in the area of cultural studies to cater for the demands of countries in a post-colonial and post-conflict era. As Christopher Hill summarized, "History properly taught can help men to become critical and humane, just as wrongly taught it can turn them into bigots and fanatics."<sup>74</sup>

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