

Lebanon in the Eyes of Ambassadors

Municipal and Ikhtiariah Elections
in Mount Lebanon

Secondary School Official Exams 2008-2009

Cost of official security escorts in Lebanon

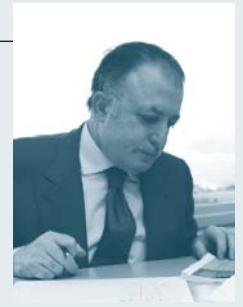


LBP 60 billion a year

Cost of official security escorts in Lebanon

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“Their” book about “our” history or Who corrects exams at the IC? As’ad AbuKhalil¹ or Avigdor Lieberman²?



Modern World History, a book that has been taught in IC’s second level curriculum since 2003, suddenly became a topic of discussion in the Lebanese press. The controversy focused on a few pages titled “Hunting for Terrorists”; more specifically about the mention of Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations. Then, just as suddenly, everyone went silent.

What happened exactly?

It is worth noting that not one member of the IC’s parents committee, parent, student or teacher (needless to mention nobody at the Ministry of Education) had in the past considered this important. Perhaps it is because we didn’t read the book, or perhaps because we read it and we approved of it, perhaps because we are simply apathetic, or, perhaps because we are content with any history book at all.

IC’s administration swiftly responded with saying that it had either “pasted over the [controversial] pages” or ordered students to “tear them out”. This is a reminder of how Queen Mary I of England burned the “History of Italy” in 1554 after ordering the execution of its author William Thomas. It is also a reminder of the burning of Thomas Hobbes’ books in 1683 in Oxford University. Similarly, in 1988, some groups in Europe and the United States burned Salman Rushdie’s “Satanic Verses”, while in May 2008 the Israeli Shas party burned the New Testament. Some mothers in America even burned books from the popular Harry Potter series, claiming it encouraged ‘witchcraft, the devil’s work’.

There are however some differences: first, the IC did not destroy the book altogether. It merely pasted over or tore out what was unwanted.

Second the matter is not related to royalty or religion, it is an issue of the Lebanese General Security, which, by law, controls the imports of books. Third the issue was dealt with ‘à la Libanaise’, the storm abated, everyone relaxed, there was no accountability and there was no burning. There was, however, pasting over and tearing out.

The local press, especially “As Safir” and “Al Akhbar”, approached the subject from a specific angle concerned with the listing of Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations. The Daily Star, meanwhile, merely quoted the Associated Press as saying: “A leading school was forced to remove pages from a history book said to describe Hezbollah as a terrorist organization . . . [school president] Johnson said ‘the school does not have a particular political position and does not teach the Arab-Israeli conflict.’” Why didn’t the editor make the effort of reading the book instead of using the word “said to” and, for that matter, why doesn’t the school teach the Arab-Israeli conflict?

Let us then bury our heads in the sand. This is a book that deserves to be methodologically challenged, yet we are content to just remove a few pages. The IC was established in Lebanon in 1936 but they “do not teach the Arab-Israeli conflict”. The parents’ committee had no comment, but in the July 2006 war they looked for alternative schools abroad because the Israeli minister of defense threatened destruction, and kept his word.

Since 1936, the Ministry of Education has overlooked the fact that private schools have their own curriculums. It did take notice that the structural

deterioration of public schools (a matter to be debated at length) led 55% of students to enroll in private schools today. Private schools in Lebanon have their own “free”, “sovereign” and “independent” republics as well. The role of the Ministry of Education does not even come close to that of UNIFIL in counting the violations of Lebanese laws related to education.

The reader is urged to consider the book’s methodology. The description of Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorists in a history book reflects a specific view of history. How do the authors of the book regard other peoples?

What if I were a Native American, also known as a “Red Indian”?

I would be very pleased with what Suzan Shown Harjo wrote on page 109: “We will be asked to buy into the thinking that . . . genocide and ecocide are offset by the benefits of horses, cut-glass beads, pickup trucks, and microwave ovens.”

My heart would ache when reading Bartolomé de Las Casas’s words as an eye witness to the annihilation of my people on page 109: “. . . Their other frightening weapon after the horses: twenty hunting greyhounds. They were unleashed and fell on the Indians. . . Within an hour they had preyed on one hundred of them. . .”

But I would be angry because the issue of genocide is not tackled in detail. The book’s methodology portrays history through several general but “understanding” view points that in the end with the “Red Indians” falling prey to diseases more than genocide. But the questions, which the book lists at the end of each chapter, and on this particular subject, urge the mind to go through an in-depth debate.

Then, the book’s authors, under the title of “Different Perspectives- The Legacy of Columbus” understand that there can be more than one school of thought, more than one point of view of historical events. The book appears somewhat realistic, and aims to educate students while opening their minds to subjects directly linked to American society.

They appear more understanding and more prepared to accept the principle of “different perspectives” when it comes to “Red Indians”, African-Americans and Latin-Americans (Hispanics).

This is also reflected, in an albeit shy manner, on the role of CIA in toppling Salvadore Allende in 1973. After describing him as an “admitted Marxist”, the book recalls on page 492 how “through the CIA, [the United States government] helped forces . . . topple his government. . .” Take careful note of the word “helped”. In their analogy, addressing the use of the nuclear bomb in World War II, the authors ask a question that, to some extent, encourages criticism of the second bomb in Nagasaki.

However, the subject takes a different direction once we leave the United

1-A Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, and founder of the Angry Arab News service

2- Israel’s Foreign Minister



States and its social make-up and enter our Arab world or regions, perhaps sees as marginally important by the authors. The reader is then deprived of the overflow of emotions that Americans and “Red Indians” experience because here there is no happiness, sadness or anger, only abhorrence. There is a sense of revulsion from those who wrote (the West) and revulsion from those who were written about (us).

What if I were from the Congo? Here you come across a unilateral opinion. There is no room for “different perspectives”. Instead, we are confronted by the official US position, telling us the sugar coated version of the 1961 overthrowing of Lumumba. It fails to mention the circumstances behind the mysterious death of UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. The book settles for saying on page 519 that Mobutu came to power with a “bloodless coup” in 1965 and he “ruled... stabilized ... but in 2000 the nation faced civil war ...” The book fails to mention the role of the United States, and more specifically that of the CIA, although Belgium was mentioned as having interfered. The authors are committed to their country’s official and old position, despite valid reports that Lumumba was toppled upon the request and intervention of the Americans.

What would the book, in its newest edition, say about the killing of some three million Congolese over the past nine years?

What about Iran and the coup against Mossaddeq? “... They [Iranians] nationalized a British-owned oil company and, in 1953, forced the shah to flee. Fearing that Mossaddeq might turn to the Soviets for support, the United States had him arrested. It then restored the shah to power.” (494)

On the US support of the shah, despite a reference to poverty and the Savak, the main headline reads “The United States Supports Secular Rule”.

The issue, then, is that Iran is locked between the “seculars” (the shah) and the clerics (Khomeini), and of course, all of this has a distinct aroma of petrol. There is no need here for questions about human rights or the illegitimate intervention, what the authors called “the arrest of Mossaddeq”. The United States is made to appear as a legitimate policeman. Of course, there no mention that Mossaddeq was democratically designated prime minister with the support of an overwhelming majority.

What if I were a Muslim?

The book dedicates a few lines to Islam as a monotheistic religion, in the second chapter entitled “Judeo-Christian Tradition” on page 12. **(Explain that to your children)**

But what if you were from this region of the world? What do we call it?

Here I will not find a mention of my country or any other country.

“Judaism and Christianity both began in a small corner of southwest Asia”?

Where exactly is southwest Asia? **(Explain this to your children)**

What if I were Palestinian? “The division of Palestine after World War II set off bitter disputes in the Middle East. Some of the problems faced by the new nation of Israel were similar to those experienced by new nations in Africa and Asia... Palestinians who did not remain in Israel faced a disruptive life as refugees.”

(Page 521) As for those who did remain in Israel, the book apparently thinks they are living a life of leisure. **(Explain this to your children).**

On page 522 there is a beautiful picture of Golda Meir (perhaps her most beautiful portrait) as “one of the signers of Israel’s declaration of independence”. Israel must have been occupied (but by whom?) and then liberated! **(Explain this to your children)**

On page 523, the book mentions Hosni Mubarak and the way it is pronounced in Arabic (HAHS.nee moo.BAHR.uhk) **(ask one of children try pronouncing these letters)**. On pages 524 and 525, the book describes “life in a Kibbutz” in Israel in 1951 saying that “...instead of teaching math, philosophy, or psychology ... Israel’s eager immigrants [who] are former lawyers, professors,

or physicians ... pour over the latest publications on scientific farming from the US Department of Agriculture.” There is of course no mention of the people whose land was stolen and who were killed and displaced.

(Explain this to your children) On “peace” (Oslo 1993), the authors write on page 525 that although “Netanyahu had opposed the plan still he made efforts to keep the agreement...” **(Let the Palestinians explain this to their children)** Netanyahu is written neh.tan.YAH.hoo **(the challenge of pronunciation still stands).**

In order for us not to think that the book insensitive toward the Palestinian cause, it did the “forbidden” by asking: “they say the Arab-Israeli conflict is not between right and wrong but between two rights,” and asked what the reader thinks. Of course, there is nothing in their about the Deir Yassine massacre (refer to what has been written about the natives also known as “Red Indians”) For these reasons, and more, the Modern World History, deserves to be debated and added to the list of challenged books. This is a matter that should be undertaken by IC’s parents committee. The Ministry of Education should also fulfill its role, or else what purpose does it possibly serve?

So! If there were schools in the United States that do not teach - or censor - books such as: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Mark Twain) and the Catcher in the Rye (J.D. Salinger) and Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck) and if there are those who object to teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution in schools, then, why would the IC not consider challenging this book?

How? First: Lebanese General Security should not interfere in the issue of books, and this requires an amendment of the law. Leave the matter to the Educational Center for Research and Development and private schools.

Second: no part of any book should ever be censored.

Third: The book should be on the list of publications to be critiqued or challenged. If this book is part of the curriculum of what is called the International Baccalaureate, then why is it this book and not another? Where is the problem if IC students were taught that its authors express a specific point of view that is not necessarily correct?

Fourth: The book is a call to those who take “pride” in their “Arabic”, “Lebanese” (sometimes “Phoenician”) patriotism to publish a history book that is as captivating with its illustrations, questions and stories as this book is. It should be a history book that dares ask questions and present different perspectives of history (ours and theirs). What are the “Arabists” doing to accomplish such a project? What about the Lebanese? What are the Arab regimes doing? And of course, where is the Lebanese Ministry of Education in all this debate?

This is an American book that reflects a semi-official point of view of the world, in which racism and American patriotism are camouflaged in a history book. This is met by a horrifying vacuum in our curriculums, which are filled with our superstitions, our gibberish or books like this one! Maybe this is the “unified book” that the Americans gave their students, and that March 8 and March 14— and those before them, above them and after them - will massacre each other over without even writing a remotely comparable book. Let us read this book, criticize it and then toss it aside, with the full knowledge that it is Rome’s book on the Barbarians, and that we are the Barbarians. Do not tell your children that this is a history book. Tell them it is “their” book on “our” history that we have yet to know, comprehend, discuss or write. To quote a friend: “What if students were asked in an exam if Hezbollah was a terrorist organization? How would they reply and how would they be graded? His answer is that the grading will depend on the examiner: Will it be As’ad AbuKhalil or Avigdor Lieberman?

Based on the book’s definition of terrorism, the US invasion of Iraq is considered a terrorist act, while the killing of 1,400 human beings in Gaza could be justified. Perhaps in the next edition, we will not find a single picture of them, but we will find one of abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

We wait for the next edition.