

A Primer for a New Terrain: Palestinian Schooling in Jordan, 1950



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This article offers a close reading of the first geography textbook printed by the Ministry of Education after the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1950. Examining the Hashemite regime's early curricular attempts to incorporate its new Palestinian citizens, refugees and otherwise, the article highlights the tactics used to achieve these ends, namely a topographic centralization of Jordan, an erasure of human geography in favor of a natural one, and the foreclosure of other forms of national attachment and belonging. The discussion seeks to expand our understanding of one of the most significant narrative materials confronted by Palestinians in the aftermath of the Nakba, seeing in it a possible mechanism by which to understand the challenges to Palestinian demands for a self-determined education.

The best way to get to know a country well is to embark on several trips to places throughout, in order to see for ourselves its towns, hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, archeological sites, and natural habitats. And this is what Hassan, Nu'man, Nabil, Talal, and Ghassan, students from schools in Amman, decided to do.
—Third grade Jordanian geography primer, October 1950

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE NAKBA, the majority of Palestinians driven from their homes east of the armistice line with the newly established state of Israel entered the suddenly expanded Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as refugees. As the displaced Palestinians' stay grew ever more protracted, the Jordanian state and international organizations built a massive infrastructure to educate their children. They did so by creating a system that would reproduce and consolidate a state narrative that denationalized Palestinian youth and implicated them in Hashemite legitimacy—or so it was hoped. The Ministry of Education was tasked with the development of a curricular system for both government schools and the schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which had been created in December 1949 to support the needs of the Palestinian refugee population throughout the region. The curriculum was designed to coerce political and social integration by articulating a linear national tale aimed at producing compliant citizen-subjects who would be loyal to a state hegemon.

In Jordan, this process was complicated by three unique features. First, the recently expanded state had annexed territory otherwise belonging to the majority of its new subjects, the Palestinians of the West Bank. Second, the teachers and curriculum developers tasked with writing the material were mainly Palestinians. And third, the aim of the curriculum was to transition the majority population from being the citizens of an anticipated republic to those of a semi-absolutist kingdom whose legitimacy stood in direct contradiction with their loss. Using a close reading of one of the first textbooks to have resulted from the process, the third-grade geography primer¹, *Al-mamlaka al-urduniyya al-hashimiyya*, this article demonstrates how the Jordanian curricular system sowed the seeds of a new Hashemite imprint onto annexed terrain, undergirding the legitimacy of the Hashemites as rulers of the expanded kingdom and imposing topographical hegemony. Such a granular reading of one primer considers the specific mechanisms for asserting a new imaginative geography, and the ambivalences and slippages pursuant to this earliest attempt to incorporate reluctant, if not unwilling, citizens.

Curricular Contexts

How, then, did the Jordanian state manage to make adult Palestinians teach young Palestinians to be Jordanian?

Part of that answer lies in the coercive strategies of the state. Police and intelligence officials were frequent guests in classrooms, sitting in on teachers' lessons, including at the primary level, walking the school grounds and, at moments of heightened political mobilization—as during the protests against King Abdullah I, and the Baghdad Pact in 1954—imposing curfews or lockdowns in order to prevent students from assembling or participating in protests. Another strategy was a thorough self-surveillance regime adapted from the Mandate system. Headmasters kept watch over teachers, ostensibly for quality control but also for adherence to curriculum, and ministry officials spot-checked teachers' routines in unannounced visits to their classrooms. They stopped students for impromptu interrogations and monitored extracurricular activities during and after regular school hours.² Lastly, there was the systemic and coercive recruitment of students as classroom informants. Drawn by promises of future employment, additional rations, entrapment, or even threats to other family members, students would report on their teachers and classmates to intelligence field offices, triggering the interrogation and imprisonment of teachers who had gone off-script in their lessons.

Another part of the answer lies in the political and social conditions that Palestinians experienced after the 1948–49 war. The majority of those who either entered Jordanian territory, or now found themselves living there as a result of the annexation of the West Bank, were from the rural regions of central Palestine, or from among the working classes of Yafa (Jaffa) and other coastal cities. Corralled into desert and valley outposts or on the peripheries of towns, the refugees shared two commonalities with Palestinians who had not otherwise been displaced: first, they had lost whatever land and most of the capital they may have owned beyond the armistice line; and second, they now found themselves stripped of a recognized national belonging. Although that moment of shared rupture was unequally distributed, all Palestinians living in the newly created kingdom—whether displaced, indigent, rural, bourgeois, illiterate, or educated—were stateless first and subjects of the Hashemite crown second. Entering this new terrain, stripped of their social and political bearings,

they got by together and crafted collective forms of care under duress. Those with liquid assets were able to leverage their holdings for better employment, housing, and resources for themselves and their families. Others utilized their accrued social capital, particularly their schooling in the final years of the Mandate, to gain work in Jordan's rapidly expanding ministries and public sector. The majority, however, found themselves in desperate straits, reliant on international aid for food rations, health, and shelter. As more of them kept arriving, the meager emergency resources of relief programs rapidly depleted amidst the clamor of work schemes and plans for a quick and (for the regime) easy re/solution to their plight.³

Enter education. Having missed most of the 1947–48 school year, and with no initial clarity as to who was responsible for their education, Palestinian refugees worried that their children were falling behind and set up their own schools. They carried the demand for, and practices of, public education across the threshold of the Nakba, insisting that nothing should threaten their children's schooling, not even displacement. By late 1949, the newly created UNRWA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had entered into an agreement to jointly deliver education to the refugee camps. The Ministry of Education insisted on, and received, guarantees of full control over curriculum and security. Despite full-throated appeals to then-UNESCO director Roger Garraud by educators like Khalil Totah, Wasfi Anabtawi, Abdul Latif Tibawi, and many others, requests for a national—that is, a self-determined, Palestine-centered—education were denied. The state understood that its control over schools entailed a statist narrative running through the educational structure. Narrative was to the Hashemites, as to all states, an indispensable mechanism for captivity.⁴

Curriculum, Coercion, and the State

Education is a useful vehicle to understand the complex, contradictory, and wrenching mechanisms that the Jordanian state used in its attempt to erase Palestinians politically and ideologically. In a small subset of gradually burgeoning historiography concerning the interwar Palestinian experience, historians have examined key features of such mechanisms of incorporation and coercion. Elena Dodge Corbett, Kimberly Katz, and Joseph Massad, for example, have shown how education came to be utilized as an artery of state power. Jalal Hussein, Abdul-Latif Barghouti, Nabil Badran, Randa Farah, Ilana Feldman, Benjamin Schiff, and André Mazawi have uncovered the historic and contemporary social and political mechanisms at work in the Palestinians' search to recalibrate and reassess the role of education, particularly the UNRWA-UNESCO system, in the aftermath of the Nakba losses. Betty Anderson and Hilary Falb Kalisman have both chronicled the social and political trajectories of some of the educators involved in the establishment and growth of the Jordanian educational system. Karma Nabulsi and Abdel Razzaq Takriti have recorded the experiences of Palestinian organizers and shown how crucial educators and schools during this period were to generating and disseminating revolutionary traditions. Yamila Hussein's intellectual history of Palestinian revolutionary pedagogy shows how the entanglement with the Hashemites and other host states helped to hone theories of emancipatory education amongst Palestinians. In addition, Anderson, Riad Nasser, and Najla Bashour saw the significance of the textbooks developed in the first decade after dispossession. In comparative and

longitudinal studies, they have deciphered how these textbooks constructed a tale for Jordan that was scaffolded on a narrative of linear historical progression culminating in a unified body politic and geography. According to this narrative, the new organism could only develop and grow under the guidance of moderate, civic, and enlightened Hashemite rule that carried the weight of historical inevitability and Arab triumphalism.⁵

Textbooks, in Jordan as elsewhere since the formation of early modern/modern nation-states, provide a pedagogical map for building national knowledge. They help cultivate, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, a field of power, or a topography of social relations, that legitimates authority, shapes subjectivity, and consolidates territory. Textbooks, as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, and others argue, mobilize symbol, form, and allegory in service of particular, narrowly conceived, objective truth claims that teachers are tasked with cultivating in their students. In Jacques Rancière's terms, textbooks serve to build "a political aesthetic of the sensible," an internal logic of belonging and subjecthood that can only be overturned through a willful break from its basis in social and political power.⁶

In another sense, textbooks are also a site for the articulation of national futurity. The lesson plans, the recitation and memorization, the classroom conversations—even those that are critical of the textbook—reaffirm it as the central story with which one must contend. The textbook is already doing the work of reconfiguring the possible and impossible, the dream and the nightmare, the self and the Other, the body and the territory, the subject and the crown. Geography textbooks re-spatialize the imaginary through a discursive move against the familiar. Palestinian children who had just undertaken the long march from their homes to their tents were asked to "re-view" the very ground they had traversed, reread it as part of a story that was both theirs—insofar as they were now citizens—and not theirs, insofar as they were now subjects of another nation. Those Palestinians who were not displaced were called upon to read a natural topography so intimately tied to their social world as if they were alien from it. As for Jordanian students, they too were now tasked with seeing their country reimagined. Whatever had been asked of them prior to 1948 was now being rewritten, coercing their complicity in the erasure of ostensible brethren, and in the excision of a world and country many of their loved ones had died to save, regardless of the behavior of the generals who had led them.

Authoring Jordanian Stories

The authors of the textbook, Sa'id Durra, Wasfi Anabtawi, Sa'id Sabbagh, and Husni Fariz were all members of the earliest Ministry of Education curriculum committee and all were geography teachers. They maintained a delicate balance between forging ahead with the new state imaginary and not directly contradicting the demands, desires, and dreams of emancipation they too shared. All were heavily involved in one political current or another. Fariz left a strong impression on those who would later preside over the Jordanian Communist Party (JCP) in the 1950s and 1960s. Ya'qub Ziyadin, for example, an East Bank Jordanian from Karak, who in the 1950s headed the JCP, remembers learning of socialism under Fariz.⁷ Nabih Irshaidat from Irbid, who also became a central JCP figure, recalled the Arab nationalist songs with which Fariz would lead the class.⁸ Even Wasfi al-Tell, who later became prime minister and was a primary architect of the

expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1970s, recalled his history teacher, Said al-Durra, at Salt Secondary School. He remembered al-Durra fondly, describing him as the one “who inspired . . . a powerful attachment to the Arab nationalist cause.”⁹

Amid disillusion and displacement, these Hashemite curriculum writers who, like their peer educators, were also Arab nationalists, Ba’athists, and communists of various stripes, faced a confounding dilemma. Their multiple attachments tugged against each other in an “impossible stasis,” as one teacher described it.¹⁰ They were committed, on the one hand, to an anticolonial and emancipatory nationalism rooted in a modernist ethos of democratic reform, and on the other, to a deep sense of responsibility for sustaining class positioning only recently earned, which required some accommodation with a regime apparently willing to tolerate a degree of political opposition. Although the new Hashemite regime was opportunistic and self-aggrandizing, the state apparatus provided some space for the incorporation of politicized teachers into the system, allowing them to secure scarce employment without a sense of political capitulation. The very stability of the state depended on their incorporation since it was they who were tasked with guiding students and fellow teachers.

The central task of the curriculum writers was to flesh out a Hashemite story in a new terrain. It was a formidable challenge for the Ministry of Education. How could it convince young people to see the familiar anew? What modifications needed to be made to their reality? What needed to be slain in their imaginary, and what conjured? The textbook in question here is the first written after 1948, and the first to be named after the newly expanded state. No longer the Emirate of Transjordan, the state became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. As such, the textbook was part of a larger toolkit, including the press and radio, as well as official speeches and listening tours, with which the state could whittle a new subjectivity. The textbook was an introduction of the new state to the new child citizen. It had three aims: to reorient the child’s topographical sensibility and provide teachers with the new vocabulary to do so, to pivot the child’s gaze towards a natural world bereft of a human geography that the state had not yet fully captured, and through that erasure, to foreclose the possibility of building the self and sociality anew beyond the framework of the still-insecure state—both foregrounding its voice and preventing the stateless from conjuring their return and other possibilities for their collective life.

Introductions and Reorientations

The textbook is divided into three main sections. The first and second short sections are titled “Natural Geography” and cover a basic introduction to the continents and oceans. The third and main section is titled “Road Trips.” In a footnote to the teacher, the authors say, “We have utilized the method of road trips to ease the student’s understanding of their country’s geography, relying on description and tourism so that the lessons are not dry.”¹¹ Teachers were called upon to serve as national storytellers, and to utilize then-new theories of education to develop attachment to a “novel” geography, the assumption being that this was not a known terrain, or one that must be known again. One former student said, “I remember this textbook so clearly, all these years later, because I remember memorizing sections for an exam and thinking, ‘but I already know these places.’ Most of these places we had gone through in order to reach the camp.

But of course, I now understand that this book wasn't supposed to teach us what we already knew, but to reorient us."¹²

Before the road trips even began there were three key "reorientations." First, the five friends making the road trip, Hassan, Ghassan, Nu'man, Talal, and Nabil, would meet in Amman. The city is described as having "become many times larger" than it had been in the past. "Its trade has increased and its infrastructure expanded as beautiful buildings have spread over its hills and valleys, its population has increased to 150,000, and it is the capital of the kingdom."¹³ In 1948, Amman's population totaled 70,000 inhabitants. By 1952, when the first post-1948 census was conducted, that number had almost doubled to 120,000, a large percentage of whom were among the approximately 145,000 Palestinians that had taken refuge in the East Bank.¹⁴ In this introductory extolment of Amman's burgeoning growth, no reason is given for the increase in the city's inhabitants nor, for that matter, its development and modernization. The effects are detached from their cause. The city is dehistoricized in order to prepare for it a Hashemite futurity.

The boys agree to travel during their spring break, each heading in a different direction and returning to Amman to report on what he saw of "our homeland's natural habitat, its hills, rivers, valleys, and archeological sites." Hassan decides to visit Ajlun and Irbid (northern Jordan), and Nu'man the Jordan Valley (between the East and West Banks); Nabil wants to climb the "Western hills" (the central hills of the West Bank, which include Nablus, Bethlehem, and al-Khalil [Hebron]); Talal heads towards the "coastal valleys" (of Mandate Palestine and the cities of Acre, Haifa, and Gaza), and Ghassan heads south, towards Karak and Aqaba (in southern Jordan).¹⁵ Already in this introduction to the five travelers, there is a new geographical vocabulary for Palestine, and an expanded geography of Jordan. The country is redistricted, and Amman more expressly centered as the capital of the kingdom.

The introduction also reorients the students to a gendered mobility. The absence of girl travelers reflects the broadly traditionalist leadership of both King Abdullah I and the Ministry of Education. Despite the growth of women's movements in the region, including Palestine and Jordan, and the progressive ideals of the curriculum writers, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan would have no girls traveling alone. Perhaps the most emotive irony is that these students would read a story devoid of women after many had just marched kilometers with their mothers and sisters, women who had been separated from husbands, fathers, and brothers.

The only time a girl is mentioned in the story is during a brief trip to Beirut when Nabil brings along his sister, Laila. Laila interjects at intervals to ask Nabil questions that allow him to elaborate on what is before them, and thus before the young reader's imagination. The gendered implications of this scenario, and the respective mimetic roles the traveling companions play as student and teacher, are impossible to miss. Laila never answers a question, and Nabil never asks one (nor is he ever at a loss for an answer to one). Upon arrival at Beirut's port, for example, Laila turns to her brother and asks, "Tell me, Nabil! Why did people build these two piers in the water?" to which he responds with a short treatise on the wind and the waves and the lighthouse as a ship's guide at night.¹⁶

The textbook also disorients. Farid Abu-Zaynah recalled that the geography textbook and its seemingly carefree, cheerful, and effortless travel felt "altogether surreal" from the vantage point of someone cordoned into tent camps and taught in the open air.¹⁷ Sabah al-Asfur, who was eight years old when she read the textbook in her family's tent in Wihdat camp, told me, "I was always

so confused about where we were, and how we got there. How did they [the characters in the textbooks] not get lost as we did?”¹⁸ As Nabil and Laila gaze at the coastline from Beirut northward, Nabil exclaims, “Oh, Laila, how these ports and inlets remind me of the Gulf of Acre, which extends all the way to Haifa!”¹⁹ The only possible travel to Palestine is therefore temporal, it is travel to the memory of a terrain previously known and now out of reach. Acre is remembered, but as with Beirut, it is not part of the new Jordanian imaginary but held in place as past. A lament is not a promise, but it is also not an admonishment. There is no call to forget, but there is also no call to return.

In this earliest 1950 textbook, two simultaneous subtexts ran through this tourism to elsewhere and the lamentation of cities lost. First, the imaginative distancing from Lebanon, Egypt, and other republican states, reflected the antagonism of the Hashemite regime to an Arab nationalist project that was gaining maturity and momentum in the aftermath of the 1948 war. The mobilization for a united front, and a cohesive political and economic project against colonial (both European and Israeli) capture and rule, had gained its strongest forward momentum following the devastations wrought by the fall of Palestine. The failures of the Arab armies and militias to protect Palestine from settler-colonial invasion triggered waves of protest, as disgruntled and traumatized soldiers returned home speaking of regime collusion and incompetence, disorganized and incoherent orders, and under-equipped and abandoned units.

Second, by the early 1950s, Palestinians had begun their steady exodus to the Gulf states for work, and to other parts of the Arab world, particularly Egypt and Iraq, for further education. Amman, both for those living in it and for those coming in from the West Bank, became a transit point toward labor opportunities and higher education elsewhere. It had become the only way station to the outside world, including the Arab region, and a necessary stop-through for social mobility. Amman was thus both the point of departure and of return. In other words, every student-traveler embarking on a tour of his/her country begins and ends the journey in Amman; the circular paths extend out in every direction, but the hub is always this new capital—and by extension, the Hashemite kingdom. Reintroducing and reorienting the new subject began with an attempt to dislodge old geographies and toponymies. The text then transformed a place of actual origin for some students into a cry of loss for all.

Nature as Erasure

After spring break, the five students regroup at school in Amman to discuss their travels. The first to tell his tale is Hassan. After watching phosphate extraction in Rusayfa and being given a pen at the Iraqi Oil Company’s refinery in Mafraq, Hassan exclaims,

Irbid is truly one of the most beautiful places [*bilad*] in Jordan, built to the most modern specifications, its streets wide and organized, and it has a large hill on which stand government buildings, the secondary school, and the girls’ school. It is also an important trading and agricultural town, teeming with people buying and selling everywhere, because it has a large weekly market, and is close to the Syrian border. And after spending a night in Irbid, enjoying its good air, I woke

to gaze at her fertile valleys. And as I headed to Jabal Ajlun, located southwest, I passed its lovely woodlands with almond trees, evergreens, and oaks.²⁰

What is most important for the student to know about Irbid and northern Jordan? The grit of its factories, refineries, and airfield, and of Jordan's industrial zone, Mafraq, and the fecundity of its fields. These homeland splendors are offered as evidence of Hashemite futurity: development, education, and advanced governance.

But who inhabits this kingdom? Attached to Hassan's story is an image with the caption, "View of the suq in Irbid."²¹ The small photograph, only one-fourth of the page, depicts a street crammed with awning-covered shops. The suq, the historic center of most towns in the region, with its bustle of market exchanges and commerce, and often the main locale for the exchange of ideas and political organizing in cafés and bookshops, is almost entirely empty. A lone elderly man can be seen walking away from the scene, hunched over and with his hands clasped behind his back.

Erasure is redoubled by Nu'man. His first stop is Salt, a historic city in the Balqa Valley northeast of Amman and the site of significant political opposition to the Hashemites since the early 1920s. Salt Secondary School was, even then, a storied institution, foundational to the formation of the Jordanian intelligentsia. Two of the textbook's authors were educated there. However, no mention is made of the school, and once again, Nu'man underlines the country's verdancy, the "hills, terraces, beautiful valleys, [and] gardens ripe with fruits and flowers."²² This emphasis on the natural abundance that the kingdom has to offer is a particularly compelling promise at a time when most children were subsisting on basic rations of flour, tea, powdered milk, tinned cheese, processed meat, and canned sardines provided by UNRWA and the government.²³

In the small village of Shuna near the Allenby Bridge, Nu'man spots the winter residence of "His Majesty, our King." Apart from Laila and the five young travelers themselves, the king's is the sole name invoked in the entire textbook. While figures, such as the drivers transporting the young travelers and the locals offering directions and information shadow the tales, no other figure is brought into the foreground. The sovereign's home is part of the natural terrain of the kingdom—a stop as significant as the relics of Jarash, the castles of Ajlun, and the empty streets of Irbid.

After a short respite in Jericho, Nu'man arrives on the southeastern shore of Lake Tiberias. "It is too hot," he declares, "which makes the valley unlivable."²⁴ Thus, between the modernization symbolized by an electricity plant near the lake and the banana trees in the valley is an unlivable chasm. Yet it was in this very "un-livability" that so many refugees made their lives. In both Hassan and Nu'man's tales, the streets are free of the refugees who have been swallowed up amid an undifferentiated mass of subjects. As Nu'man descended into the Jordan Valley, he would have passed banana trees and palm trees, but also refugee camps. By 1951, and certainly by the seventh printing of the textbook in 1953, the previously sparsely populated valley had seen the influx of more than fifty thousand refugees. More than eight camps had been set up just outside Jericho. Aqabat Jabr, the largest of them, housed thirty thousand people in tents strung along the craggy slopes leading into the valley. Many of the refugees did not even have tents and lived instead in the caves on the city's outskirts. One particularly destitute camp, 'Ayn Sultan, located one kilometer northeast of Jericho, housed thirteen thousand refugees. As he traveled on the road running along the Jordan River, Nu'man would have been able to clearly see the thousands of tents blanketing the

landscape.²⁵ Instead, this terrain of initially patched-together encampments featuring open sewage, then mud brick homes and “zinc” roofing, is made invisible as the traveler’s car barrels from one village to the next, speeding past the lived topography of those listening to his stories. The roads and streets are cleansed of people on a canvas to be painted anew. Student-readers are forced to learn a curriculum that has ghosted them.²⁶

Slippage and Speculative Return

As Nu‘man wends his way around the River Jordan and its tributaries, he threads the two banks of the river, no longer as two separate places but as one and the same. Nabil then consolidates the annexationist tale as he visits Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, al-Khalil, and Tulkarm. He accumulates religious sites on behalf of the Hashemite kingdom, lending the state greater credence as the “Holy Land,” and reinforcing these religious symbols of national legitimacy for a regime making a claim against the non-Hashemite nationalist forces who saw in Palestine, and particularly Jerusalem, a primarily Arab struggle. Nabil spends two days in Jerusalem, visiting the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the tomb of King Hussein bin Ali, the father of King Abdullah I.²⁷ Nabil, who also tours the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Ibrahimi Mosque in al-Khalil, parses the various biblical and Arabic names of the hills surrounding Nablus for the benefit of his fellow travel mates.²⁸ The effusiveness with which students were treated to the story of Ghassan’s journey to Irbid and Zarqa is duplicated here in descriptions of the landscape around the towns of the West Bank. Nabil finds al-Khalil to be a beautiful summer resort, “famous for its natural scenery, pure water, clean air, and delicious, large grapes.”²⁹ In Ramallah, he discovers fig and olive trees, and vineyards heavy with fruit.³⁰ He proclaims that any visitor to the town would be delighted by Nablus’s “educational renaissance,” “cleanliness,” and the good-quality soap made in local factories.³¹ Jenin, which overlooks the “famous Marj Ibn ‘Amr” (the Jezreel Valley), is “renowned for its gardens and abundant water supply,” and replete with grain and fruit production.³² Palestine slips into a natural Hashemite world, a fecundity and development born less of centuries-long peasant toil and the aspirations of local populations (with their attendant hardship on bodies and lives) than of rebirth under the new sovereign.

What happens when Nabil reaches the northern edge of Jenin? He keeps driving, onwards across the Jezreel Valley into lower Galilee, coasting through Afula and arriving at Nazareth. “Every Christian pilgrim visits Nazareth,” Nabil says, “just as they visit Jerusalem and Bethlehem.” In stark contrast to the experience of the students reading the textbook itself, this fantastical journey is told with the casual entitlement of a state confident in its claims. Far from being an uneventful road crossing, the (undeclared) border between Israel and the West Bank was, in actuality, deadly. Refugees attempting to return to their villages, sometimes only a few hundred meters on the other side of the armistice line, were shot by Israeli sorties on a regular basis. After the war, some Palestinians had managed to return to their homes, others hoped to harvest their lands, and still others, particularly in the mid-1950s, conducted resistance operations inside the armistice line. And throughout the country, but particularly in the West Bank, regular demonstrations were being held demanding that the Hashemites respond to Israeli raids of towns on or near the armistice line.

But recognition of the armistice line would not have been without its own political implications. Just as the material structure of their dwellings—and their refusal to alter them—connoted the Palestinians’ political insistence on the impermanence of their refugee condition, so too the armistice lines, which they refused to recognize. Barricades and border fences erected by the Jordanian government or by the Israelis were constantly dismantled by frontier villagers. Barbed wire was cut and very often moved.³³ Such physical dividers, it was widely (and correctly) feared, would create a *fait accompli* and recognition of the armistice line as a legitimate and permanent international border.

This ambivalence towards boundaries is laden with possibility. In rendering the crossing anodyne, the curriculum writers were slipping in another futurity, nestling it amidst Hashemite conquest. The textbook begins with an authors’ preface meant to orient students to its cast of characters. It then shifts to a first-person narration by the student-tourists, who create for the student-readers their new natural and naturalized topography. This more or less remains the case throughout the primer until, upon departing Nazareth, Nabil stops, looks about, and says, “Had we wished to continue our car journey from Nazareth to Safad, we would necessarily have passed by the town of Tiberias.”³⁴ He does not go there, however. Nabil’s actual journey ends at the doorstep of the Church of the Annunciation, and the remainder of the tour of the so-called Western Hills remains theoretical—the trip to Safad foreclosed.

Nabil’s story ends abruptly, and Talal’s begins: “I left Jerusalem heading towards the coastal valley . . . and after . . . driving thirty kilometers through the hills, I reached Palestine’s coast.”³⁵ In this final trip across the River Jordan, earlier language aimed at building the topographical imaginary for a Hashemite state is replaced with a natural world now conjuring the past rather than erasing a differentiated human geography. The recently depopulated Ramla becomes the Ramla of “apricot and almond trees, and olive orchards”; nearby Lydda, whose residents were forcibly expelled on 14 July 1948 in what came to be known as the Death March, here returns to its past glory. Talal describes the city as “famous for its grand train station, joining the railroad lines of Jerusalem to the east, Yafa to the west, Egypt to the south, and Haifa to the north.”³⁶

Talal then heads westward, to Yafa’s orange groves, wherein the narrator opines on the nutritional benefits of oranges: “They fortify the body, purify the blood, and cure chest ailments. It is for this reason that they are sought after in northern Europe, especially in England. Oranges are the most important exports of Palestine.”³⁷ As Talal heads north of Yafa, he finds the “Jewish town of Tal-Abib [Tel Aviv], which has been greatly built up, as has its manufacturing. It is also full of modern architecture, with its many factories located on the way to Yafa.”³⁸ The forms of modernity that Yafa and Tal-Abib display then cede to southern Palestine, to Majdal’s and Gaza’s historic ruins, to Khan Yunis’s vegetables, and to the desert landscape of Bir al-Saba [Beersheeba].

Here, the textbook features two (glaring) exclusions: first, any reference to Zionism, Israel, or Zionist settler colonialism. If refugees were excluded in earlier sections of the textbook, the reason for their dispossession, displacement, and massacring, that is, the Nakba in its entirety, was occluded. The other exclusion was temporal. It is not to a concurrent time that Talal travels. Rather, he, the students, and the storytelling teacher, must relapse into a speculative Palestine that cannot in fact be returned to in “real time.” In contrast to the hazy borders north of Jenin, south of al-Khalil, and west of Jerusalem, utter clarity marks the descriptions of the coastal valleys. They are *clearly* unreachable and can only be envisioned through the vivid reimagination of a parallel

space-time. This is not a part of the “new Jordan,” it is somewhere else, somewhere otherworldly, perhaps belonging to a future to be remade by the students themselves, in the name of their new king.

But this is also where the foreclosure wavers. From the window of a house built in a pine forest, Talal says,

I see . . . a beautiful sight, considered one of the most beautiful in all of Palestine. From there, we can see:

- 1) The sea both to the north and the south.
- 2) The city of Haifa built on the side of Mount Carmel.
- 3) Haifa’s large port crowded with giant ships.
- 4) And in the distance, the city of Akka [Acre], famous for its historic ruins, . . . Jazzar Mosque, and the vegetables and grains produced by its fertile soil.
- 5) Also in the distance are the Muqata’ and Na’amayn rivers. What makes Haifa especially important are its oil refineries, the pipelines from the oil wells of Mosul in Iraq extending [all the way] to their endpoint, in Tripoli, Lebanon.³⁹

In a few elegant lines, the narration of Palestine’s topography slips back in, and the students are prompted: “Imagine that you are standing atop Mount Carmel, describe to me what you see.”⁴⁰

More than three-fourths of the students in the classrooms, in shelters made of tents and metal roofing, were Palestinians. Yet, all the students are asked to imagine peering out from the window of the Haifa home. In this small slippage, the curriculum writers hint at the possibility that what they have lost could still be reconjured, that their memory and their imaginary held value. For refugees desperate for schooling, whose lives were otherwise subjected to erasure, it is these gestures of care, this almost gentle note in the midst of violence, that made the curriculum somewhat tolerable.

But what, then, must Palestine mean for the Transjordanian Bedouin from Karak or Irbid? The authors have a ready response. In the final pages of the textbook, at the beginning of the section reviewing the terms introduced throughout the text, they state, “The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan extends from the Syrian Republic in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea in the south; it is contiguous with Iraq and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the east, and is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the west.”⁴¹ In a footnote to this first officially published textbook, the authors claim: “We consider the borders of the Hashemite kingdom to include all of Palestine and Transjordan, previously.”⁴² Slippages and gestures aside, here, finally, is the ultimate purpose of the textbook, its *raison d’être*. *All* of Palestine, and *all* of Transjordan, are now *Hashemite*. In a masterful turn, as the Palestinian remembers the port of Haifa, so too must the East Bank Jordanian, because they are both now subjects of a king who lays claim to that harbor.

There are only two distinctions between the first printing of the textbook in 1950 and its final printing in 1953. The October 1950 version was titled, *Al-watan al-‘arabi* (The Arab nation). By the second printing, in January 1951, the title had become *Al-mamlaka al-urduniyya al-hashimiyya* (The Hashemite kingdom of Jordan). In the first edition, there is an additional paragraph following the description of the borders of the Hashemite kingdom, stating, “There is a part of our holy land, which extends along the Mediterranean Sea and consists of the flourishing

and fertile part of beloved Palestine. Today occupied and plundered by foreigners, it remains the dear hope of every Jordanian and Arab who struggles to reclaim the land and rid it of its vandals.”⁴³ And in the questions section appended at the bottom of the page, the authors insert: “History tells us that the great Romans and their generals would, at every turn, be reminded of the following phrase: ‘Carthage will inevitably be destroyed.’ So, what is it that you are reminded of, oh Arab student?”⁴⁴

By the second printing, this missive had been excised from the text; the paragraph defining the borders and the note on Carthage remained. The first printing can be understood as reflective of the earliest post-1948 mood of Arab nationalist foment and the casual and disorganized nature of the fledgling Ministry of Education. The war for Palestine having already been branded a disaster, the full extent of the damage was only then being assessed by Palestinian refugees and recounted by Jordanian soldiers returning from the battlefields. The textual terrain was still riddled with fresh wounds of destruction and upheaval. The deletion of this initial outburst of pain and vindictiveness illustrates the speed with which the Ministry of Education harnessed its narrative output. This, however, was not an entirely coherent process. It was fraught with the ambiguities and contradictions of a Hashemite nationalism still grasping for its Other. The textbook’s authors attempted to subdue non-Hashemite nationalist tropes without tainting the narrative as anti-Arab nationalist or alienating their students. Nevertheless, the textbook triumphed for seven printings (at least) because it did its work well. It built an imaginary of a new national space by replacing the radically altered human terrain of Jordan and Palestine with an idyllic Hashemite Kingdom whose immediate past was not tied to its present, but entwined with a triumphant speculative future.

* * *

I first encountered this textbook by way of its recitation. It was early in my archival labors through the cellars, closets, rucksacks, and boxes, memories and bookshelves of teachers and students, and their children and grandchildren. We were picking through lentils together in a living room in Wihdat camp, the television flickering images of U.S. tanks entering Baghdad. We’d been chatting about my adventures at the Ministry of Education that day, and of my first depressing glimpse of its ostensible archive unit.

“*Wa qad zurtu aydan madinat Haifa, ‘ala safa’ Jabal Al-Karmil . . .*”

“Huh?” I looked at my companion quizzically.

“It’s from this textbook we had to memorize,” she said. “And I remember there was a whole section on Haifa, and how beautiful it is, and how there is a house in the middle of the pine trees, and I remember memorizing the textbook word for word. ‘*Nushahid marfa’ Haifa al-badi’, tazdahim fihi al-bawakhir al-kabira.*’ Every word. It was for the exam, but I still remember.”

Umm Hassan had not completed eighth grade.

She was not the only one who remembered. They used to chant the words under their breath as they walked to school every day, repeating passages over and over like incantations until they were so imprinted in their minds that decades later, in their twilight years, near senile elders could recite entire passages to me. They would quote from these primers, remind me who their authors were, recalling the pictures, and how they answered the particularly difficult questions at the end of each section. This was the narrative that wound its way through their everyday lives, read by candlelight and under kerosene lamps. These were the books that the novelist Ibrahim Nasrallah

traded off with his siblings and were handed down from one sister to the next—in some instances, as in the case of this primer, over decades. They would hold these books carefully, tenderly, lest their thin, brown pages crumble before they could be handed down yet again. They would mock the photographs of the king by giving him devil's horns and etch themselves into the nature drawings of their homeland. These textbooks may have been narratives of the state, but they were material objects carried and cared for, at once precious and venomous. Like the educational system itself, the pedagogical objects were full of promise along with the steady but firm pressure to concede to the new sovereign. They were also what the youth read most widely: hours upon hours every day, an encounter with the state and their teachers, and with their futures. Futures that the state aimed to capture by pulling teachers into a conspiracy of narrative erasure.

The first decade after the Nakba, or perhaps more broadly the period from the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank until the 1967 Israeli conquest, remains dominated by diplomatic and political histories of regime and state machinations, negotiations, and intrigue, or by institutional histories of international organizations, particularly UNRWA. There are a few exceptions, and these tell stories of refugees ingathering, seeking support and restitution for themselves, not just as Palestinians, but also as Arabs and as Jordanians. Such exceptions ask us to think of this period as not just a period of waiting for some Arab savior, or as a preliminary moment to the advent of the Palestinian revolution and of the Israeli invasion and its occupation, but as one that opened up possibilities for a reordering of politics, self, community, and society.

One of the longest-standing tropes of Palestinian education is that it is a success story. The prevailing image is of the stateless yet well-educated Palestinian who as a result of education is, in ironic echo to the Mandate system, now deserving of standing alone. There is an enticing popular desire to see the classroom as a stage upon which the subject performs for a state, mimics it, and memorizes what it demands, but ultimately rebels against it. If the rush of young people into the Battle of Karamah in 1968 is any indication, the Hashemite enterprise failed—its efforts to reorient, pivot, and foreclose Palestinian-ness/ism leading to refusal and rebellion. In other words: any attempts to absorb the Palestinians fail because of the sturdiness of Palestinian identity.

Accurate as that may be, such a read flattens the story of Palestinian education. Success was not a foregone conclusion. By 1954, the U.S. Congress had already begun to threaten to defund UNRWA schools, and pressured UNESCO to impose “reforms” on its curriculum. Palestinians may have demanded a pedagogy of revolution, but the United States, the largest donor to UNRWA, demanded a pedagogy of resettlement. It is testament to the centrality of education in Hashemite state-planning that the Jordanians, and of course the Palestinians, refused these pressures to modify their curriculum. While the historiography has helped us to understand the formation of the educational system—thanks to multiple studies on the UNRWA-UNESCO program, the Ministry of Education, and private and religious schooling during this period—these histories remain largely siloed. How did these bureaucracies intersect? How did the state organize its intelligence-gathering from educational spaces, and how did this inform broader policing decisions? How did teachers build political and pedagogical networks? How can education help us to better understand the precise nature of the Jordanian moment in the West Bank? Did Jordan's curricular erasures of another nation reflect, by some minor measure, features of settler colonialism?

From a social perspective, the story of education read simply as one of success misses the opportunity to write the story of schooling itself, a crucible of social formation experienced by nearly everyone. Though we understand the conditions under which educational achievement was sought by Palestinians, what were the negotiations it required on a day-to-day basis? How did teachers receive curricular erasures? How did they build political consciousness outside formal school hours? What did the students do with this curriculum? What did they debate and fight over? And beyond the curriculum, how did young people engage schooling itself? How did they negotiate education for both its promises and its disciplinary purposes, education as both success and subjugation?

The trope of success has one particularly fatal flaw. Not everyone succeeded. The UNRWA educational program in particular became a laboratory for experimentation in modern pedagogical methodologies, especially those that facilitated access to market needs. How, then, did the development models of testing, the new indices of intelligence and achievement, impact Palestinians' sense of social order? How do we talk about failure amidst all this rush of educational success? Who did this system abandon? What happened to the children who did not pass the exams or were purposely streamed out into vocational training or unskilled labor after basic literacy was met?

Moreover, educational success for a boy promised a prosperous, though perhaps Faustian, future in the Gulf or elsewhere. But success for a girl? Women teachers rebuilt familial order through their new social capital. They entered in far greater numbers into political formations, their economic contributions to family and community allowed them new social purchase power, and expanded their capacities to build self-determined socialities, queer and otherwise. How can a gendering of the historiography of education in exile allow us to not only see the women teachers and their students, and the gendered erasures in the curriculum, but to re-index and expand the definition of success itself?

There are certainly archival challenges to entering these classrooms, or any classrooms for that matter. It is an archival challenge that calls one to seek ephemeral traces, to follow threads of memoirs and memory, and to conjure archives anew. To read this textbook closely is one way to try and enter the classrooms, and live with these young people for a moment, to read what they read, and to see what they had to learn, learn with, and learn against. It is to try and spend a moment to study as they did and look around as they must have done—lulled by monotonous recitation and Hashemite banalities—to see what it was that they were called upon to dream and to wonder along with them if another dream was possible.

About the Author

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ENDNOTES

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- 3 For a class analysis of the early post-Nakba period, see Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876–1983* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).
- 4 UNESCO, "Schools for Arab Refugees," London: National Archives, ED 157/366, 1952; UNESCO, "The Education of Palestine Arab Refugees," August 1953, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001261/126137EB.pdf>.
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- 7 Ya'qub Ziyadin, *al-Bidayya: Sira dhatiya; arba'un sana fi al-haraka al-wataniyya al-urduniyya* (Beirut: Ibn Khaldun, 1981) p. 17.
- 8 Nabih Irshaydat, *Awraq laysat shakhsiyya: Mudhakkirat nabil irshaydat* (Damascus: Dar al-yanabi', 2001), p. 17.
- 9 Durra et al., p. 4.
- 10 Mustafa Salam, former teacher in UNRWA primary schools (1950–85), personal interview, 17 October 2004, Jabal al-Hussein camp, Jordan.

- 11 Durra et al., p. 2.
- 12 Interview with former student, Wihdat camp, 12 January 2005.
- 13 Durra et al., p. 6.
- 14 For an analysis of the often difficult-to-decipher numbers on Palestinians in the East and West Banks prior to 1967, see Yusif Yazid Sayigh, *Al-Urdun wa al-Filastiniyyun: Dirasa fi wihdat al-masir aw al-sird'al-hatmi* (London: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 1987), pp. 12–14.
- 15 Durra et al., p. 22.
- 16 Durra et al., p. 4.
- 17 Interview with author, 18 December 2004, Amman, Jordan.
- 18 Interview with author, 18 January 2004, Amman, Jordan.
- 19 Durra et al., p. 5.
- 20 Durra et al., p. 23.
- 21 Durra et al., p. 24.
- 22 Durra et al., p. 29.
- 23 *Nutritional State of the Palestine Refugees in the Spring of 1951* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1951), p. 24. On the relationship between demands for UNRWA rations and Palestinian identity during this period, see Ilana Feldman, “The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 2 (2012): pp. 155–72.
- 24 Durra et al., p. 33.
- 25 Avi Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, 1948–1957* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1981), appendix 10. A particularly illuminating and poignant film on the history of Aqabat Jabr camp, both past and present, is Eyal Sivan’s *Aqabat-Jaber: Passing Through* (Paris: Memento!, 1987).
- 26 The educational literature on the histories and sociologies of the disappearances and exclusions of vulnerable students from classrooms is extensive. See, for example, Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999); Henry Giroux, *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); and Alan Wieder, *Voices from Cape Town Classrooms: Oral Histories of Teachers Who Fought Apartheid* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).
- 27 Durra et al., p. 35.
- 28 Durra et al., p. 39.
- 29 Durra et al., p. 38.
- 30 Durra et al., p. 39.
- 31 Durra et al., p. 39.
- 32 Durra et al., p. 40.
- 33 One of the most enduring and widely disseminated stories from the early post-1948 period is of Palestinians switching signposts and moving barricades and fences along the long, and often unmanned, border in the middle of the night, in order to redraw the armistice line and recover more of their confiscated land (inside Israel or the West Bank, depending on the narrator). One narration of this story is in the documentary, *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*, directed by Michael Khleifi and Eyal Sivan (Paris: Memento!, 2004).
- 34 Durra et al., p. 42.
- 35 Notice that Talal here begins his journey in Jerusalem, and not Amman—a nod to the assumed role of Jerusalem as the secondary capital of the kingdom. Durra et al., p. 42.
- 36 Durra et al., p. 46.
- 37 Durra et al., p. 46.
- 38 Durra et al., p. 47.

- 39 Durra et al., pp. 50–52.
- 40 Durra et al., p. 52.
- 41 Durra et al., p. 63.
- 42 Durra et al., p. 63.
- 43 Durra et al., p. 21.
- 44 Durra et al., p. 52.