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Hanan Fadlallah & Jan Germen Janmaat

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History education and the construction of identities in divided societies: the case of Lebanon

Hanan Fadlallah and Jan Germen Janmaat 

Institute of Education, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

A major concern in religiously divided societies, is identity formation, as the different communities in such societies aim to pass their religion and culture on to the next generation. Research looking at the socialization function of education shows that history education plays a significant role in identity formation. For instance, [Korostelina, K. V. (2013). *History Education in the Formation of Social Identity: Toward a Culture of Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan] identifies three conceptions of national identity, an ethnic, a multicultural, and a civic one, and argues that these can be shaped through history education. Linking this back to divided societies, existing research shows that communities generally promote an ethnic or a civic identity through history education, but not a multicultural one. Lebanon is an example of a religiously divided society where the school system, which is mainly composed of private schools, is divided along sectarian lines. We draw on Korostelina's model to develop our own analytic framework, which we subsequently use to analyze history textbooks used in different Lebanese religious schools. We find that these textbooks generally promote sectarian identities corresponding to the three main religious communities, despite recent attempts to promote a civic identity in some Christian and Sunni private schools.

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Introduction

Lebanon is a religiously divided society. It hosts eighteen religious communities (Daher, 2012), which are acknowledged by the Lebanese government (Kriener, 2012). None of these comprise a majority of the population: the largest groups are Sunni Muslims (+/– 30%), Shi'a Muslims (+/– 30%) and Maronite Christians (+/– 25%) (US Government, 2008). The tension between the different religious groups, which has been present since the founding of Lebanon, was further strengthened due to the 14-years long Lebanese civil war (Daher, 2012). Moreover, these religious divisions permeate public life and politics to such an extent that Lebanon can be classified as a consociational state (Fontana, 2016; Lijphart & Crepaz, 1991). For instance, each religious community is entitled to an allotted number of seats in parliament and a number of important public

CONTACT Jan Germen Janmaat  g.janmaat@ucl.ac.uk

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positions, including the head of the Lebanese University and the director generals of ministries (The Lebanese Constitution, 1995). Therefore, it can be argued that, with their political manifestation, the religious communities have guaranteed their power in terms of decision making in the country.

These religious divisions are also manifested within the education system. According to Article 10 in the Constitution, religious communities can establish schools (The Lebanese Constitution, 1995). Furthermore, since 1950, private schools, including religious ones, which make up the vast majority of private schools (World Bank Group, 2018), have the right to add topics to their curricula that are not part of the official curriculum. Prior approval from the government is not needed for these additions, with some exceptions (Decree 1436, 1950). This suggests that students enrolled in different schools in Lebanon learn different curricula, especially since most of the school children are enrolled in private schools (CERD, 2020). Consequently, it can be argued that the religious communities have the power to impose their ideologies within their school curricula.

Given this situation, this paper aims to compare different history textbooks used in religious and non-religious schools and both state and private sectors in Lebanon. Specifically, we examine to what extent history education in Lebanon perpetuates a divided society split among religious lines. This question is explored through the lens of the kind of identity promoted through history education in each type of school. This paper builds on an emerging literature on history education in Lebanon (e.g. Abouchedid & Nassar, 2000; Bashshur, 2005; Daher, 2012; Hourani, 2017; Kriener, 2012; Nazarian, 2013; van Ommering, 2015). Some of these studies have also examined the connection between history education and sectarian identities. Abouchedid and Nassar (2000) and Bashshur (2005) found, for instance, that history education in Christian faith schools stresses a Phoenician and European heritage while it emphasizes Arabism in Muslim faith schools. In his ethnographic study, van Ommering (2015, p. 200) found that history education in Lebanon also 'acts as weapon of war, sustaining hostilities and obstructing youth in pursuing a better future'. However to our knowledge no research has yet sought to systematically compare the history education offered in different faith schools in terms of the identities it promotes with a distinct analytic framework, which is what the current paper will do. Investigating the use of history education for the cultivation of identities is important in divided societies as the kind of identity promoted – ethnic, multicultural, or civic (see further below) – influences intergroup relations and therefore overall cohesion (Carras, 2001).

We argue that the religious identity of the school extensively and directly influences the historical narratives adopted in history textbooks, thus promoting a variation of the ethnic concept of national identity (see further below). On the other hand, the type of school, i.e. private or public, does not necessarily influence the identity promoted. This is because several textbooks are used in both private and public schools. The history education offered in these schools, in our view, plays a key role in maintaining and reproducing the divisions in the Lebanese society along religious lines.

Generally, history education is considered an important identity-formation tool (Schiffauer et al., 2004; van Ommering, 2015). It is responsible for promoting national, religious, regional, and ethnic identities (Korostelina, 2011). The reason why history education plays this role in identity formation is that the 'history narratives adopted within history education are based on explicit judgments about the importance of specific

events in the history of a particular nation or ethnic group’ (Korostelina, 2011, p.14). Consequently, the differences among communities are reproduced by history education as the latter strengthens both loyalty to in-groups and the negative perception of out-groups (Carras, 2001; Janmaat, 2007; Korostelina, 2013). However, history education can also mitigate ethnic divides by promoting overarching identities and engaging with supra-national themes (Soysal & Schissler, 2005).

Korostelina (2013) has developed a framework to assess which kinds of national identity history education can promote (ethnic, multicultural, or civic identities), which we will discuss further in the Literature Review section. We find this a helpful tool for our analysis as it offers detailed guidance on the characteristics of history education that can be associated with a particular identity. It is further of value to us as it highlights the kind of identities that are crucial for intergroup relations and overall cohesion, which is of paramount importance in divided societies such as Lebanon. More particularly, it can be expected that the promotion of ethnic identities will perpetuate division while the furthering of multicultural and civic identities can have a reconciliatory and unifying effect (Carras, 2001; Shanks, 2019). We will develop this framework further by adapting it to the Lebanese context and by adding several indicators that allow us to assess the kind of identities history textbooks promote (see Table 1 below). We see this revised framework as a significant contribution that this paper makes to the literature as it could be applied to study the socialization aspects of history education in other divided societies as well.

We recognize that education can also sustain or overcome ethnic divides in many other ways, such as through language policies, religious education, cultural performances, extracurricular activities and the structure of the school system (segregated or integrated). However, we focus on history education as this aspect of education is uniquely suited for storytelling, which is one of the most important ways for socializing children into the values and identities of society and their own group (Farmer, 1990; Newkirk, 2014).

Literature review

Divided societies are characterized by having a significant proportion of their population with weak loyalty towards the state and strong loyalty to their ethnic communities (Fontana, 2016). Consequently, the identity of the ethnic group becomes the reference

Table 1. Indicators for the three conceptions of identity of Korostelina’s framework.

	Ethnic/Sectarian	Multicultural	Civic
Perspective	History narratives are written from the perspective of the religious community	History narratives are written from the perspectives of various religious groups in the society	History narratives are written from a civic perspective, not linked to any religious community
Topics	The topics chosen relate directly to the religious community and legitimize its political position	The topics chosen illustrate multiculturalism in the society	The topics chosen relate to human rights and civic responsibility rather than the religious community
Other religious communities in the society	Other religious groups are portrayed as outgroups, who are inferior or hostile to the ingroup (one’s own religious community)	All religious groups are portrayed as positive contributors to the society as a whole	All citizens are portrayed as equal, regardless of their religious community

of security, rather than the state (Shanks, 2019). This would lead to the creation of social boundaries between the ethnic groups in society. The divisions in the society and the relationship of group members within the group and across the social boundaries are usually reflected in the education system.

Since education is a vehicle for the transmission of language, culture and identity to the next generation (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000), ethnic and religious communities in divided societies tend to employ education to transmit their culture and identity, which presents a challenge for social cohesion and societal security (Shanks, 2019). Thus, in these contexts, the divisions are 'often reflected in separate schooling, where pupils do not experience shared learning and the perspective of the other' (Niens et al., 2013, p. 129). Such segregated education systems construct and reinforce differences among groups to the extent that pupils end up viewing themselves as different kinds of people (Coulby, 2012). In short, education in divided societies is expected to be fragmented, where each community tries to reproduce its culture and ideology to the next generation.

At this point we want to emphasize that the segregated education systems in divided societies need not only be based on free choice but can also reflect unequal power relations between the different groups (cf. MacNair, 2006). For example, the constitutional arrangements in divided societies offering communities significant political and cultural autonomy are often the result of protracted conflicts and as a rule represent uneasy compromises between groups with different levels of power and resources. They therefore need not reflect political solutions that satisfy all groups equally. Indeed, the Taif agreement, which ended the 1975–1989 Lebanese civil war and provided the basis for the post-war power-sharing arrangement between the different religious communities, frustrated Muslims by giving Christian denominations equal representation in parliament despite Muslims constituting the majority of the population (Traboulsi, 2012). However, this agreement did represent an improvement of the representation of Muslims as the ratio of Christians to Muslims in Parliament was reduced from 6:5 in the previous arrangement to 1:1 (Traboulsi, 2012). Moreover, power shifted from the president, a position allocated to Christians, to the Council of Ministers (AbuKhalil, 2018), further eroding the privileged position that Christian religious communities had enjoyed under the previous consociational arrangement. Thus, although we recognize that the present power-sharing arrangement between the different religious communities may to some extent still reflect unequal power relations, it certainly does not represent a framework imposed by a single dominant group.

We further note that our focus on Lebanon's religious communities and their attempts to use history education for the inculcation of sectarian identities does not mean that we consider these communities as primordial, i.e. as unchanging and natural entities of Lebanese society (cf. Majed, 2020). We agree with Makdisi (2000), who understands the contemporary religious communities in Lebanon as modern constructs resulting from a conscious mobilization of religious identities for political purposes. Moreover, this construction and maintenance of religious identities is not confined to the present. According to Makdisi (2017), the Ottoman and French colonial rulers played their part in fanning the flames of sectarian division to suit their interests. We equally recognize salient differences *within* each of the religious communities, as exemplified by the widespread dissatisfaction with the existing power-sharing arrangement among young people within each of the

communities (Diab et al., 2017). Notwithstanding these qualifying remarks, we believe that a focus on religious communities is justified precisely because of the official political status accorded to these communities and the fact that they continue to represent major cleavages in society, conditioning the values, identities and social interactions of Lebanese citizens.

History education in divided societies

As previously mentioned, history education has an integral role in identity formation. The challenge of establishing a history curriculum in divided societies is that 'history is so closely tied to the emotions associated with national identity and collective belonging' (McCully, 2012, p. 148). In other words, in divided societies, because the population identifies with exclusive ethnic groups (Niens et al., 2013), it is tough to establish a common history curriculum that meets the aspirations of all communities. Since no rule is set, divided societies might adopt different approaches to history education that lead to different concepts of national identity. As already mentioned, we draw on Korostelina's (2013) framework to examine the kind of identities that history education promotes in Lebanon. Korostelina (2013) identifies three concepts of national identities, explained below, which can be promoted through history education: ethnic, multicultural, and civic.

Ethnic/sectarian concept

The ethnic concept of national identity is based on viewing the nation as monoethnic and the groups belonging to different ethnicities should assimilate around the core ethnic community (Korostelina, 2013). In other words, the nation is defined based on ethnicity which involves ascribed criteria, such as ancestry, race, native language or religion (Pehrson & Green, 2010).¹ It tends to be thought of as a natural entity, akin to an organism, that needs to be represented politically (Pehrson & Green, 2010). This concept of national identity can be achieved through history education by applying two mechanisms. The first mechanism, which is portraying the nation as ethnically homogeneous, can be achieved through forming 'a concept of nation based on ethnic rather than regional identity and representing national history through the ethnic aspirations for nation-building' (Korostelina, 2013, p. 170). The second mechanism is delegitimizing ethnic minorities as equal members by representing 'ethnic minorities as foreign invaders ... or ignorant peoples ... who have not made any contribution to the nation' (Korostelina, 2013). Then, the expectation is that the historical narratives adopted in history education represent the narrative of the core ethnic community.

The single-narrative approach, or as Seixas identifies it, the best story approach 'means handing over a single definite best story ... which reinforces the sense of belonging somewhere ... promotes values ... and gives a general knowledge of human behavior in history' (Chapman et al., 2011, p. 6). It is argued, however, that the best story approach to history education is not suitable for divided communities. As established above, divided societies are characterized by having strong loyalties towards ethnic groups rather than the state (Fontana, 2016). This loyalty to different ethnic groups is often reflected in the group's perception of national identity. The diverse perceptions among different groups might reach a point of being politically contradicting (Niens et al., 2013). Consequently, because national identity is usually debatable in divided societies,

it is challenging to establish history narratives that are inclusive to all citizens (McCully, 2012). What can be argued here is that such societies adopt a variation of Korostelina's (2013) concept of ethnic identity. In divided societies, the expectation is that each community promotes its conception of national identity, without trying to impose it on the rest of the population. This results in having diverse historical narratives representing the diversity present in the society, without an overarching narrative at the national level.

While Korostelina (2013) defines groups on the basis of ethnicity, we use religion and denomination to distinguish between groups to best portray the case of Lebanon where the divisions are among sectarian lines.

Multicultural concept

The multicultural concept of national identity is achieved through adopting a multiple perspective approach in history education. It is based on the perception of a nation as multicultural, providing the diverse ethnic communities with equal rights (Korostelina, 2013). In other words, the various groups within the nation would be given the resources needed to maintain their culture, such as including their cultural heritage within the national heritage (Korostelina, 2013). The diversity in historical narratives depends on the diversity present in the society. For instance, the historical perspectives can be framed along cultural, political, social, and religious lines, in addition to ethnicity (Kropman et al., 2020). Since the 1990s, the international organization encouraged states emerging from conflict to adopt the multiple perspective approach to history education, as means to promote peace (McCully, 2012).

The multicultural concept usually prevails in societies that are either polyethnic or monoethnic with a dominant ethnic community (Korostelina, 2013). Since the communities in Lebanon meet Smith's criteria for ethnic groups (Fontana, 2016), the Lebanese society can be considered a polyethnic society. Two types of mechanisms in history education promote a multicultural concept of national identity, descriptive and normative mechanisms (Korostelina, 2013). The descriptive mechanisms include focusing on the contributions of the diverse ethnic communities whereas the normative mechanisms include promoting tolerance and appreciation among all ethnic groups (Korostelina, 2013). The approach adopted to promote a multicultural concept emphasizes an inclusive and integrative rather than exclusive and separatist concept of identity by including the various components of the society in the narratives (Pingel, 2010). In short, the multicultural concept of national identity is promoted through history education when the latter includes narratives from various perspectives representing the cultures of all ethnic communities in the country. We recognize that understanding multiculturalism in this way may be different from other approaches to the concept (critical or supportive), but believe that this understanding helps to clearly distinguish between the three concepts of national identity proposed by Korostelina.

Civic concept

The civic concept of national identity is established by disregarding ethnicities. Through the civic concept, people view their citizenship as a contract, stating the rights and responsibilities between them and the state (Korostelina, 2013). In this case, the nation 'is based on common citizenship and participation in public life, rather than on primordial

blood ties or linguistic and cultural homogeneity' (Pehrson & Green, 2010, p. 698). Skårås (2019) links the civic concept to the avoidance strategy in history education. The avoidance strategy is characterized by avoiding controversial history topics where the purpose of history teaching is only seen as making people better at history as a school subject (McCully & Kitson, 2005). In short, the civic concept of national identity means that citizens are connected with their nation based on rights and responsibilities disregarding any account for ethnicity.

Several mechanisms and approaches to history education are linked to the formation of a civic concept of national identity. To establish a civic concept of national identity through history education, two types of mechanisms are employed, descriptive and normative (Korostelina, 2013). The descriptive mechanism includes describing the institutions and laws in society as well as the individual's role (Korostelina, 2013). The normative mechanisms, however, include promoting human rights and peaceful coexistence in society as well as warning against using history to reshape prejudices (Korostelina, 2013). Seixas identifies this approach as the disciplinary approach, where the focus is on analyzing and interpreting history rather than transmitting historical knowledge (Chapman et al., 2011). Thus, history education promotes a civic concept by demonstrating the nation as a civic rather than an ethnic entity with an emphasis on human rights and responsibilities and avoiding ethnic-related or controversial topics. Some divided societies aim to promote the civic concept of national identity through their history education.

To conclude, three concepts of national identity can be promoted through history education, depending on the approach adopted. The ethnic concept of national identity is characterized by viewing the nation as composed of one ethnic community around which minority ethnic groups should assimilate (Korostelina, 2013). This concept is established by adopting a single perspective that usually represents the dominant ethnic community, and predominates the historical narratives in the history curriculum (Chapman et al., 2011). The multicultural concept of national identity is linked to viewing the nation as multicultural while acknowledging and appreciating the contributions of all groups to the nation (Korostelina, 2013). The third concept is the civic concept of national identity, through which citizenship is viewed as a contract between the nation and citizens clearly stating the rights and responsibilities of the latter (Korostelina, 2013).

Methodology

Content analysis

Content analysis has been employed as a method for analyzing textbooks to answer how they contribute to identity formation. This method mainly examines the text itself in the textbook (Pingel, 2010) concerning the question of interest, as well as images (Fuchs, 2011). Based on the mechanisms Korostelina (2013) identifies for each concept of national identity and following the approach of analysing textbook narratives developed by Janmaat (2007), we have developed a set of indicators for each concept summarized in Table 1 below. We will use these indicators as the basis for the content analysis of the textbooks.

The history curriculum and grade level selection

The aforementioned Taif Agreement provided an impetus to reinforce a national curriculum for history education as it stated that ‘the curricula shall be reviewed and developed in a manner that strengthens national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness, and that unifies textbooks on the subjects of history and national education’ (Lebanese Parliament, 1989). However, 34 years later and the goal of developing a unifying history course offering an account of history up to the present has not yet been reached. Moreover, according to Akar (2020), didactic pedagogies focusing on reciting historical events continue to prevail. Currently, the official history curriculum in use is that established in 1970 (Kriener, 2012). The content of the official history curriculum ends with the independence of Lebanon which was accomplished in 1943 (Decree 14528, 1970). Consequently, all events which took place after 1943 are not included in the curriculum, including the civil war. In the official curriculum, history education begins in the seventh grade (Decree 14528, 1970). Therefore, if private schools administer history education before the seventh grade, they have to construct their own history curriculum. To be able to compare the textbooks of the religious communities, the grade level selected must be seven or above.

Unified central examinations are administered to Lebanese students in all public and private schools in grades 9 and 12 by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Thus, all public and private schools in Lebanon adopt the same history curriculum in grades 9 and 12, for the sake of examinations. Moreover, most public and private schools adopt the curricula of grades 9 and 12 in grades 8 and 11 respectively, to guarantee that their students are ready for the central examinations. Then, the expectation is that more differences in history textbooks between schools would be present in grade levels seven and ten. In this paper, the grade level chosen is grade seven.

Textbook and school selection

To be able to cover the three largest communities which constitute the Lebanese society (Sunni, Shi’a and Maronites), the choice of textbooks was based on the characteristics of the school/group of schools that adopt the textbook.

Schools were selected to be representatives of the religious community they belong to, and the textbook chosen is adopted in some public schools, as well as some private schools. The schools were chosen according to their popularity within their community as well as the number of students enrolled in these schools.

Altareekh Al’ilmi [the scientific history]

Public schools in Lebanon have the freedom to choose any history textbook they want, as long as it abides by the official curriculum set by the Center of Educational Research and Development. *Altareekh Al’ilmi* textbook, published in 2017, serves as a sample of textbooks that abide by the official curriculum. The reason this textbook is chosen instead of others is that it was also found to be the most popular history textbook among private schools in Beirut (Kriener, 2012). Among the schools which adopt this textbook are Collège des Sœurs des Saints Cœurs and Al-Hariri schools. The characteristics of the groups of schools are indicated below.

Collège des Sœurs des Saints Cœurs

Founded in 1853 by Christian missionaries in Lebanon (see <http://hadath.scc.edu.lb/Historique.html>), the association currently includes around 35 schools in different areas around Lebanon, with around 24,000 students enrolled in the academic year 2019–2020 (School Guide | CRDP Lebanon, n.d.).

Al-Hariri schools

Al-Hariri Schools are part of Rafic Al-Hariri Association. Rafic Al-Hariri is the former Muslim Sunni prime minister in Lebanon (see <https://rhf.org.lb/en/content/rafik-hariri-biography>). Although the goals and vision of the association, as stated on their website, do not mention religion, Al-Hariri schools teach the Muslim Sunni religion in their schools. Their mission, however, emphasizes that the core of their mission lies in providing Lebanese youth with multicultural knowledge and principles of human rights (see <https://rhf.org.lb/en/content/mission-0>). It currently includes 5 schools in different areas around Lebanon, with around 6,000 students enrolled in the academic year 2019–2020 (School Guide | CRDP Lebanon, n.d.).

Nahnu Wa AlTareekh [history and us]

This textbook is published by Ajyal Al-Moustafa (PBUH) Publishing House [Arabic for the Generations of Al Moustafa, which is another name of Prophet Mohammad] which is part of Jame'yat A- Ta'leem Al-Deene Al-Islami [Arabic for The Islamic Religious Educational Association]. This textbook is adopted in three private associations, all of which belong to the Shi'i religious community: Al-Moustafa, Al-Mahdi, and Al-Emdad. The characteristics of each association are indicated below.

Al-Moustafa (PBUH) schools

Al Moustafa schools are included in Al Ta'leem Al Deene Al Islami Association. Currently, they are composed of six schools located in different areas around Lebanon (Jame'yat Al-Ta'leem Al-Deene Al-Islami, n.d.). The total number of students enrolled in the schools in the academic year 2019–2020 was 6482 (see <https://www.crdp.org/school-guide>).

Al-Mahdi schools

Al-Mahdi refers to the twelfth Imam, who is considered to be the savior of humankind in the Twelver Shi'i thought (see <https://www.al-islam.org/person/imam-al-mahdi>), and so this set of schools is named after him. Currently, there are 14 schools located in different areas around Lebanon (see <https://www.almahdischools.edu.lb/#>). During the academic year 2019–2020, around 13,000 students were enrolled in Al-Mahdi schools (see <https://www.crdp.org/school-guide>).

Al-Emdad schools

In 1987, in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which took place in 1982, and in coordination with the Emdad Committee in Iran, the Islamic Charitable Emdad Committee was established (Islamic Charitable Emdad Committee, n.d.). The population the association aims for is the most vulnerable, especially orphans (Islamic Charitable Emdad Committee, n.d.). Currently, it is formed of four schools located in different areas around

Lebanon, with around 4800 students enrolled annually (Islamic Charitable Emdad Committee, n.d.).

Durous fi Altareekh [lessons in history]

The history textbook is created by Al-Mabarrat Charitable association and is only adopted in its schools. Al-Mabarrat association was founded by the Lebanese Shi'i religious figure Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah in 1978 (Al-Mabarrat Association, n.d.). The association currently has 14 schools (Al-Mabarrat Association, n.d.). In the academic year 2019-2020, Al-Mabarrat schools enrolled around 19,000 students (see <https://www.crdp.org/school-guide>).

E-mtidad

E-mtidad is a history e-book created by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut (E-Mtidad Fi Altareekh, n.d.). The e-book is adopted in Saint Mary's Orthodox College. It is a private school affiliated with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Beirut (SMOC, n.d.). During the academic year 2019-2020, the school enrolled around 1500 students (see <https://www.crdp.org/school-guide>).

Analysis and discussion

Altareekh Al'ilmi textbook

Perspective

In the introduction of the textbook, the authors state that they have created the textbook from a 'civic perspective' and that they aim to deliver objective history narratives (Hayek et al., 2017, p. 3). It can be argued that this perspective is portrayed in different parts of the textbook as well. For instance, when the authors list the names of the twelve Imams whom the Shi'as believe in, they list their names without the title of 'Imam' (Hayek et al., 2017, see p.23). This indicates that the authors did not adopt a Shi'i perspective when discussing a topic from the Shi'i school of thought. Moreover, when explaining the case of Lebanon during the Seljuk era, the authors mention all religious sects present at the time (Hayek et al., 2017).

Objectivity is also present when discussing religious conflicts. For instance, two perspectives are mentioned when explaining the crusade wars. One perspective, mentioned within the body of the lesson, argues that the 'crusade wars were done by a large number of Europeans towards the East and especially Jerusalem ... to take over the sacred lands of Palestine' (Hayek et al., 2017, p. 40). The second perspective, however, is not mentioned in the main body of the lesson, but in the margins for further elaboration on the topic. It states that 'from a Western European perspective, the crusade wars took place to take back the sacred lands of Palestine, especially the grave of Jesus, from the hands of Muslim Seljuks' (Hayek et al., 2017, p. 40). Even though more emphasis is put on the first perspective, the fact that the authors included the two perspectives indicates their intention of portraying both views. Moreover, since the Christian community in Lebanon might identify with the crusade's perspective for its religious reasons and relation to Europe, then it can be argued that the authors adopted a multicultural

concept of identity. Consequently, in terms of perspective, the authors adopt a hybrid perspective.

Topics

The topics adopted in the textbook are those indicated in the official curriculum. It is essential to mention that history lessons end with the Lebanese independence in 1943.

The topics are the reasons behind the falling of the Abbasid state and the foundation of statelets, the crusade wars, the Ayyubids, the Mamluks, the Ottoman Empire, and the Renaissance. As previously mentioned, in almost all topics, a description of the case of Lebanon during that time is provided. For instance, in the lesson on the Fatimid state, the authors state that ‘Lebanon was a battlefield between the Fatimids, Qarmatians, and Seljuks ... Again, Lebanon was a victim of its geographical location’ and continue to explain the nature of the conflicts with further details (Hayek et al., 2017, p. 28). However, when discussing the topic of the Renaissance, the authors seem to have adopted a different approach. Across the nine lessons, the authors do not mention Lebanon, the geographical area in which Lebanon is located, or the religious sects previously highlighted in the textbook. Moreover, when listing the reasons behind the Renaissance, religion is not mentioned, even though it is mentioned in other textbooks, as we will see later in the analyses of other textbooks. Based on the set of indicators identified in the methodology section, the topics chosen might align best with the civic concept of national identity. On one hand, the topics chosen relate to the nation as a whole rather than one or several religious community. That is, even when religious communities are mentioned, they’re mentioned to describe the context of Lebanon at the time. On the other hand, it can be argued that the authors employ avoidance strategy by disregarding references to the current state of Lebanon, even when the topic discussed is highly related to the recent history of Lebanon. For instance, the geographical divisions based on religious sects indicated in the lessons on Seljuks are still relevant today, but the authors elaborate on them as part of the past. The avoidance strategy described in the literature review is usually employed to promote a civic concept of national identity. The topics and how they are dealt with directly influence how ‘the other’ is portrayed in the textbook.

Other communities

Even though religious groups are only mentioned in historical settings, how they are portrayed implies the message the authors want to reflect. For instance, the authors state clearly that the Fatimids belong to the Shi’i school of thought (Hayek et al., 2017). To explain the ‘revolution of Allaka in Tyre’, as the authors put it, the authors explain that the Fatimids treated the citizens of Lebanon badly and broke into the Lebanese city Tyre, where they extensively destroyed and killed, in addition to capturing, torturing aggressively, and killing Allaka who was a sailor that revolted against the Fatimids for their bad treatment (Hayek et al., 2017, see p.28). One can argue that describing the Fatimids with violent vocabulary while mentioning that they’re Shi’as might reflect a negative image of the current Shi’i community in Lebanon. Later in the same lesson on the Fatimid state, is an interesting section on the Durzi religious sect.

Unlike other religious sects, a section is dedicated to explaining the founding and beliefs of the Durzi sect. When explaining Durzi’s role during that time, the authors

state that 'Durzis were known for their courage, great love to the land, devotion to freedom, and patience with adversity. Durzis had, and still have, a special role in the history of Lebanon and the Levant, in standing against foreign invasions' (Hayek et al., 2017, p. 29). Noting that no other religious sect is explained similarly in the textbook, it can be argued that the authors consider the Durzi community as an ingroup, while the other communities as outgroups. Interestingly, this aligns with the sectarian concept of national identity, where one community is portrayed to have a positive contribution to the nation, whereas other groups are either neglected or argued to harm the nation.

Nahnu w AlTareekh

Perspective

The introduction emphasizes that, throughout time, historical narratives were subject to personal perspectives and preferences which led to a loss of truth (Nahnu Wa Al-Tareekh, 2020). Thus, this textbook aims to provide an objective perspective on history (see p.5). This aligns with the civic concept of national identity, where the aim is not to provide history from a subjective sectarian point of view, but rather to adopt an objective perspective. This, however, does not necessarily apply to the perspective adopted in the rest of the textbook. For instance, the authors explain the purpose of learning history in the introduction by referencing a Quranic verse. In addition to that, the introduction ends with a phrase commonly used among Muslims. Using this phrase and referring to the Quran to explain the purpose behind learning history, implies that the authors are adopting an Islamic perspective, expecting that readers understand and adopt a similar perspective when using the textbook. It can be argued that a similar perspective is also adopted in different lessons throughout the textbook.

For instance, in the lesson on the falling of the Abbasid state, the authors focus on religious reasons behind the end of the Abbasid era. Moreover, the lesson on Islamic schools of thought during the Abbasid era begins with posing the issue of who should be the successor of the prophet after his death. Although the issue posed might reflect the multicultural concept of national identity where the different perspectives would be explained, the illustration chosen is of 'the Prophet pledging the allegiance for Imam Ali (AS) as his successor during the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage' (see p.18). In addition to giving the title of 'Imam' to Imam Ali throughout the textbook, the illustration provided also legitimizes the Shi'i perspective that believes that Imam Ali should have been the successor of the Prophet, as explained in the Background section. Moreover, when explaining the Shi'i school of thought, the authors state that the Prophet 'clearly stated that Imam Ali is his successor on three different occasions' (see p.25-26). Additionally, all Imams whom the Twelver Shi'as believe in are given the titles of 'Imam' throughout the textbook, even when explaining a different religious sect. This implies that the perspective adopted throughout the textbook legitimizes the Shi'i school of thought and thus promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

Topics

Two of the lessons included in the textbooks are not included in the official curriculum. The first lesson poses the issue of who should be the successor of the Prophet and explains some of the Islamic schools of thought at the time, including the Sunni school

(see p.22). The second lesson is dedicated to the Shi'i schools of thought (see p.25). At the end of the second lesson is a picture of Khomeini with an explanation that Shi'as were always oppressed in history until the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Nahnu Wa Al-Tareekh, 2020). This paragraph extends from legitimizing a certain religious community to legitimizing a certain political opinion by arguing that the Twelver Shi'as have always been oppressed until the Islamic revolution in Iran took place. In addition to that, almost all lessons include a picture of a mosque, to resemble the culture of the ruler at the time (e.g. Ibin Tulun mosque p.36 and the mosques of Cairo p.45). Moreover, when discussing the Ottoman empire, the authors focus on Islamic aspects such as stating the goals of the empire to include uniting Muslims and spreading Islam in the West (i.e. Europe) (see p.144), which was not the case in AlTareekh Al'ilmi textbook. Thus, it can be argued that even though the topics of the textbook include parts on Lebanon, the textbook is dominated by topics that legitimize not only the Shi'i school of thought but also the political opinion adopted by the authors of the textbook.

Other communities

To begin with, when explaining the different perspectives adopted when the issue of the successor of the prophet arose, the category which explains the Shi'i perspective is entitled 'Ahul Al Beit [the family of the Prophet] and the Elite Muslims' (Nahnu Wa Al-Tareekh, 2020, see p.26). Even though the other perspectives are explained as well, entitling the Shi'i perspective as such implies that this is the 'right' point of view. This perspective is further emphasized with the illustration presented on page 26 with the description of 'one of the Imams of Ahul Al Beit explaining religious issues to jurists and scholars', thus implying the former is more knowledgeable than the latter. This indicates that the Shi'a are the ingroup. However, it is important to note that the Sunni school of thought is also legitimized by referring to the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet to explain their point of view, which promotes a multicultural concept of identity, such that the Sunni school of thought is explained from their point of view.

In the previous textbook analyzed, the revolution Allaka led was illustrated in a way that portrayed the Fatimids negatively. What is different in this case is that the Fatimids are not portrayed as purely evil and Allaka as the savior, as the first textbook explains, but the other way around, as Allaka is portrayed as a rebel against the Fatimids who were forced to raise the taxes. Considering that the Fatimid were Shi'i, it can be argued that this might aim to portray a positive image of them. Later in the same lesson, a paragraph on the Durzi sect is presented but is restricted to the historical narratives of the Durzi rulers at the time (see p.71), unlike the first textbook which emphasizes the positive role of Durzis historically and currently.

What is significant, however, is how Christians are portrayed. To explain the reasons behind the Crusade wars, the authors explain that the public in Europe was shocked as the Christians left the Levant because Jerusalem became under Islamic rule, this was seen as a shameful stigma in the history of Christians in Europe (Nahnu Wa Al-Tareekh, 2020, see p.83). Moreover, the authors claim that the Christians exaggerated the oppression Christian pilgrims were facing by Muslims on their way to Jerusalem (Nahnu Wa Al-Tareekh, 2020). Consequently, the aims of the Crusade wars were to 1) Takeover Jerusalem, 2) colonize and dominate the goods of the Muslim East, and 3) Stand against the spread of Islam and Muslims which began to invade Europe (see p.84). Thus, throughout

the textbook, Christians are put against Muslims where the former wanted to put an end to the latter. Moreover, the authors mention that it was natural for Christians to go against the Church as the latter asked them to blindly follow Christianity and to abstain from the beauties and attractions of life (see p.201). Furthermore, the authors compare this to Islam and argue that Islam provided a balanced way of living by referencing two Quranic verses that illustrate that Islam provides a balanced approach to life where equal importance is given to enjoyment in life and abiding by religion for the afterlife. This signifies superiority of Islam over Christianity, as the former has a more 'balanced' approach to life than the latter. From what was presented, it can be argued that the textbook promotes a sectarian concept of national identity by legitimizing the Shi'i sect and portraying it as superior to other religious groups.

Dorous fi AlTareekh

Topics

The textbook includes several lessons on Islam and the Muslim civilization. For example, the lesson on the beginning of the Islamic call illustrates the lifetime of the Prophet since birth and until he founded the Islamic state (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). The next lesson explains the issue of who is the successor which arose with the death of the Prophet, the oppression Imam Ali faced which led to his killing, as well as the situations each successor faced during his ruling (see p.17). Similarly, the authors continue to explain the oppression Imam Al-Hasan and Imam Al-Hussein (the sons of Imam Ali and the 2nd and 3rd Imams according to the Shi'i school of thought) suffered from Mouawiyya who did not keep his word and assigned his son as his successor instead of Imam Al-Hussein, which consequently led to the battle of Karbala where Imam Al-Hussein and his family were killed (see p.22). The battle of Karbala, which the Shi'a commemorate annually, is explained in the additional information section rather than in the core lesson (see p.25). In addition to that, this is the only textbook that explores the Buyid state. After mentioning that the Buyid state is Shi'i, the authors explain that it was very positive in terms of economy, culture, politics, and security which led other states (mainly Persians and Seljuks) to revolt against them thus defeating the Buyid state (see p.52). Another topic related to Shi'ism is explaining the role of Shams Eddine Mohammad bin Makki AlJezini as additional information and not in the core lesson. Shams Eddine is explained to be 'one of the prominent Shi'a jurists born in ... [Lebanon]. He left an evident influence on the Shi'i thought ... He is still considered an important reference in the Shi'i school of thought until this day (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d., p. 91). These topics are directly linked to the Shi'i community and their beliefs and thus promote a sectarian concept of national identity.

Although the Palestinian cause represents a highly important issue to Shi'as, the way the lesson is developed promotes a civic concept of national identity. It can be divided into three parts, an international part, a regional part, and a part of Lebanon. In the international part, the beginning of Zionism in 1897 and how it evolved throughout time is explained, as well as how Israel came into being starting with the end of World War II (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). At the regional level, the massacres Israel committed (e.g. Deir Yassine massacre when more than 450 people were brutally killed), the reasons which led to Israel occupying Palestine (e.g. the weakening of Arab armies and

Western support), and the Israeli-Arab wars are explained. As for Lebanon, the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, as well as the 2006 war on Lebanon, are elaborated (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Since the focus is on the nation as a whole rather than one or a group of sects, then it can be argued that it promotes a civic concept of national identity. Significantly, while the official history curriculum ends with the Lebanese independence in 1943, this textbook includes historical events related to the religious community that go beyond the mentioned date.

Other religious communities

To explain the different communities present in Lebanon, the authors focus on Shi'as and Maronites, who found Lebanon to be a shelter away from the authorities (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). They explain how both communities suffered from different rulers or battles (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Recognizing and acknowledging the suffering of different religious communities and not just one's group aligns with the multicultural concept of national identity. Similar to Nahnu wa AlTareekh textbook, the Durzi sect is mentioned within its historical context (see p.67). Similarly, the story of Allaka and the Fatimids in this textbook matches that in Nahnu wa AlTareekh textbook. As argued earlier, this might be to emphasize the positive nature of the Fatimid state, as a Shi'i state, and thus promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

As for the relationship with Europe, the case is different from the previous textbook. For instance, this textbook focuses on how Europe was influenced by the Arab Muslim civilization (see p.46). This stage which is often left out in history (Al-Hassani, 2012) is not neglected when developing this textbook. Moreover, the authors argue that the crusade wars had both positive and negative effects on the Muslim world and one of the results on the Western world is the creation of the political link between Maronites and the West, especially France, which was the introduction of foreign intervention leading to the French mandate on Lebanon (see p.73). It can be argued that the West is not portrayed negatively as in Nahnu wa AlTareekh textbook. This promotes a multicultural concept of national identity where the relationship with the West includes both positive and negative aspects, and the link between Lebanese Maronites and Europe is also clearly stated. In general, only some religious communities are mentioned in the textbook. However, when mentioned, they're recognized and in some instances mentioned to have a positive contribution to the nation, thus promoting a multicultural concept of national identity.

E-mtidad

Perspective

In the introduction, the authors state that based on their motto 'history for the sake of tomorrow', they've developed the content of the e-book to reflect the culture and values of the country and the region (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Thus, the expectation is that the e-book focuses on the nation as a whole, thus promoting a civic concept of national identity. However, later in the textbook when explaining the case of Lebanon during the Byzantine civilization, the authors state that Lebanon was exhausted and ready to accept anything that would help them get rid of the Byzantine rule, which made it easy for Arabs to get into our country (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d., p. 67). This

implies that the people of Lebanon are originally not Arabs. In addition to that, the title of the second unit 'The Arabs' stresses the former idea. This aligns with the Christians' identification with the West, rather than Arabs and thus promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

Topics

The lesson on Greek civilization mostly focuses on what the civilization was like with little focus on Lebanon (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). To begin with, the authors call Lebanese cities 'Phoenician' which is directly linked to the Christians' belief that they're of Phoenician origin rather than Arab. Moreover, the wording in the lesson suggests that the Greek civilization contributed positively to the Lebanese cities, which is presented differently in different textbooks. Thus, it can be argued that this promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

The chapter on Roman civilization focuses on Christianity. Specifically, it includes a section on the beginning of Christianity and its most important beliefs and values (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). The story is succeeded by questions on the lifetime of Jesus (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). After that, a section is dedicated to the teachings of Christianity and the positive influence Christianity had on people at the level of religion, morality, culture, and politics (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). The focus on Christianity as a religion and the positive influence legitimizes the religious group to which the creators of the e-book and the school belong, and thus promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

In the chapter on Islam, the lifetime of the Prophet and the main teachings of Islam are mentioned (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Moreover, the authors name the successors of the Prophet without mentioning the Sunni-Shi'i divide regarding who should have been the successor (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). The authors claim that the economic development and flourishing Lebanon witnessed during the Umayyad rule was due to the religious acceptance of Christian by the Muslim rulers. In specific, the authors mention that Mouawiya's wife, poet, personal doctor, and finance minister were Christians, which enhanced the economy of Lebanon at the time (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Although the topic of Islam is mentioned in the textbook, the way the topic is dealt with can be divided into three ways: 1) mentioning the teachings of Islam and the lifetime of the Prophet, which can be seen as promoting a multicultural concept of national identity, 2) avoiding the main topic in the history of Islam which led to the formation of the two religious communities, Sunni and Shi'as, which can be seen as promoting a civic concept of national identity by employing the avoidance strategy, and 3) claiming that the positive contribution Muslims had to Lebanon is related to their religious acceptance of Christians, which promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

Other communities

When explaining Christianity, the authors illustrate the position Jewish religious men had against Jesus. Jewish religious men were not pleased with the popularity Jesus gained rapidly and expressed their feelings to the Roman emperor (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Moreover, the authors mention that Christians were highly oppressed and brutally tortured by the Romans for around 300 years (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Focusing on the suffering of the Christians on one hand and emphasizing that the Jewish caused

their suffering, promotes a sectarian concept of national identity where the focus is on Christians as an ingroup, and the Jewish community is seen to have contributed to the sorrow of the ingroup in the past.

What is significant is that Mouawiya is portrayed as a positive character. According to the Shi'as, and as was mentioned in Dorous fi AlTareekh textbook, Mouawiya had a very negative role in history and called for the killing of Imam Ali, and his son Yazeed was the head of the army that fought and killed Imam Hussein, his family, and companions during the battle of Karbala (Dorous Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). Thus, on one hand, the authors argue that Mouawiya had positive contributions because of his positive relations with Christians, thus promoting a sectarian concept of national identity. On the other hand, the image portrayed of Mouawiya is completely opposite to that portrayed by the Shi'i community.

As for Lebanon, this e-book is the only one among the textbooks analyzed which does not mention the religious diversity present in the country. It does, however, mention the origin of Maronites in Lebanon, and that they have had a primary role in the history of the nation (E-Mtidad Fi AlTareekh, n.d.). By focusing only on the Maronite community in Lebanon and their role in developing the nation, the e-book promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

The story of Allaka is presented completely differently in this e-book. First, the conflict is said to have happened between Allaka and the Abbasid rather than the Fatimid state. Second, the Abbasid state is linked explicitly to the prophet in different parts of the lesson (see p.109-110-113-137). The narrative told shows that Allaka was the savior against the brutal oppressor. Moreover, linking the Abbasid state directly to the Prophet, implies that the oppressors were related to the Prophet and thus are of direct Muslim origins. This indicates a negative image of Muslims as well as their negative influence over the nation, and thus promotes a sectarian concept of national identity.

Discussion

Based on the literature review, the expectation in divided societies is for each community to promote its religious identity through history education, without trying to impose its identity on the rest of the society, which is a variation of the ethnic concept of identity that Korostelina (2013) identifies. Another expectation is that governments promote a civic concept of national identity by disregarding sectarian diversities and avoiding controversial topics.

On the one hand, it seems that the Lebanese government aims through its official history curriculum to promote a civic concept of national identity by avoiding most topics Lebanese communities find controversial. Public schools, as well as some private schools that belong to Sunni and Christian communities, abide by this curriculum, as shown in the Methodology section. It is important to note that unifying the history curriculum in grades 9 and 12 in all Lebanese schools for the sake of unified central examinations is also indicative of a civic nation-building strategy. Thus, it can be argued that a considerable part of history education is devoted to national history from the official perspective, especially since the official curriculum is also adopted in religious private schools. However, as Daher (2012, p. 108) puts it, 'the standardization of history examinations constitute a positive but insufficient step: only school years in which students present themselves for public examinations were focused on [by the government],

whereas the teaching given in other years remain subject of the attitudes of the schools' management, the type of textbooks used, and the character of the teacher'.

Although some details in the narrative of the textbook belonging to the Sunni association seem to reflect a sectarian concept of national identity, this textbook for the most part aligns with the official curriculum as well and thus promotes a civic concept of national identity. Consequently, on close inspection, considerable efforts are being made to promote an overarching sense of 'Lebaneseness' away from the promotion of religious identities, even in schools that belong to religious communities.

The Shi'i community, on the other hand, seems to employ history education to promote the Shi'i identity. In the first Shi'i textbook analyzed, *Nahnu wa AlTareekh*, the sectarian identity seems to prevail in almost all aspects of the textbook. In the second Shi'i textbook analyzed, the Shi'i identity also seems to prevail in most parts of the textbook, especially in terms of the topics chosen. What is different, however, is that in some parts of the textbook, such as when discussing the different religious communities present in Lebanon during the era of the Mamluks or when presenting the Palestinian cause, the authors focus on Lebanon as a whole rather than the Shi'i community, thus promoting a civic concept of national identity. Similarly, in the case of the Christian community, one e-book was deeply analyzed. All aspects of the e-book relate directly to the Christian identity.

In both cases of Shi'i and Christian communities, history education is employed to promote a sectarian concept of national identity. This aligns with the findings of the literature review, where divided communities reaffirm their identity and historical narratives in history education to promote a sectarian identity.

Conclusion

This paper found that history education in Lebanon reproduces the divisions in society among religious lines. The divisions are reproduced by promoting a sectarian concept of national identity in some religious communities through history education, such as the Shi'i and Christian communities. There seems to be, however, an attempt to promote an overarching civic identity in the Lebanese society, regardless of the sectarian diversity in the society. This attempt is translated in the official history curriculum adopted in public schools and in some Sunni and Christian private schools and generally avoids reference to religious communities as well as controversial topics such as the civil war. Another manifestation of this attempt is unifying the history curriculum in all Lebanese public and private schools in grades 9 and 12 for the sake of central examinations. However, the latter step might be argued to be insufficient as it only focuses on two grade levels, whereas other grade levels are disregarded. Despite these examinations, there does not seem to be a consensus among religious communities to implement the national history curriculum in the same way. This might be because these groups have the power to teach their own ideologies within their private schools. Moreover, their power to instill their ideologies is protected as the Lebanese political system guarantees the political autonomy of these communities. This aligns with van Ommering's (2015) findings that although textbooks draw on the same history curriculum, they vary in their representation of historical eras to align with the current sectarian interests of each group.

Note

1. Although language and religion are changeable and therefore strictly speaking not ascriptive criteria, they are often understood as primordial markers defining a person's identity and lumped along with ancestry and race in the 'ethnic' category (Kymlicka, 1999)

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Notes on contributors

Hanan Fadlallah is a secondary teacher at Al-Sadiq and Al-Zahra schools in London. She has received her master's degree in comparative education from UCL. She's interested in how education is used by governments and communities to influence and inculcate identity. Her dissertation on "History Education and Language of Instruction in Divided Societies: The Case of Lebanon" received the 2022 Master's Dissertation award from the British Educational Research Association.

Jan Germen Janmaat is a professor of political socialisation at UCL Institute of Education. He's interested in how education, broadly conceived, can promote democratic values and has published widely in this area. His latest book is "School Councils across Europe: Democratic Forums or Exclusive Clubs", co-authored with Isabel Kempner. In January 2024, he is starting a four-year Leverhulme Trust funded project aiming to develop the Education for Democracy Index. This index intends to measure how well an education system promotes democratic values.

ORCID

Jan Germen Janmaat  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8102-5047>

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