

THE STATE OF HISTORY TEACHING IN PRIVATE-RUN CONFESSIONAL SCHOOLS IN LEBANON: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract - History curriculum gravitates towards understanding differences among pluralistic societies. However, the Lebanese case has exacted a range of differences promulgated by the number of confessional-run private schools, with little control over their administrative or curricular policies. Since the establishment of the Republic in 1926, public policy gave the private schools their own constitutional prerogative maintaining their own educational programmes, each with a distinctive value system. This paper looks at the policies towards history curriculum by the seven major confessional schools in Lebanon. Through textual analysis of history books, reviews of policies, and interviews with students, educational decision-makers, and history teachers, the paper argues that confessional schools have propagated their own line of discourse for history teaching, without accommodating for a pluralistic discourse of integration.

Introduction

Since its inception as a potentially viable state by the French Mandate in 1920, Lebanon has been derailed from policies conducive to national integration. Writers on modern Lebanese politics attribute the lack of national integration to the multiplicity of confessional communities, which continue to articulate their distinct identities as separate groups (Phares, 1995; Khashan, 1992). To some extent, the success of the government to moderate inter-group conflict and instill a unified national consciousness among schoolchildren rests upon the role of education as a national unifier.

A potential medium for reinforcing national integration is the history curriculum. The preamble to the 1968 Lebanese curriculum, which is still used by schools to date (2000), recognises that history is one of the most useful courses in strengthening national sentiments and pride in the nation (Legislative Decrees 9099 and 9100, 1968). Given the aims of the Lebanese curriculum and in the light of the country's multi-confessional context, this article focuses on the role of history teaching in the national political socialisation of schoolchildren. First, we review the legislative decrees of history teaching in Lebanon. Second, we analyse

10 history textbooks used by 7 confessional schools in order to examine the extent to which they converge and diverge in their interpretation of political and historical perspectives that characterise Lebanon. Third, we appraise history teaching in these schools by comparing the amount of time and emphasis on subjects conducive to inter-group understanding. In order to further understand the state of history teaching in confessional schools, we describe briefly aspects pertaining to national integration and education in Lebanon.

The rationale of this article is based on three premises. First, history teaching in Lebanon occupies a central position in the process of national integration. Second, the fact that negative inter-group relationships are exacerbated by biases and omissions in history texts (Preiswerk and Perot, 1978), content analysis of history textbooks provides a clearer grasp of the factors that tend to promote inter-group understanding. Third, studies of political socialisation, supplying the process through which members of society learn politically relevant attitudes (Dash and Niemi, 1992), indicate that history is an important medium to transmit basic political values and inculcate a sense of national citizenship (Hicks, 1978). Experience in Lebanon pressures for a history curriculum capable of breaking through the walls of confessional exclusivity and making inroads into national integration. Although this article is concerned with the state of history teaching in Lebanon, its broader aim is not limited to the Lebanese experience, but with wider applicability to education in plural societies.

Lebanon's educational system: a historical prologue

One of the most striking characteristics of Lebanon lies in its division into a large number of communities organised along confessional lines. Contemporary Lebanese historians argue that the origins of all confessional communities in today's Lebanon are traceable to Middle Eastern neighbouring countries. For example, toward the end of the seventh century, the Christian Maronite community fled religious persecution in Syria and sought sanctuary in Lebanon's rugged and impassable mountains (Salibi, 1988; Hitti, 1957). In their newly found homeland, Lebanon, the Maronites immediately acquired the enmity of the conquering Muslim Arabs by supporting the Byzantine troops in their battle to dislodge the Muslims from their recently won Syrian coast. Moreover, the early religious friction between Christian co-religionists in 1054 (Hanf, 1993) led to an increase in the number of Christian sects in Lebanon. The Lebanese mountains also attracted two other confessional communities; Muslim Shiites and Druzes, who fled religious persecution under the wider Muslim Sunnite political establishment (Ben-Dor, 1976). A fourth group, the Armenians, represented the

latest addition into the Lebanese multi-confessional set up. This community settled in Lebanon after the Great Anatolian Genocide which took place in 1909 and 1915 respectively (Zahr al-Din, 1988). At present, Lebanon accommodates 18 officially recognised religious sects.

Political schism between Christian and Muslim communities has sporadically exploded into inter-group brutal encounters. Foreign interests have served to complicate the simmering religious antagonism among Lebanon's vying confessional communities. Phares (1995), for instance, argued that the persistence of the obstreperous inter-religious conflict was nourished by external powers meddling in social and political domestic affairs. These powers, mostly Western European, found it convenient to consolidate their political and economic interests in Lebanon through the establishment of educational institutions (Abouchedid, 1997).

In the 16th century, the onset of the inter-religious war in the Ottoman Empire made it advantageous for Western Europe to intervene in domestic affairs. In 1535 the Ottoman ruler, Sultan Suleiman, the Magnificent, granted the first capitulation to France which laid the basis of the French supremacy over the Levant (McDowall, 1984). This capitulation granted France a wide range of economic and cultural privileges in Mount Lebanon. As the Ottoman Empire continued to weaken, England and other Western European countries obtained similar capitulation (Spagnolo, 1977) and the educational works of missionaries in Mount Lebanon started in earnest since then.

The establishment of private-run confessional schools

The tradition of confessional schools gained momentum after the ending of the inter-sectarian rancorous war, which broke out between Christian and non-Christian communities in Mount Lebanon in 1859. In 1861, the six interested powers, namely Turkey, France, England, Russia, Prussia and Austria signed the *Reglement Organique* establishing Lebanon as a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire (Zamir, 1985). Under this agreement, the French sponsored the Christian Maronites, the British the Druzes, while the Russians offered guardianship to the Greek Orthodox community. Sunnites were left without a political tutelage due to the Islamic political weakness resulting from the internal territorial divisions and strife in the Ottoman Empire.

The ensuing Western patronage of confessional communities created an atmosphere within which the establishment of private schools, both Jesuit and Protestant (Szyliowicz, 1973), was to flourish. Consequently, both missionaries and confessional communities founded a large number of schools in semi-

autonomous Lebanon. For example, the Syrian Protestant College, which is today's American University of Beirut (AUB), was founded in 1866 by Bliss, Vandyke, and Mr. Dodge of the Protestant missionaries. In addition, the Protestant missionaries founded secondary level boarding schools for boys and girls. From the very beginning, the educational activity of the Protestant missionaries had stimulated the Roman Catholics to emulate their example. The Catholic missionaries established schools and encouraged the Maronites to open their own, such as the famous school, *École de la Sagesse*, founded by the Bishop of Beirut in 1862 (Salibi, 1977).

In reaction to Christian missionaries' work in Mount Lebanon, and in an attempt to ward off the possibility of a perceived Western cultural encroachment on Muslims, the Sunnites established their own schools. In 1878 they founded a charitable society, Al Makassed, which was to become, in time, an active organisation for spreading education among Muslims of both sexes (Archive material). Later in 1897, the Sunnites founded the Uthman School (Hitti, 1957) to provide education for the disadvantaged in the remote areas. Furthermore, the Druze opened the Dawodiā School in 1862, while the Shiites was the only confessional community, which took no central part in the educational movement of the time.

The number of schools established by confessional communities gave Lebanon's present educational system a plural character. State schools were entirely absent. Before World War I, Lebanon had only one state school (Szyliowicz, 1973; Mathew and Akrawi, 1949), which formed the nucleus of the current Lebanese State school system. When the former Ottoman regions (mostly poor Muslims), were annexed to semi-autonomous Lebanon (mostly Christians) by the French Mandate in 1920, foreign and confessional schools grew in number to serve little for the poverty-stricken rural communities.

The superiority of the confessional-controlled private sector of education over the public one (Abouchedid, 1997) made it difficult for the state to employ the schools as an agent of national integration. Despite the lack of state schools at that time, particularly in the annexed territories, the French Mandate accorded more priority to the rights of confessional communities in educational matters than on establishing schools in the poorest regions. Article 8 of the French Mandate – as cited by Khalil (1962, p.96) – guaranteed:

'The right of each community to maintain its own schools for the instruction of its own members in its own language while conforming to such educational requirements of a general nature as the administration may impose shall not be denied or impaired.'

With the establishment of the Lebanese Republic in 1926, confessional communities gained further constitutional prerogatives, which allowed them to maintain their own schools. Article 10 of the Lebanese Constitution of May 23, 1926, which is the only Article in the Constitution that deals with education, echoed Article 8 of the French Mandate by acknowledging freedom of education to confessional communities. Hence, Christians, Muslims, and Druzes were able to organise their own schools. The perfunctory inspection of private schools by the Ministry of Education allowed private schools to shape and execute their own educational programmes.

Inspection policies

During the French Mandate of Lebanon (1920-1943), all foreign schools were put under the direct authority of the French Commissioner to Lebanon (Decree number 455, February 9, 1920). As for the national private schools owned by organisations, confessional communities, and private holders, both Lebanese administration and the French High Commission supervised them. In practice, however, the French High Commission did not accord the right to the Ministry of Education to either inspect or supervise the private schools which received financial assistance from the French government (Abu Mrad, 1982). This meant that the Ministry of Education could only inspect public schools since the largest number of the private schools received annual subsidies from the French mandatory authorities.

Following independence in 1943, the political objective of the first Lebanese government was to obliterate the educational and cultural imprints of the French Mandate. In tandem with this objective, the government expunged the French supervision and inspection scheme of private schools, both confessional and foreign. Section 18 of Decree 1436 dated March 23, 1950 requested that all private schools be subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Education. However, political disagreements between confessional communities over Lebanon's national identity, manifested in a civil war in 1958 (Gordon, 1980), made it difficult for the Ministry of Education to enforce its post-independence inspection policies of private schools.

On January 16, 1959, one year after the conclusion of the 1958 civil war, the Lebanese government relinquished its supervision and inspection policies that were promulgated shortly after independence. School inspection was no longer the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Section 40 of Decree number 2869 accorded the right to the arbiters of Lebanon's six regions the right to inspect public schools and supervise the private ones. Public schools

succumbed to inspection, while private schools to supervision, since this Decree did not accord the right to arbiters to directly inspect private schools, both confessional and foreign.

Concomitant with the perfunctory inspection of schools, the Ministry of Education has failed to express and maintain a consistent educational policy. Section 13 of Decree number 1436 of March 1950 and is still in effect to date stipulated that '...the curriculum in the private, national, and foreign schools should be the national one'. However, it added '...directors of these schools can choose techniques of teaching and add subject matters not included in the national curriculum as they see fit'. Private schools were thus able to substantially decide on what is taught and how. More interestingly, the fact that section 13 of Decree 1436 required that only approved books by the Minister of Education must be used to teach Lebanese history, textbooks on the history of countries other than Lebanon did not require the consent of the Minister of Education. Lack of consensus on basic political issues among Lebanese (Hiro, 1993) together with freedom of education bestowed to private schools have diminished the role of education as a national unifier. Furthermore, attempts to address Lebanon's plural challenges have been debilitated by the deeply divided ideologies among confessional communities; particularly those concerned with the role of education.

Conflicting views to education

On the eve of the 1975 war, Lebanon's major confessional communities expressed different ideological outlooks concerning the role of education. The Permanent Congress of Superiors General of the Lebanese Monastic Maronite Orders, for instance, released a *communiqué* to the public pronouncing a new liberal educational model in Lebanon that purported to favour cultural pluralism. It stated that Lebanon's educational system should arm the citizen with the possibility to connect history with world cultures (CEMAM Reports, 1975). On the other hand, the working paper of the Supreme Muslim Shiite Council called for a standardised educational system emphasising the national Arab heritage and culture (Assafir Newspaper, March 5, 1975). A similar position was endorsed by the Sunnite Muslim paper, which requested that Arabism in Lebanon must be established once and for all (CEMAM Reports, 1975).

A close examination into the various *communiqués* enunciated by the confessional communities revealed three salient features circumscribing the conflict over the role of education. First, the insistence of Muslim Shiites and Sunnites on the ultra Arabic political character of Lebanon as opposed to the Christian liberal plural model of education, pronounced two opposed ideological

stances: Muslims calling for cultural homogeneity, while Christians championing cultural heterogeneity (Ma'oz, 1978). Second, the various *communiqués* reflected the particularistic tendencies of confessional communities by their insistence on the perpetuation of their distinct educational ethos. Third, confessional communities stripped legitimacy from the government's educational mandate by warding off its role in considering their *communiqués*.

In the light of the review of the state of education in Lebanon, this article compares history teaching in seven confessional schools by evaluating the extent to which it instills a sense of national consciousness and inter-group learning among schoolchildren.

Method

Criteria for selecting schools

Seven private-run confessional schools were selected for the study. As Smith and Tomlinson (1989) observe, there is a great deal of difficulty in matching schools in a sample of this kind. However, such matching is important when comparability is a central objective of the study. In order to compare history teaching in confessional schools, the present study required that all schools in the sample should belong to different confessional orders.

Access to confessional schools in Lebanon involves extensive negotiations, particularly when researchers are explicitly concerned with a touchy and emotionally taxing issue such as national integration. Access to a larger number of schools was limited by the fact that many educators felt that we were digging up something that many Lebanese would prefer to maintain buried. To overcome this limitation, we asked educational decision-makers to identify schools which they felt were seeking to respond to the challenge of history teaching in Lebanon. The researchers approached directors at these schools and obtained permission for access from them. To preserve anonymity we have given each of the schools that participated in the study the name of a tree. These names are used throughout this paper. In terms of confessional affiliation, our school sample fell into two categories: Christian and Muslim.

Four schools (Cedar, Pine, Elm, and Beech) were run by different Christian sects. Cedar School was a Catholic co-educational Diocesan school for children in grades KG through secondary classes. The school belonged to a large chain of ecclesiastical private schools supervised and administered by a Maronite religious board known as the Block of Catholic Schools in Lebanon. It was founded on September 23, 1963 by the Archbishop of the Maronite Diocese with the help of

the Jesuit missionaries in Ohio, US. The school was situated in a predominantly inhabited Maronite area, to the north east of the capital Beirut. According to the registrar office, Cedar School housed 2,183 student during the academic year 1997/98 of whom 12 students were Sunnites, 1,823 Maronites, 347 Greek Orthodox, and 1 Latin. In the secondary classroom of the school, three were 3 Greek Orthodox students, 16 Catholic, and 1 Latin.

The American Protestant missionaries to Syria and Lebanon established Pine School in 1928. However, the date 1835 marked the year of the official foundation of the school. The Board of the National Synod of Syria and Lebanon has governed the school since October 1959. The school is situated in a predominantly inhabited Christian area. At the time of the research (1997) the school housed 1,094 student, of whom 432 were Maronites, 381 were Greek Orthodox, 256 Evangelic and 25 Muslim Sunnite. In the secondary classes there were 41 student of who 36.8% were Greek Orthodox, 65.9% Maronites, 2.4% Sunnite, and 4.9% Evangelic. This meant that the incidence of student mixing in the school was high between Christian co-religionists and limited between Christians and Muslims.

The third Christian school in the sample was Greek Orthodox. Historically, the establishment of the Greek Orthodox schools in Lebanon began in the 19th century for the education of the Greek Orthodox community. At that time, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries' educational activities solicited the Greek Orthodox Christians to join their schools. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch complained to the Pope in the 19th century about the activities of the Catholic missionaries in attempting to convert Greek Orthodox students to Catholicism (Archives cited in Nawar, 1974). Consequently, the establishment of Beech School aimed to circumvent such proselytising. The school was situated in a Christian district in Beirut and served the Greek Orthodox community. During the academic year 1997/98 the school housed 1,450 student of whom 1,410 were Christians and 40 Muslims, i.e. Muslims students constituted 2.76% of students as opposed 97.2% Christians. In the secondary classroom there were 48 student, of whom, 34 (70.8%) were Greek Orthodox and 14 (29.2%) were Maronites. The inclusion of other students from different religions was low.

The establishment of Elm School aimed at raising Armenian children along Armenian national lines. The school was founded in 1960 for intermediate classes. In 1964 secondary classes were added to accommodate for the needs emerging from the additional influx of Armenians from the economically deprived Bekaa plain to the slums of the southern suburbs of Beirut. During the school year 1997/98 Elm School housed 310 students who were all Armenian Orthodox (Register Office). This meant that inter-group socialisation in the school was low since there was an absolute absence of other non-Armenian students and even Armenian ones from other denominations.

In the Muslim school category, the researchers visited Ash, Yew, and Oak schools. Ash School was founded on July 16, 1887 by a group of citizens motivated by philanthropic intentions to provide education to the Sunnites and counter Western models of education (School Prospectus). Its immediate catchment area was mainly middle class Sunnites. According to the registrar office, during the school year 1998/99, Ash School housed 411 Sunnite student, 2 Druzes, and 5 Shiites. In the secondary classrooms there were 54 students of whom 90.7% were Sunnites and 9.3% Shiites.

Yew School was established to serve the largest and poorest confessional community of Lebanon, the Shiites (Theroux, 1987). The Shiite social and political demands for equality have been ignored by Lebanon's political system since the inception of the Lebanese Republic in 1926. The Shiite community attempted to overcome their 'second class' conditions by capitalising on the cultural and social accomplishments of other confessional communities in Lebanon through founding their schools. Eventually, the Shiite community founded the Amelia Charitable Organisation, which has been administering Yew School since its establishment on April 24, 1941. The school served the Shiite community residing in the southern suburbs of Beirut. During the school year 1997/98, 2000 students were enrolled in the school, of whom 28 were Sunnites and the rest were Shiites. In the secondary classes there were 52 students, all Shiite.

Oak School was founded by the Druze Charitable Organization - Irfan - in 1973 to provide social and educational services to the Druze community of Mount Lebanon. In the school year 1997/98, the school housed 723 Druze students, 23 of whom were enrolled in the secondary cycle.

Participants

The present study attempted to survey the perceptions and experiences of educational decision-makers, history teachers and students. We interviewed 14 educational decision-makers of confessional schools, 5 decision-makers from the Center of Educational Research and Development (CERD), 7 history teachers, and 48 student enrolled in secondary cycles. The purpose behind interviewing respondents of such a variety of statuses was to facilitate the collection of as wide a range of views as possible on history teaching in confessional schools.

The sampling process for this research was an admixture of the controlled and the opportunistic techniques. Controlled sampling implies the selection of respondents based on a series of particular characteristics, which are central to the inquiry (Nisbet and Entwistle, 1970). Researchers, therefore, 'hand pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement on their typicality'

(Cohen and Manion 1994: 89). The focus of the present study required that all educational decision-makers of confessional schools were important persons in the policy-making and educational planning processes besides being representatives of their confessional communities. Our selection of educational decision-makers of confessional schools was based on the controlled sampling technique. In addition, suitable respondents conditioned our sampling process of education decision-makers from the Center of Educational Research and Development by availability. Five out of eight educational decision-makers were available for the interview. Those five were members in an educational committee formed by the Ministry of Education in 1997 to design a new history curriculum.

Research on selective perception and selective retention suggests that people see and remember only the evidence in agreement with their perceptions and overlook evidence or forget that which is not (Mouly, 1987). To accept unconditionally what decision-makers and other experts say is a dangerous practice, particularly when dealing with disputatious issues open to conflicting views such as history teaching in Lebanon. Therefore, we interviewed students in order to verify and supplement interview data obtained from educational decision-makers and history teachers.

Students' views on history teaching allowed us to understand the state of history teaching from the learners' perspective. The age factor was an important determinant for obtaining interview data. A controlled sample was formed based on age category and educational cycle. Due to their age group (14-18), secondary classroom students are manageable and tend to exhibit a higher degree of cooperation with interviewers than younger students who have a tendency to resort to defensive, monosyllabic behavior (Verma *et al.*, 1994). Their exposure to the Lebanese political culture may allow them to articulate their perceptions more than younger students do. Moreover, they study the history of Lebanon more than students do in other educational cycles. The researchers had no power to oblige students to respond to the interview questions; as such, only those students who volunteered to participate were interviewed, and these represented 48 out of the 236 secondary cycle students. Almost half of the students came from Muslim schools ($n = 22$) and the other half ($n = 26$) from Christian schools.

In addition to students, one history teacher was selected from each school. History teachers have a wide experience and insight, so that their views on the state of history teaching can be of immense benefit to the study.

Interviews

Due to the complex nature of the state of history teaching in Lebanon, individual interviews were chosen as a strategy - this being one of the most

important sources of case study information (Yin, 1994). Interviews lie in a range between structured, which usually seek answers to a large number of relatively simple questions (Powney and Watts, 1987) to the totally unstructured 'in-depth' interviews, which are often associated with psychotherapy. The need in this research to allow respondents to express their views freely, and occasionally in detail - while at the same time maintaining direction and time-management, necessitated the adoption of a semi-structured interview.

Three main perspectives shaped our interviews: (i) the experiences of history teachers; (ii) the perceptions of students; (iii) the views of educational decision-makers of confessional schools and the Center of Educational Research and Development (CERD). The researchers laid out three interview schedules, one for each type of sample in the study. Three sources were brought together to construct the interview items: (i) the opinion of colleagues on the subject; (ii) guidance from school prospectus and policy papers; (iii) the literature pertaining to political and social fragmentation in Lebanon (e.g., Khashan, 1992; Barakat, 1977).

Before collecting our data, pilot runs were tried with 7 interviewees outside the main sample frame to establish the reliability of the interviewing schedules and ensure the clarity of the items and their usefulness in gathering of relevant information. The fact that the protracted 1975-90 war has left its distinctive marks on the quality of inter-group relations in Lebanon led the researchers to avoid questions that could rekindle war-related memories. For example, to a question on the problems of confessional pluralism in Lebanon, an interviewee said: 'It's a shame to ask this question after fourteen years of war'. In order to mitigate the pitfalls of the question, the researchers asked respondents about their views on pluralist experience in other countries and requested them afterwards to relate their views to the Lebanese context. By designing interview items with both care and tact, the researchers were more likely to make the data generated from interviewees meaningful to the study.

One of the questions in the interview aimed to obtain views on how history teachers discuss the issue of national identity in their teaching. The concept of national identity is both complex and highly abstract because it is based on a multiplicity of cultural identities (Beck, 1992). Our interviewing questions sought information on whether history teachers taught elements of hybrid monism (Smolicz, 1981) in which different identities of Lebanese society were welded together in some sort of mix or hybrid containing elements of each. Hence, we asked history teachers to comment on the degree of emphasis in their teaching on the different identities that constitute Lebanon's plural society. At the teaching level, the fact that the number of hours devoted to the teaching of history reflected priority given to the material (Hess and Torney, 1968), we requested history teachers to report on the time they spent on each topic. Furthermore, we asked

history teachers to appraise the quality of the officially prescribed history curriculum and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the texts they used (see Appendix I).

The information received from history teachers was further verified and supplemented by students' understanding of national leaders, outstanding events in Lebanon, and their views on the official history text (see Appendix II). In addition, the researchers were interested in learning about the issues that created sharp dissent in Lebanese educational panorama. The interviewing questions for the educational decision-makers sought to understand their views on the policies of confessional schools, coordination with the Ministry of Education and their views on the proposed history curriculum (see Appendix III). The information obtained from educational decision-makers of confessional schools was compared with those received from educational decision-makers working on the new history curriculum.

Given that there are clear advantages in the use of a variety of research methods alongside each other, we supplemented our interview data with content analysis of history texts. Such triangulation not only generates different types of data, but also helps researchers to create a connected chain of evidence (Yin, 1994) that greatly increases the chances of accuracy (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Textual analysis

Textual analysis aims to identify prejudice, distortion of facts and bias in written material. In the 1970s, studies conducted by minority group organisations aimed not only to identify distortions and omissions in the written material but also to identify what the missing perspectives were (Hicks, 1981). For example, Preiswerk and Perot (1978) conducted an in-depth study of Western ethnocentrism in history textbooks, illustrating the way in which the Western value system continually attempted to omit reference to all other non-European cultures. Other studies were also made of the treatment of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa in school history textbooks (e.g. Hulmes, 1989). These studies were of central significance to the identification of the racist images that were portrayed in history textbooks and other teaching material.

While textual analysis in Western countries analysed the stories and events advocated by the majority in political rule and identified racial and ethnocentric beliefs, little work has been done on history textbooks and national integration in war-ridden multi-confessional contexts. The present study analysed 10 different history texts, of which the Ministry of Education officially approved 4, while the remaining 6 were used by confessional schools as supplementary teaching material (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Names of officially approved history books used by the seven schools in the secondary cycles and supplementary material

| School name | Approved books | Supplementary material |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cedars (Maronite) | The Pictured History | Cultural History |
| Beech (Greek Orthodox) | Modern Scientific History | History of Lebanon |
| Elm (Armenian Orthodox) | The Complete in History | History of Armenia |
| Ash (Sunnite) | The Pictured History | / |
| Yew (Shiite) | The Enlightening History | Cultures and Old Civilization |
| Oak (Druze) | Pictured History | Patriotic Education |
| Pine (Protestant) | The Complete in History | Global Cultures |

The questions we used for textual analysis were adapted from Preiswerk and Perot (1978), with the wording rephrased to suit the Lebanese experience. The researchers read each textbook and constructed matrices in order to compare and contrast the content and the information provided by each text. Our analyses of history textbooks aimed to answer the following questions:

- Do the textbooks emphasise the history of Europe and the Arab World more than the history of Lebanon?
- How do the texts portray national symbols and historical leaders?
- Are there omissions and distortions of facts and events?
- Do the authors have any sympathy to any confessional community?
- Are the textbooks conducive to inter-group understanding?

Results and discussion

The official textbooks used by our confessional school sample followed the course outline and units prescribed by the Ministry of Education in Legislative Decree 9100 dated January 8, 1968. The content of the official textbooks was divided into three units: (i) modern history of Lebanon; (ii) modern history of the Arab World; (iii) history of the modern world. Curiously, the official textbooks used by our school sample devoted disproportional attention to the history units prescribed by the officially approved history curriculum. *The Enlightening History* (304 pages) used by Yew School, for instance, devoted 27.6% of its lessons to Lebanon's history during the First World War, 44.5% on independence of Arab countries and 27.9% on Europe from Vienna Conference in 1815 to the

First World War. On the other hand, the *Complete in History* (283 pages) which was used by Elm and Pine schools, gave 40.9% of its lessons on Lebanon and 59.1% on independence of Arab countries, while the history of Europe was presented in handouts. Moreover, the official history texts used by Cedar, Ash, and Oak devoted 47.2% of the lessons to the history of Lebanon, 30.3% to the independence of Arab countries, and 19.9% to the modern history of Europe. The history text used by Elm School gave an Armenian-oriented presentation of the history of modern Europe by laying a greater emphasis on the Armenian Diaspora in the West than on the history of the Arab World after 1800 and its considerable contributions to Lebanon (pp.89-168).

The manner in which historical events are interpreted and described in history textbooks might deepen the existing divisions among Lebanese. Although all the official textbooks analysed referred to the great famine of Lebanon in 1914, certain contradictions as to the causes of the famine were identified. *The Modern Scientific History* adopted by Pine School argued that the famine was caused by the British siege of the Lebanese coast, the plummeting of the Ottoman currency and greedy merchants who took advantage of the situation (pp. 23-25). On the other hand, *The Enlightening History* used by Yew School, argued that the Ottomans first put an embargo on transferring food and essential commodities to the Lebanese but later on allowed food rationing to the inhabitants of Beirut (p.16). All official textbooks analysed offered conflicting interpretations as to the role of institutions in mitigating the burdens of the famine on people. *The Modern Scientific History*, for instance, argued that the American Embassy and the French fleet played a central role in supplying food ration to the needy (p.25). The book further alluded to the role of the Maronite Patriarchy in catering for the poor (p. 25). On the other hand, *The Enlightening History* used by Yew School maintained that local national, foreign and religious institutions were interested in facing the famine (pp.17-18), without referring to role of the Maronite Patriarchy in this regard.

Besides the contradictions in the official textbooks, another deficiency came through their neglect of pluralism in Lebanon. With the exception of the *Modern Scientific History*, the official textbooks omitted reference to the multi-confessional plural context of Lebanon, which gave rise to a political system of special type. In *The Enlightening History* (p.14), *The Pictured History* (p.18), and *The Complete in History* (p.15), the Maronites were referred to as the 'Inhabitants of the Mountains', while the Sunnites as the inhabitants of the 'Coastal Areas'. In describing the political differences among Lebanese, all textbooks argued that the inhabitants of the coastal areas preferred ties with the Arab government in Syria, while the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon harboured a desire for the independence of Lebanon with special relationships with France, without explaining the reasons

behind these differences. In addition, all textbooks analysed overlooked the historical origins of confessional communities, their relationships, accomplishments, and their contribution to pluralism in today's Lebanon. Furthermore, the textbooks analysed avoided discussions on sensitive topics on which confessional communities might disagree in their interpretation, such as the 1860 war. On its part, the Ministry of Education denied students the opportunity to learn about the post-Second World War years by removing chapters encompassing such important events as the formation of political parties, the administrative reforms, and the 1958 civil war. For the remainder of the official textbooks, students learn nothing about the Israeli/Arab conflict and the problems to be addressed.

Our reviews of the official curriculum showed that the objectives of employing history texts for promoting national integration and a sense of national citizenship had low priority. Legislative Decrees 2150 dated November 6, 1971 which was based on Decree 9099 dated January 8, 1968, in addition to Decree 864 dated March 24, 1971, allocated one hour per week for history in the secondary scientific classes and two hours per week for the literature classes. However, the official curriculum did not specify the time to be spent on each subject and the interpretations to be given. Thus, each school in the sample devoted different timetables to different subjects depending on its educational ethos and policy. For instance, Yew, Ash, Beech and Oak schools, whose policies were favourable to Arabism, allocated two hours per week to the history of the Arab World. Cedar and Pine, on the other hand, allocated one hour per week for all subjects to be covered during the school year while devoting one extra hour per week for supplementary material not required by the official curriculum. Furthermore, Elm School allocated 1 extra hour per week to Armenian history and the Armenian Diaspora. The lack of time allocated by the Ministry of Education to the history curriculum together with the different timetables allocated by the seven schools attested to the low priority given to the socialisation of students along national unitary lines. In order to allow for additional interpretations, most of our school sample used supplementary history texts and learning material not requested by the Ministry of Education.

Our appraisal of supplementary history texts and other material available in five schools revealed that *Global Cultures* used by the Pine School, and cultural studies handouts by Cedar School were useful courses for fostering an understanding of ancient civilisations and their contribution to pluralism in today's Lebanon. Moreover, the *Culture of Old Civilizations* adopted by Yew School offered literature on the development of civilisations in the Fertile Crescent. However, the fact that the text neglected the cultural performance of confessional communities in Lebanon meant that students were denied the

opportunity to learn about the Lebanese plural reality. Other schools used supplementary textbooks, which were ethnocentric in nature. Interview data with a history teacher at Elm School showed that the book used by the school centred on the Armenian Diaspora and the Turkish atrocities committed during the Great Anatolian Genocide. In a similar vein, Oak School adopted a supplementary textbook entitled *Al Tanshia Al Watania* ('Patriotic Socialization') that expressed largely the Druze self-identity and resistance to colonial powers - namely France during its mandate of Syria and Lebanon (pp.34-69). Given the interpretation presented in the history text reflecting the Druze's version of outstanding historical events, a Druze policy-maker said to one of the researchers that the text 'did not suit other sects'.

Although Legislative Decree 1436 accords the right to the Ministry of Education to evaluate and approve history textbooks used by private schools, the procedure has, however, never been enforced. A decision-maker from the Center of Educational Research and Development said to the researchers that the Ministry of Education did not even have any information about the content of the various history textbooks used by private schools. The result, he added, 'has been a lack of uniformity in history teaching among the schools'. Our interview data obtained from history teachers across our school sample identified a number of noticeable conflicting interpretations as to the historical leaders of Lebanon and the creation of Greater Lebanon by the French Mandate in 1920. Regarding the formation of Greater Lebanon, the history teachers at Cedar and Pine tended to be favourable to the French Mandate and inclined to perceive Greater Lebanon as having historical roots laid down by Fakhreddine. On the contrary, history teachers at Oak and Yew considered Greater Lebanon as a scrambled French fabrication detached from the Arab World. In describing the resistance against the Ottomans in Lebanon, the history teacher at Yew School said:

'Though it is not mentioned in the book for certain political reasons, it is common knowledge in history that some Muslims preferred the Ottoman rule to the French one. This is attributed to religious factor. Some groups in Lebanon view the martyrs who faced the Ottomans as traitors others saw them as heroes.'

The Maronite history teacher of Cedar School lamented over the view which considered the martyrs as traitors who colluded against the Ottoman Empire.

Besides the constraint mentioned above, there seemed to be additional factors that prevented the majority of schools from contributing to students' knowledge of each others' histories and cultures. Although there was near-unanimity among history teachers across schools on the potential of history teaching for fostering inter-group knowledge, practical implementation of that potential was hindered by

the overloaded national curriculum and the firm requirements of the national examinations. The history teacher at Ash School, for instance, said to the researchers: 'The history curriculum is demanding and we cannot teach our students everything. We have to be selective at times'. Moreover, the history teachers at Yew and Oak felt that the Ministry of Education together with their schools should play a role in contributing to students' understanding of other histories and cultures than their own. However, the recognition of history teachers to the imperative of inter-group learning, possibly genuine in itself, was also limited by the ideological background of Muslim schools, which dismissed the notion of pluralism in Lebanon. In contrast, proponents of pluralism in Lebanon, mainly Maronites, encouraged inter-group learning in their schools. The Maronite educational decision-maker said to one of the researchers 'encouraging students to learn from each others' religious and historical backgrounds is at the heart of our educational objective'. Cedar's history teacher professed his school's practical commitment to inter-group learning:

'Though we are Maronites we do not teach the history of the Maronites because we are not an isolated community. Although each sect has its own version of history, our school offers cultural studies courses in order to give students an idea of how the confessional amalgam works in Lebanon.'

Other school teachers in the sample were supportive of inter-group learning promoted through the history curriculum, yet they tended to take a rather skeptical view about what their schools would do to transmit historical knowledge that promote inter-group learning among students. The history teacher of Beech School said to the researchers:

'If the communal objectives in the country are not clear, what do you want me to teach my students, whether they were Christians or Muslims? Teaching students about each other's historical roots is a good thing, but we cannot do that since we have to meet the requirements of the national examinations.'

The wealth of material from interviews with history teachers, of which a small amount is reported here, was confirmed by data obtained from students. Students' perceptions of events were undoubtedly affected by the impact of the history curriculum. Interview data showed that students at Yew School expressed little interest in Lebanese historical leaders and seemed to be more interested in the history of their lost homeland, Armenia. Another student in the school lamented what she regarded as the 'bias in the official textbook, which neglected the

Armenian Diaspora'. Interview data showed that the majority of students at Cedar School considered the official textbook biased since it ignored the history of the Maronites. A student said, 'the contribution of the Maronites to build up a citadel of freedom [Lebanon] in the region was overlooked by the book'. To a question about students' understanding of the historical leader Fakhreddine, a Sunnite student at Ash School said to one of the researchers: 'I do not understand why we should study about dead people who did little to solve our problems'. Other students at Cedar and Pine said to one of the researchers that the book used by their schools did not give enough information on Lebanese historical leaders. The variations in students' perceptions to historical leaders and events cannot be attributed only to history curriculum but to other factors that tend to intervene in the socialisation process of students such as the role of the family and politicised religious leaders. This view was shared by the Shiite educational decision-maker who said to one of the researchers:

'I do not think that we should blame lack of national consciousness among our students on education. I think that the family plays a greater role in their socialisation than schools do.'

In evaluating the official history textbooks, students at Ash School levelled resentment against the overloaded nature of the curriculum, not the textbook's content. Armenian students who complained about memorising dates and events that were presented in the official text shared their views. An Armenian student said: 'Sometimes I have difficulties with history because it is in Arabic but I should memorise it to pass'. Students at Oak and Pine said that they were stressed by the bookish nature of the course. A student at Pine School described the history teaching as 'bookish' and another student added: 'We have to memorise everything, even the silly details'. With the exception of Armenian students, most of students in the sample showed more interest in the history of Lebanon than in other units and subjects in the book. When probed further, a student at Ash School said: 'The history of Lebanon gives us more grades than the other lessons of the book'. This overwhelming motivation for grades was confirmed by a history teacher at Ash School who said, 'Students focus on chapters on Lebanon because they generate 60 percent of history grades in the official examinations'.

Conclusion

Our data have shown that history teaching in Lebanon is not conducive to national integration. First, little uniformity exists in the content and standards of history texts. Second, the Ministry of Education does not enforce its inspection

policies. Third, history teaching expresses loyalty to particularistic confessional groups rather than to the nation as a whole.

With the conclusion of the civil war in 1989, the Ministry of Education proposed a new national curriculum. The National Reconciliation Charter, the Ta'ef agreement signed in 1989, makes a reference to the need to standardising textbooks in history as well as civics. Although the Ministry of Education formed a committee vested with the responsibility for designing a new history curriculum and standardising history texts, educational decision-makers still face difficulties in achieving a consensus as to how Lebanon's history and political system should be interpreted and taught. In fact, the insistence on distinctive social and religious identities among confessional communities continues to prevent history teaching from creating a unified national consciousness among schoolchildren. However, despite the limitations of history teaching, the writing of a history curriculum relevant to Lebanon's political and plural needs is still possible. At present, the Ministry of Education has a unique opportunity to the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) to write a history text with a national frame of reference. Many education decision-makers have faith that the efforts made toward the setting of a standardised history textbook will bear fruits along the line. Others say that the educational controversy over the interpretation of Lebanon's political history will continue as far as confessional communities lack a collective political disposition to alter the *status quo*. As a decision-maker said to one of the researchers in response to a question on the future of role of education in Lebanon:

'Once you look at the situation, positive and negative do not exist. My statement is philosophical. We have to be realistic and do our best.'

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APPENDIX I

History Teacher Interview Schedule

School _____

Date _____

Number of years in teaching _____

Name of textbooks used _____

1. Does your school use more than one history textbook? Yes No

If yes, why? _____

2. Who decide on the supplementary textbook? _____

Please comment on the followings:

- Allocations of sessions
- The context of the official history textbook
- Students' attitudes
- The teaching process
- The role of France and the Ottoman Empire in Lebanon
- Independence of Lebanon
- The confessional culture of Lebanon.
- National identity

3. What kind of history textbook and teaching methods you think will help students understand the multicultural and multi-confessional dimensions of Lebanon both historical and modern?

1 Standardized 2 Objective 3 Multicultural 4 Neutral

Please comment: _____

4. Are you satisfied with the content of the book?

Yes No

Please comment: _____

5. How do you get feedback from students?

Questionnaire Informal means

Please comment: _____

6. Further comments: _____

APPENDIX II

Student Interview Schedule

School _____

Sect _____

Gender Male Female

Residential background _____

Last school attended _____

1. In your opinion; what is citizenship? _____

2. What do you like and dislike about history teaching? _____

3. Comment on the followings:

Independence of Lebanon

Fakhereddine

The role of the Ottoman Empire in Lebanon

The role of France in Lebanon

APPENDIX III

Confessional Pluralism and the Curriculum Education Decision-maker Interview Schedule

1. Date _____

2. Name _____

3. Position _____

4. Number of years in policy making _____

5. How do you describe Lebanon's educational system in the context of pluralism before the war and after? 1 Conducive to inter-group education 2 Fragmented

Please comment: _____

6. How do you evaluate the education policy-making process after the Ta'ef Accord?

1 Democratic 2 Confessionally based 3 Sufficient for mutual learning

Please comment: _____

7. Summarize the factors that led to the development of the new educational plan for Lebanon.

8. What factors (historical, political, social, cultural and economic) led to the establishment of your schools in Lebanon? Please comment on each:

9. What are the main sources of funding of your schools in Lebanon?

How do these factors relate to the wider Lebanese cultural and politico-economic contexts?

Very much Just a little

Please comment _____

10. What is the nature of your relationship with the Ministry of Education?

11. Why and how do you participate in the policy making process of the new educational plan?

12. What are the points of departure in the policy making process between your confessional group and others?

1 Cultural 2 Political 3 Financial 4 Others

Please comment: _____
