



THE CHANGING FORMS OF INCITEMENT TO TERROR AND VIOLENCE: The Need for a New International Response



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THE DELEGITIMIZATION OF ISRAEL IN SCHOOLS IN THE WESTERN WORLD

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In October 2011 it became known that the German EVZ Foundation had financed two high school student programs that promoted hatred of Israel. This state foundation was created to compensate Holocaust slave workers and fight contemporary anti-Semitism.¹ In one program a Dutch Jewish anti-Israeli extremist, Hayo Meyer, visited the Anne Frank High School in Gutersloh. He equated Palestinian suffering with the mass murder of Jews in the Holocaust and termed Israel a “criminal state.”²

In the same month at the high school in the village of Nesbru in Norway, an exhibition sponsored by Norwegian Church Aid was held on “Palestine.” It included a picture of a crossed-out Israeli flag with “Murder” written in reverse underneath it. After a protest by an Israeli student and some negative media publicity, the school finally decided to remove the exhibition.³

The next month Hugo Deckers, secretary of the Belgian socialist teachers trade union (ACOD), threatened Jewish schools. He wrote a letter to the Flemish Jewish paper *Joods Actueel* about the announced expansion of Israeli settlements after the Palestinian Authority had gained membership of UNESCO. Deckers wrote that “If this is the [Israeli] reaction, I will as union leader of the ACOD, bring the situation of Jewish schools in Antwerp to public attention. I suspect you will be frightened.”⁴

In May 2012 a Toronto Islamic school was investigated after a complaint by the Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies. The curriculum at the East End Madrassa taught boys about treacherous Jews and Jewish plots. It also contrasted Islam with the Jews and the Nazis. After this became public, the school apologized to the Jewish community.⁵

In the same month in a General Certificate of Secondary Education exam by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, Britain’s largest exam board, more than a thousand teenagers who took the religious-studies test paper were asked, “Explain briefly why some people are prejudiced against Jews.” The question was heavily criticized. Education Secretary Michael Gove said to the *Jewish Chronicle*: “To suggest that anti-Semitism can ever be explained rather than condemned, is insensitive and, frankly bizarre.” He added that it was “the duty of politicians to fight prejudice, and with anti-Semitism on the rise we need to be especially vigilant.”⁶

WHAT IS KNOWN?

Little is known about anti-Israeli incitement in schools in the Western world. Yet the topic is crucially important. In certain schools in a number of countries, a new young generation of Israel-haters and anti-Semites is being formed.

This issue needs to be put in perspective. There are about sixteen categories of originators of the delegitimization of Israel. Over the years, substantial information has been collected about some of these perpetrator categories. Considerable material is available about the hatred of Israel coming out of Muslim states. Much is also known about anti-Semitism among Muslims in the Western world, and about anti-Semitism issuing from the United Nations, NGOs, neo-Nazis, the Western extreme left, socialist and Labor parties, and academics. Information is quite limited about the promotion of Israel-hate in Christian environments and in the trade unions.

About the delegitimization of Israel in schools, however, almost nothing is known. There are only a few studies on subtopics in some countries. A major study on this topic is required and would necessitate significant funding. Two things can be done in the meantime. First, an inventory can be made of the information available as far as studies and anecdotal material are concerned. Second, an outline can be made of the subjects to be analyzed in a more detailed study.

THREE RELATED SUBJECTS

When studying the delegitimization of Israel in schools, two other topics need to be investigated. One is anti-Semitism there; the other concerns Holocaust education in European schools. As Holocaust teaching is often part of the official curriculum, problems related to Israel emerge in these lessons as well.

Within this overall topic of high school-related issues, a number of subjects need to be investigated. The first concerns the neutrality of textbooks and curricula. A second aspect is whether the lessons given by teachers are objective. A third theme is the attitude of non-Jewish students toward their Jewish schoolmates.

Besides these major issues there are others, such as: does a school offer Holocaust education and what are the responses to it? Is there harassment of Jewish teachers? Other questions concern Jewish schools. First of all, one should investigate whether there has been violence against Jewish schools; and second, when Jewish schoolchildren participate in activities outside of the school, are they harassed? And finally, what is being done to counteract the negative developments?

WHAT DATA ARE AVAILABLE?

This author has identified a small number of studies concerning some aspects of hatred related to Jews and Israel in schools. In the United States and France, bias in textbooks has been analyzed. A study in the Netherlands has dealt with anti-Jewish prejudice in Amsterdam schools. A 2011 study in Norway shows major anti-Semitism in Oslo high schools.⁷ In Brussels, a study of Dutch-speaking schools found that Muslim students are far more anti-Semitic than others.⁸

Each of the subjects mentioned will now be analyzed in more detail. Textbooks used in schools are sometimes a major source of biased anti-Israeli teaching. In the 1990s Mitchell Bard published a study, *Rewriting History in Textbooks*, on eighteen of the most widely used history textbooks in American high schools. He found them “full of factual errors, oversimplification, omission, and distortion. All these are consistently to the detriment of Jews and Israel. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that the authors are prejudiced.”⁹ Bard concluded that American “high schools are, as far as anti-Israeli teaching is concerned, even worse than universities.”

Another analysis on the same subject in 2008 by the late Gary Tobin and Dennis Ybarra confirmed what Bard had concluded.¹⁰ They also found that Arab and Muslim interest groups try to whitewash and glorify all things Islamic and promote Islam. In this way a multitude of lies have permeated American textbooks.

In France several studies have been undertaken. These have found, for instance, that facts on the Middle East are presented so as to imply that Palestinian terrorism is different from other terrorism.¹¹

How the Jews are presented in the context of French history is possibly even worse. One researcher, Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun, summed it up in a spirit of caricature: “in antiquity there were the Hebrews whose religion, Judaism, was significantly improved by Jesus, founder of Christianity. At the end of the nineteenth century, a Jew and French officer (Dreyfus) was accused of treason; this divided the country until the beginning of the twentieth century. In the middle of the twentieth century during the Second World War, Jews were exterminated. Other Jews who subsequently created Israel conduct an unjust war against the innocent Palestinians.”¹²

In Britain there is proof that anti-Semitism in some Muslim schools is far more prevalent than in other schools. A Panorama TV program aired by the BBC in November 2010 dealt with what is taught in Saudi-run Muslim schools in Britain. It found that these schools used textbooks from Saudi Arabia that teach children from age six and up that Jews are descendants of monkeys and pigs.

The Panorama program also showed one textbook proclaiming that “Jews are cursed by God.” It furthermore asked children to list the negative qualities of Jews. Teenagers who follow the Saudi national curriculum are being taught that Zionists aim to take over the world for the benefit of Jews and that the fabricated text of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is true.¹³

Sometimes one can incite children with a single sentence. For instance, in a Dutch-language textbook for the sixth grade in Belgium, students are asked to read sentences with the correct intonation. One of these was, “When a Palestinian child in Jerusalem saw a Jewish soldier arriving, he shrank in fear.”¹⁴

One can only imagine what the reactions would be if a Belgian textbook included an intonation exercise with the sentence: “After a Palestinian suicide terrorist killed many Jewish children and adults, the Belgian media focused mainly on the Israeli military response.”

An article by Gideon Böss in the German daily *Die Welt* accuses the three major German textbook publishers of presenting Israelis as perpetrators and Palestinians as victims.¹⁵

BIASED TEACHING

A second topic of investigation is biased teaching. There are no detailed studies available. The information available is thus largely incidental and anecdotal in character. The cases mentioned above from Germany and Norway illustrate that almost everything is possible.

Much of the information we have is necessarily indirect. One can check whether there are anti-Israeli opinions among non-Jewish and Jewish schoolchildren. It then emerges that they have often derived these views from their teachers. In the United States, one source of indirect information on biased teaching in schools is the youth group of the Orthodox Union (OU). The National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) has developed culture clubs in over 150 public schools across the country and reaches thirty thousand Jewish youngsters. Former OU chief executive Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb says, “We find that many children are very anti-Israeli. They have been very much brainwashed by an extremely anti-Israeli educational establishment.”¹⁶

HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS

Another major issue is the harassment of Jewish students in public schools. A pioneering effort on this subject some years ago in France was the publication of a book called *The Lost Territories of the Republic*.

Many problems of anti-Semitism are caused by some Muslims. But Christian students are also harassed by them. It would be mistaken to say that the ideological hatred of these Muslims focuses exclusively on Jews and Israel. It also is directed at the United States; yet their real target is French society.¹⁷ This finally became very clear in the anti-French riots of autumn 2005.¹⁸

For statistics on harassment of Jewish students in schools one can again focus on Norway. In June 2011 the Oslo Municipality published a study on racism and anti-Semitism among eighth- to tenth-grade students in the city’s schools, which at the time came as a shock. The study found that 33 percent of the Jewish students regularly experience bullying at school. According to the definition used, these students are targeted with verbal or physical abuse at least two or three times per month.¹⁹

HARASSMENT OF JEWISH TEACHERS

Sometimes Jewish teachers are also harassed. There is some information on incidents in a number of countries. One example comes from Norway. David Katznelson, an Israeli teacher who has lived there for fifteen years, said he has had a swastika spray-painted on his mailbox and that his Jewish students have been afraid to publicly disclose their faith.²⁰

JEWISH SCHOOLS

The past forty years have seen a number of bomb and arson attacks on Jewish schools. Initially this occurred mainly in Muslim countries and in Latin America.²¹ In a 1995 car bombing in Lyon, France, outside a Jewish school, fourteen people were injured.²² In the

past decade there have been a number of attacks on Jewish schools in Montreal.²³

The most serious incident took place in southwestern France in March 2012. A few days after murdering three French soldiers, the terrorist Mohammed Merah killed a teacher and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse.²⁴

The impact of the murders went far beyond France as Jewish communities all over Europe implemented enhanced security measures. Ervin Kohn, head of the Jewish community in Oslo, told the daily *Dagbladet*: “This could just as easily have happened in Norway. We do not feel safe.” He added that the Jewish community is a vulnerable group and would like to see permanent police protection at its institutions.²⁵

In the Netherlands extra security measures for Jewish institutions were put in place. There is a long conflict between the Jewish community and the Dutch government about the latter’s unwillingness to contribute toward the community’s large expenses for security.²⁶ In Belgium, England, Italy, and other European countries, Jewish communities expressed their fears.²⁷ Even in New York increased security measures were taken.²⁸

The Merah murders had a sizable bandwagon effect.²⁹ For several months there was an increase in anti-Semitic incidents in France. In July a pupil of the same Jewish school in Toulouse, who was wearing a Star of David, was beaten up in a train by North Africans.³⁰

Jewish schoolchildren are sometimes insulted or attacked near their schools or when they go on school trips. This has happened a number of times, for instance, to students of the Amsterdam Jewish elementary school Rosh Pina.³¹ Jewish children at non-Jewish schools sometimes transfer to Jewish schools because of harassment. This has been reported in several places such as France,³² Amsterdam,³³ and Berlin.³⁴

PROGRAMS TO COMBAT ANTI-SEMITISM

In a few places there are programs to combat anti-Semitic hatred. The Amsterdam Municipality has developed such a program to diminish anti-Semitism and Israel-hatred among mainly Muslim students. This has had some good results. Although the number of Muslim anti-Semitic students has decreased, it remains far higher than among other students.³⁵ One of the main problems of the program is that it teaches the topics of the Holocaust and the Middle East together. The Jewish community has protested against this mix-up many times, but without results.³⁶

The Fast Program (Fighting Antisemitism Together) in Canada is led by a coalition of non-Jewish Canadian business and community leaders. It aims to educate sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students about the dangers of intolerance with an emphasis on anti-Semitism. This program has received wide acclaim from educators.³⁷

In Germany, the Amadeo Antonio Foundation has done some work on making teachers aware of how to deal with expressions of anti-Semitism in schools.³⁸ On a local level, there has been a project to fight anti-Semitism including schools in the Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin.³⁹

What goes on in schools in many countries can be very dangerous for Jewish children. Anti-Semitic experiences in school can have a major impact; some Jewish parents report that their children are still traumatized many years later. On a different level, many high school students including Jewish ones may arrive on campus with a bias they acquired previously

in school.

A new generation of Israel-haters is being educated in some countries of the democratic world. Part of this is done at home, but another part by those who are charged with forming the students' minds and values. Much more effort has to be invested by the Israeli government and Jewish communities. What is happening is dangerous both to Jewish children and to Israel.

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APPENDIX: OUTLINE OF A STUDY TO BE UNDERTAKEN

This appendix outlines how a study on the subject could be structured and what topics would be examined.

- 1) Textbooks
 - a) Are racism and anti-Semitism addressed and in what way?
 - b) Are there differences in how religions are presented?
 - c) Are there any anti-Semitic statements in textbooks?
 - d) How is the Holocaust presented?
 - e) If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is presented, are the issues analyzed objectively?
- 2) Teaching
 - a) Is anti-Semitism addressed in the classroom?
 - b) How is this done?
 - c) Do teachers react to anti-Semitic incidents in the classroom?
 - d) Is there reporting to their schools of anti-Semitic incidents?
 - e) Do schools report on incidents to the relevant authorities?
 - f) Are teachers organizations involved in addressing the anti-Semitism issues?
- 3) Anti-Semitism in Schools by Fellow Students
 - a) Are there statistics on anti-Semitic incidents?
 - b) What is the nature of incidents?
 - c) Are Jewish students leaving schools because of anti-Semitic incidents?
 - d) Are students reporting anti-Semitic incidents to their school?
 - e) Are students reporting personal incidents to authorities and Jewish organizations outside of the school?

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