

Human Rights in Lebanese Textbooks and Curriculums

ANTOINE NASRI MESSARRA

Lebanon is the expression and concrete model of a historical dream: intercommunal coexistence. This dream is essentially democratic in an environment that aspires for freedom, despite some degree of conflict as any complex reality is. The equilibrium ensured by the Lebanese balance of power implies mutual acceptance and sharing. This cause, or dream, deserves to be defended not only for ecumenical, human and political reasons, but also for international considerations. The contemporary international system is composed of a constellation of states, the majority of which are forced to deal with their pluralism so as to consolidate national unity and concord.

The analysis of the chances of future coexistence in Lebanon lies at the heart of major contemporary controversies: ecumenical controversies bearing on the effectiveness of dialogue between different religions; political controversies concerned with the operational character of consensual or power-sharing systems; and international diplomatic controversies over the role and place of small nations in a multi-polar or unipolar international system.

After 15 years of international and civil wars in Lebanon (1975-1989), a new national Pact was adopted by the Lebanese Parliamentarians in Taëf (Saudi Arabia) and approved officially by Lebanese Parliament on 5 November 1989. Subsequently, in accordance with the Taëf Agreement, the 1926 Lebanese Constitution was amended on 21 September 1990.

Education in Lebanon includes private and public schools that follow the official curriculum. Official examinations (“Brevet” – O level – and baccalaureate) are based on this curriculum. The Council of Ministers approved on 25 October 1995 a new pedagogical structure and a new curriculum, based on the sugges-

tions of four hundred educators active in the pedagogical field in Lebanon.

The human rights concepts and practices are integrated and taught in Civic Education curriculums. The general aim of these curriculums in socio-political Lebanese context is to promote and consolidate principles of legality, conviviality, mutual tolerance, solidarity in a plural society, and collective memory for a permanent civil peace.

General Educational Framework

Principles related to education and culture are found in the introductory section of the 1990 amended Constitution of Lebanon, specifically in Articles 1 (national territory), 5 (national flag), 9 (respect for all religions, communities, freedom of belief), 10 (respect of religions and communities, freedom of teaching), 11 (language), 13 (freedom of opinion) and 19 (Constitutional Council that has the authority to decide on religious and pedagogical matters).

This section of the Constitution also states that the “Pact of Living Together” should be

introduced in the school curriculum in order to create unity among the people through the teaching of the Lebanese history, communication, government services, and the various regions in the country.

Article 9 of the Constitution provides that "... [T]he State respects all religions and communities." Article 10 links the freedom to obtain education to the necessity of "not harming any religion or community," i.e., respect for each religion. It also provides for respect for dignity, which implies the recognition of the other person's value or importance. These two articles should not be neglected in the teaching of Lebanese history in order to avoid any false understanding and in order to maintain an objective view of issues.

The adoption of the "National Education and Civic Upbringing Programs" between 1996 and 1999 under the direction of Munir Abû 'Aslî is the most important turning point in the Lebanese education system since the 1920s. They should be followed up in order to ensure their enforcement and to make sure that the enthusiastic spirit over them does not wane. Around the same period the new history curriculum was adopted.

Human Rights Education in the Secondary Level

The teaching of human rights in the new curriculum under the "National Education and Civic Upbringing Programs" has three main orientations:

1. *Cultural dimension*: The teaching of human rights without referring to their legal aspects has been included in the new curriculum. Workshops and seminars to be organized around issues concerning human rights deals with general culture and not just the claiming of "rights" or the need to do one's "duties." This keeps in mind the fact that human rights principles encounter a great deal of resistance in societies changing towards democracy.

In this context the second year of secondary curriculum includes:

1. Human and democratic values

Human values with the following components:

– *Accession to Personal Life*:

Moral conscience

Rationality in a paradoxical world

Personal judgment versus bias and crowd reaction

Courage and initiative

Self-assertion and self-confidence

Strong will and self-control

A taste for work and achievement (competitiveness and solidarity in teamwork and collective sports)

Physical upkeep

Mental upkeep (development of sensitivity and intelligence and reinforcement of the will)

Honesty and truthfulness; what is left untold

The meaning of responsibility

Personal liberty

Patience and consciousness of time: the long-term and the short-term in moral life

Happiness

– *Rules of Communication and the family*:

Egocentrism/altruism

Honesty

Regard for others

Negotiation and the art of listening

Respect for collective discipline

A sense of justice

A sense of equality

Solidarity

Collective responsibility

Interfamiliar communication

Morals and sexuality

Equality between the sexes; women's status

Values broadcast by the media

Morals of professional life

Modern man and technology: science/ethics

Professional deontology:

- The Educator
- The Doctor
- The Lawyer

Morals of economic life

The consumer: publicity, snobbism, squandering of money

Morals in regard to property

Man and money.

Democratic values: safeguarding freedom, the right to participate, dealing with others on an equal footing, standing up to tyranny, etc.

2. Work ethic

The civic education curriculum aims to compensate for the lack of its mention in the Arab literature curriculum taught in the Arab countries. The basic, new elements in the secondary level concerning the Arabic language are:

- Selecting issues and concepts related to humanity and their century
- Keeping the curriculum up-to-date
- Integrating world literature.

The reality is that more than 150 million Arabs today learn to glorify, praise and satirize all poetic and literary forms. In the Lebanese history textbooks, every time the idea of opposition to the State appears the author adds the phrase “coveting power” which means that opposition is restricted to politicians. All opponents of the State are intruders. The Arab youngsters learn the history of freedom through the British revolution, the French Revolution, the Renaissance, and American, British or French literature namely the work of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and others.

Are all Arab philosophers or writers controlled by the powers in society? The truth is that the Arab civilization taught to millions of

Arabs today is far from developing critical historical mind. Yusuf Shahin’s film, *al-Masîr* (The Destiny), is about a philosopher (Ibn Rushd) who is a paragon as regards religious freedom, understanding and accepting difference, and civil resistance to power. The words of the film’s theme song: “Raise your voice, raise your voice while singing, songs are still possible, still possible...” is a cry from the current Arab experience.

2. *Advocacy methods*: Most Arab countries have introduced human rights principles in the school curriculum because they are “fashionable” and are limited to narrating legislations about rights. They do not deal with the ways to defend these rights and claim them. The Lebanese curriculums have, on the other hand, tackled these aspects and include discussions on ways to petition and oppose.

The first year secondary curriculum includes:

1. The right to oppose tyranny:

- Defending freedoms
- Monitoring matters of public concern
- Resisting occupation by foreign powers
- Being committed to the development of law
- Working to achieve justice and equal opportunities.

2. Protecting human rights regionally and internationally.

In the third secondary year curriculum, we find:

- Right to be informed
 - a. Media and accountability of government officials
 - b. Duty to transmit the truth
- Ways of participating in elections, observing elections and holding government officials accountable.

It also insists on paying tax since it allows citizens to participate and hold public officials accountable when contributing to the public fund – and not to the “treasury” as this is un-

derstood to be the ruler's own money. This active participation is an incentive to citizenship in daily practice, that is, at the local level where citizens can see projects being carried out using the taxes they paid.

The "National Education and Civic Upbringing Programs" in secondary level includes the following topics concerning public funds and their management.

First year, secondary level:

- Questioning and accountability
- Paying taxes and fees
- Ensuring justice and equal opportunities, etc.
- The family budget
- Public property and services

Second year, secondary level:

- Work ethic in public offices

Third year, secondary level:

- The citizen's right to be informed
- Media and control of the public officials' work
- Ways of participating in elections, observing and holding public officials accountable.

3. *Varied activities and documents.* To prevent ideology-biased textbooks or those that favor a particular regime, the Lebanese curriculum follows a general framework for all students in Lebanese public and private schools. Each teacher is free to choose the activities and documents that are compatible with the curriculum's spirit, the needs and priorities of the school, and the students' environment. Teaching should be unified in its spirit and goals but not stereotyped.

School and extra-curricular activities are varied and require continuous creativity on behalf of the teachers. They include:

- *Debates:* holding debates under certain rules that have to be followed by the participants
- *Visits:* varying according to the subject and aim

- *Surveys:* carried out by the students in their own communities according to the subject and aim of the activity
- *Documentaries:* a file with data and pictures that can be shown in schools on some occasions
- *Projects:* undertaken upon the students' initiative and entail the exercise of responsibility and participation; tasks are assigned according to the subject and aim of the project
- *Texts from "living" literature:* texts from literature and the media reflecting daily life and values to be transmitted by the curriculum
- *Case studies:* these are based on realities in daily life.

Having class representatives and their election whether at school or university is a main constituent of democratic education.

The new *history* curriculum published in the *Official Gazette* in 2000 covers more than 80 pages. It is the fruit of concerted and unified efforts of educators. But no workshop was held to discuss the way it was put together or the principles that guided its development.¹ The committee formed by the President of the Center for Pedagogical Research and Development, Professor Munir Abu Aslî, worked on the principle that teaching history should not be biased nor falsified. It should rather be created by the people and not just by the rulers and "Very Important Persons (VIPs)." How can one move from teaching the history of "Lebanon" in the official and diplomatic sense to a more global teaching of the history of the Lebanese? Is history truly a human science using scientific classification or a history of the people called by Taqiy al-Dîn al-Sulh in the 1975-1990 war "the murdered"? In World War I, 10% of the casualties were civilians; in World War II, 50%; in Vietnam War 80%; in Lebanese war 90%! Are not these 80% and 90% of the people part of history?

The new curriculum on Lebanon's history put forth by the first committee² and approved

CHART 1. Contents of Civic Education in Various Years of the Secondary Level

<i>Foundation of National Education and Civic Up-bringing</i>	<i>First year secondary</i>	<i>Second year secondary</i>	<i>Third year secondary</i>
The individual, group and society	Conflicts – between individuals and in society		
Common life and the surrounding environment	Public property and services		
Family	Family planning		
Nature and the environment			Protecting and developing the environment
Country and citizenship			Lebanese presence in the world
Lebanon and its Arabic context		Arabic cooperation, solidarity and ambitions	
Education, work and job		Work ethic	Unions and federations
Rights and freedoms	Citizen's rights and political duties		
Human, democratic and social values		Human and democratic values	
Media and communication			Media and public opinion
Civic and democratic life		Citizenship and urbanism	Elections and citizens
International organizations	Protecting human rights regionally and internationally	Relations between states and the role of the United Nations	
State, public administration and institutions		Justice and the judiciary	Military service and civil service
Public and social issues	Basic problems in the world		Youth and contemporary changes

by the Council of Ministers on 16 May 2000, published in the *Official Gazette*, includes seven main pioneer principles:

1. *Geography*: teaching the history of Lebanon in its actual geographic situation and not just as Mount Lebanon
2. *People*: inclusion of the social, economic and cultural history, i.e. the history of the people and not just of rulers

3. *Conflicts*: talking about communal conflicts as they are, namely discussing their costs to Lebanese interests. This requires “accountant historians”
4. *Power and freedom*: talking about freedoms and the fight for them
5. *Memory*: building a collective and binding memory to bridge the gap between history that is taught and actual memories

6. *Moral issues*: using documents that allow the students to investigate and decide for themselves, increasing their trust on textbooks as a result
7. *Style*: using varied teaching methods to increase the students' trust on the textbooks.

What ways are there to ensure that the 1975-1990 war would be the last internal war in Lebanon's history and would no longer be suffered by the future Lebanese generations? How can one build a collective memory based on this experience and on national repentance that rejects internal divisions and external exploitation? Those concerned about these issues were born after 1985, at the end of the war or after it. Future generations may not benefit from the experience of learning from the suffering in war. The next twenty years (2000-2019) is a central phase to build a culture based on a pact of living together for the future generations. The seeds of permanent civil peace are sown in the social fabric but have not borne fruit yet. They face many obstacles and need help. As a Chinese proverb says: "The seeds of the present are the flowers of the future."

The program "Monitoring Civil Peace and Memory in Lebanon" launched since 1999 by the Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace is based on a "Grid of 120 indicators of the Lebanese coexistence pact." The program as a permanent investigation and alert action-oriented institution meets a real need in Lebanon for the next twenty years when the Lebanese generation who were born after the war, after peace has returned, and did not know the historic experience of coexistence and democracy will mature. An altered history of the 1975-1989 war may later be written by historians that may perpetuate the war after the war. Is History a human science like an academic category, or is it human since it is about humans?

The curriculum on "Philosophy and Civilizations" in the secondary school is based on the new pedagogical structure approved by the Council of Ministers on 25 October 1994.

The general aims of this curriculum include:

- Understanding higher moral values, their principles and human behavioral norms.
- Using philosophical questions, free and creative thinking.
- Developing critical and objective thinking regarding intellectual and philosophical issues to overcome conformism, divisionism and exclusion.

The specific aims include:

- Understanding and accepting others as they are (along with their qualities).
- Expressing one's self and communicating with one's environment in a positive and open way.
- Intellectual and behavioral independence, positive and active participation in professional, social and political fields.
- Developing a critical and objective mind in various intellectual and philosophical issues to overcome conformism and divisionism.

The curriculums include an introduction to religions namely Christianity (the right to: life, freedom, peace, equality, expression of belief and love in Christianity, among others), Islamic sciences (theology and its main issues, among others).

Teaching Methods and Training Programs

Based on the more than twenty training sessions for around two hundred secondary school teachers from various Lebanese regions in 1999-2002 on civic education, it appears that this subject requires more than teaching experience and competent teachers. It also requires an appropriate school environment for three reasons:

1. The subject consists of activities and general knowledge.
2. It needs constant renewal in content and methodology because it raises rejection, reservation or approval.
3. It entails deviations, which may detract it from its spirit.

This subject deals with very controversial issues: combining individualism and collectivism, freedom and the government.

Seven teaching and behavioral patterns should be banned from this course:

1. *Dictation*: teaching as basically dictation has a weak behavioral impact since students simply pour in exams what they have learned in the textbook. But they acquire behavioral patterns at home and in the school rather than from textbooks, lessons and homework.
2. *Idealization*: if citizenship is presented merely as general principles ensuring social prosperity and happiness it will exclude the condition of citizenship in reality and the need to fight for citizenship principles.
3. *Teaching ideologies*: teachers may be tempted to convey to their students their own stand and commitment thus influencing them. The students have their own personality, feelings and stand. The teachers should help the students develop their own conviction and rationalize them by listening to, debating on, and respecting different opinions. Human rights teachers listen to as well as help their students.
4. *Opening up unorganized debates*: teacher may want to allow debate among students without managing, organizing, keeping it within time and deducing its results.
5. *Communicating to students the language of political rivalry*: a difference should be made between political language as mentioned in dictionaries, official texts, regional and international agreements, and that which cause political mobilization, rivalry and conflict.
6. *Importing without rooting*: Civic education in Lebanon and Arab countries needs creativity in surveying the history of the defense of freedoms and reviewing Arab civilization and literature considering not only aesthetical aspects but values.
7. *Fatalism and considering only the power and elite*: many seminars debate the re-

gime, the power and the rulers, while they should debate about citizenship and participation, i.e., the role of citizens, their initiatives either in support of or in opposition to certain issues, holding public officials accountable.

The German Pastor, Martin Niemoeller, said in speaking about Nazi crimes in Germany: “when they arrested communists I didn’t say anything because I wasn’t a socialist. And when they came for the union leaders I didn’t say anything because I wasn’t a union leader. But when they finally came for me there wasn’t anyone left to say anything.”

What is the practice of power in school? Field surveys in schools show various violations of child rights. Some students are made to carry 7 or 8-kilogram bags, sit in an uncomfortable place, punished in a way that does not allow them to eat properly during the break period. Some teachers inspect the students’ bags, ask them out of curiosity about their parents’ job, speak in the plural about students: “Make them quiet down,” interrupt classes to talk to a colleague, scoff at the students’ bad grade or call them names and give orders: “You idiot! You fool! Shut up! Sit down! Stand up!” without any rules for standing or sitting. Some throw chalk at students, make promises and not keep them, impose group punishment, do not give a justification for the grades given, impose the use of some stationaries, and tear up students’ paper in front of the class!

In one case, a grandmother scolded a ten-year-old boy and hit him for misbehaving. The boy went to his father to complain about his grandmother. The father too scolded and hit him. The boy went back to his grandmother very upset and spat in front of her. She hugged and cuddled him. The mother went to her son saying, “Is this how you behave in front of your grandmother who offered you a new pair of shoes!” The boy answered, “She’s not the one who offered the new pair of shoes!”³

Patterns of cunningness, maneuvering, partisanship, solicitation and mercantilism, etc., all relations based on power not on norms can be observed in this family.

Human and political science studies in the Arab world are based on the perspective that knowledge is a means to change. Arabic studies relating to human rights and democracy need to be based more on behavioral patterns namely in sub-social structures (families, schools, universities, childhood friends, civil associations, unions, etc.) where powerful relations regulate conflicts peacefully.

In a training session organized by an educational institution on “respect,” the concept of respect was set forth with examples that show lack of respect in some Lebanese schools. A practical program was agreed upon for the school year 2002-2003 with four aspects:

1. Surveying and recording cases that appear in the first trimester that show respect or disrespect for human dignity without mentioning the student’s or the teacher’s name.
2. Gathering texts from Arabic literature, philosophy, and civilization on issues from actual cases.
3. Asking students to write essays on “respect” in the family, school and environment.
4. Giving a yearly prize with a committee that sets the rules to give away the prize.⁴

This example is given to make practical acknowledgement of the importance of the concept of behavioral and applied studies in education on democracy and human rights in Lebanon and the Arab region. The aim is to ensure the qualitative development of this education and its consolidation into the social fabric.

Critique of Human Rights Education Practices

Democratic/human rights education has taken, in some societies, a turn towards consumerism and individualism which breaks social bond. The culture of human rights is some-

times taught as only about filing complaints or lawsuits for the simplest disagreements between neighbors (thus burdening courts in seeking vengeance and not so much justice). In most countries, commitment to democracy and development is declining. There’s a need to consolidate civic education and up-bringing starting from Lebanese and Arab experiences.

The democratic and human rights principles are universal but education in terms of democracy and human rights is drowned in individualism. The psychological structures, traditions, expectations and special conditions of each society should be taken into consideration in order to convey the message.

Sometimes, for instance, training sessions are held about “conflict management” without distinguishing conflicts in relations between individuals and social groups on the one hand, and conflict in international relations on the other. One should take into account the Lebanese excess in accommodation. All issues are negotiable in Lebanon at the expense of the law, public interest and future generations. Unlimited compromise generates more conflicts. Therefore, one needs to establish norms of compromise, negotiation, and pacts to guarantee good social relations and safeguard public interest.

In some countries, deviations from human rights appear because the concept of “rights” is spreading with a lot of confusion in the family, school and among friends. Not all relations are based upon a contract. All human values should be taken as a whole, otherwise their essence is lost.

Most Arab countries are faced with the problem of combining religion and human rights in a way that does not exploit religion for political rivalries and mobilization, or to justify violence in the name of God.

The problem of the idea of human rights is the combination of individualism and collectivism. The main principles of the French revolution are “Liberty, equality, fraternity.” Liberty and equality are somewhat in progress,

but where is fraternity in the face of growing poverty, and the growing gap between the North and the South? Social and economic rights, the right to participate in political decisions, are the most marginalized and the least enforced in the world today.

The human rights ideology goes adrift because of growing individualism, and reduction of human relations to mere contracts. The major examples are the following:

1. *A citizen who complains:* When education in terms of citizenship is limited to conveying the mere form of rights without fostering a sense of initiative or participation or commitment, namely with youngsters, rights become consumption products in industrially developed countries. We witness the rise of a new generation of citizens (who did not fight for their freedoms) who are constantly complaining and expect services like in a first-class-hotel-country. This generation does not realize the hurdles to public policies, and the importance of initiative and participation in order to overcome these hurdles or to reduce them. Commitment today is declining among people who have reached a high degree of democratization after centuries of fighting for democracy. We fear that in developed countries, young people behave as consumers who benefit from the rights that others fought for, young people who behave as though they are in first-class hotels with democratic services. Democratic principles that have been acquired in those countries are in jeopardy if the young people's commitment decreases and fails to strengthen and protect democratic heritage.

2. *Rupture of the social bond:* When education in terms of citizenship is limited to rights and duties, it develops individualism and breaks the social bond. A child who asks for 'his' rights is often from shattered families. Not all human bonds ought to be contractual. Relations based on kinship, family ties, neighborly relations, friendship and love are all based on values that go beyond contracts and where giving

and taking are equal. Even in contracts, within a balance of rights and duties, personal considerations and psychological elements based on trust are often taken into account.

Social and economic rights are different from political and civil rights in the following aspects:

- they go beyond the mere contractual type of exchange and require a high degree of sacrifice for the general interest.
- they require a contribution in public expenses and fair taxes.
- they require field and direct participation of the civil society.

A quote from Victor Hugo's *Quatre-vingt-treize* (Ninety Three) illustrates this point:

The Republic means $2 + 2 = 4$, that is, I give each one what is rightfully his...

- But you should also give each one what is not his.
- What do you mean?
- I mean mutual and wide concessions that each should be willing to make for common interest and that all must be willing to make for each, which is the basis of social life.

3. *Turning law into a mere judicial aspect:* French author, Racine criticized in his play, *Les Plaideurs* (The Litigants), in XVII century France, the excessive use of lawsuits. This is excessively used in relations between individuals and in public matters exploiting the concept of rights in order to get even on a personal level or to slander a political opponent.

4. *Exploiting human rights in the international conflict:* The internationalization of human rights is a useful means to control violations and protect rights. However, it may lead to the marginalization of the United Nations and reinforce a new colonization in some countries which oppose the predominance of the super-powers.

5. *Religions and the legal basis*: Religions witness contradictions and confusions in practice or when exploited for political purpose. Religious values and heritage have helped the creation and spread of human rights. Religious principles are reference today for strengthening or contradicting trends or practices concerning human rights.

There are many researches in the West about the crisis of secularism and religions without frontiers, the clash of civilizations, sects, the management of cultural pluralism (with religious components sometimes). Religious pluralism may be a source of interaction and enrichment or it may be a source of violation of human rights.

Religions in the Middle East suffer from situations which involve, in turn, dialogue and conflict with historical, social, cultural and traditional backgrounds. Zionism was created in the name of religion. Religion is used to justify fanatic trends, social traditions, or authoritarian practices. It is sometimes used as well to prevent the ratification of international human rights instruments.

We often tend to forget as well that atheist trends in contemporary history, such as fascism, Nazism and communism were a source of violation of human rights. They did not consider the human being as an individual value in the image of God but a mere producer or an efficient element in a public grouping.

New inventions raise major issues as concerns ethical values – namely as concerns artificial procreation and the science of genetics – which were the very foundation of religions.

The world today needs to build a harmonious relation between religions and human rights, through the concept of the Rule of Law – instead of relations based on contradictions or exploitation of religion in order to run away from basic rights or to justify the violation of fundamental rights.

Our major challenges in human rights education are these questions: How can human rights be *universal* in their principles and *specific* in their application and integration into the very core of people's cultures? How can we return to the very origins of the human rights instruments as principles, practices, education and culture for future generations?

Endnotes

1. *The Official Gazette*, no. 27, 22/06/2000, pages 2114-2195.

2. The Center for Pedagogical Research and Development, decree no. 151/96, 28/02/1996; the committee including: Wahîd Abû Fadil, Elias Qatâr, Abbâs Abû Sâlih, Hasan Munaymnah, Ahmad Hotait, Antoine Messarra, Joseph Abi Râshid.

3. Antoine Messarra, "Behaviorisms" in Antoine Messarra, editor, *Tomorrow's Citizen, Patterns of Civic Education*, Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace (Beirut: Oriental Library, 1995), pages 31-46.

4. Antoine Messarra, *The School of Respect: Pedagogical and Applied Behaviors and Acts*, training lecture, the Sts Cœurs School in Fâkihah (Bekaa-Lebanon), 12 September 2002.