

Report on the Revisions Made to Two Pearson GCSE Textbooks

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Introduction

This report (“Report”) presents a summary and analysis of recent significant revisions made to two Pearson GCSE textbooks on the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The two textbooks are:

Hilary Brash, *Conflict in the Middle East, c1945-1995* Edexcel GCSE (9-1) History, Series Editor: Angela Leonard (London: Pearson, 2016).

Hilary Brash, *The Middle East: Conflict, Crisis and Change, 1917-2012*, Edexcel International GCSE (9-1) History, Series Editor: Nigel Kelly (London: Pearson, 2017).

The majority of the text is identical in these two books, abbreviated below as “CME” and “MECCC” respectively.

We decided to examine these textbooks because of media reports suggesting that their contents had been revised as a result of an external intervention. (See also the statement by the Board of Deputies of British Jews reproduced as an Annex to this Report).

We are senior academics in Middle East Studies. One of us, John Chalcraft, both researches and teaches the Israel/Palestine conflict. We draw on our knowledge of the field, on our training and experience in research, writing and teaching, and on consultations with relevant experts.

We have compared the original versions (the “OVs”) of the two texts with the revised versions (the “RVs”). Note that the OVs were published in 2016 and 2017; the RVs have been published more recently (we believe in 2020), but the publication date has not been updated. There is no indication in the RVs that these each constitute a ‘revised edition’, or a ‘revised and updated edition’, or a ‘new edition, revised and updated’. Indeed, the ISBN numbers on the OVs and the RVs remain unchanged.

Our method has been simple but exhaustive – a sentence by sentence comparison of the OVs and RVs. A similar approach was used for photographs and maps, for which we have recorded a description of the changes that have been made. We are able to make the documentary evidence of this comparison available for scrutiny.

This Report offers a summary and analysis of our findings. We begin with some indications of the scale and direction of the revisions, before moving on to some examples.

Summary of Findings

1. Scale of the changes

The revisions to the OVs are extensive, numerous, and detailed. There are changes on almost every page, often multiple changes. In CME (with 84 pages of history) we have counted 294 changes, in MECCC (with 104 pages of history) over 360. There are thus on average more than three changes per page, and the re-writing on some pages is particularly extensive. Alterations have been made to text, timelines, maps and photographs, as well as to sample student essays, and to the questions that students are asked to answer.

2. The direction of change

‘Change’ is a neutral term. It can be for the better where an inaccurate statement of fact is corrected, or an evident omission is rectified. Very few of the changes that we assessed fall into these categories.

In assessing the changes that we found there was one dimension on which almost all of the changes could be arrayed, namely from which perspective the history of Israel/Palestine should be told. In assessing the direction of change we used a simple scheme, based on whether a reasonable, broadly informed person would understand a change to be pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian or neutral between those positions. The terms ‘pro-Israeli’ and ‘pro-Palestinian’ are defined in their most generally accepted sense – as characterizing an account which exonerates Israelis or Palestinians from blame, fault or wrongdoing.

On this basis we found (a) a small number of changes that are broadly neutral, (b) around half a dozen changes that may be described as mildly pro-Palestinian, and (c) the remainder, the vast majority, that are pro-Israeli. The net effect is that the content and substance of the textbooks has been significantly altered. The RVs are emphatically more pro-Israeli than the OVs.

We note at the outset, as a general principle, that very small changes, even the change of a single word, can make a substantial difference. For example, the Deir Yassin massacre (in which Israeli forces killed at least 107 Palestinian civilians) is in the MECCC OV (p.20) described as ‘one of the worst atrocities of the [1948] war’. In the RV, however, the word ‘atrocities’ has been replaced by ‘acts’. No detail is too small. In the OVs, for instance, a photograph is captioned, ‘Children crossing overflowing sewage in the Jabalya Refugee Camp in Gaza’. In the RVs, however, the reference to sewage has been removed, preventing students from obtaining information about an important fact of Palestinian life in Gaza, and rendering the photograph very difficult to interpret (CME p.80).

3. Categories and examples of changes

The remainder of the Report provides just a few illustrative examples of the changes that have been made in the revision from the OVs to the RVs. They have been chosen for their ability to illustrate the main categories of changes that we have identified. In general, we will give the page references for CME only, though almost all are present in MECCC also.

a) The Description of Violence

References to Jewish and/or Israeli violence and aggression have been removed or softened, while references to Arab and/or Palestinian violence or aggression have been added or intensified. For example, in the OV we find the accurate statement that during the first intifada of 1987-93 'The arms and fingers of [Palestinian] child stone throwers were broken [by Israeli soldiers]'. In the RV this reference to a well-documented fact has been removed (CME p.81).

In the OVs, the word 'terrorism' is applied much more frequently to Arabs and Palestinians than to Jews or Israelis (although over the years the number of Palestinian and Arab civilians killed by Israeli forces is much greater than the number of Jewish or Israeli civilians killed by Palestinian forces). In the OV of CME (and MECCC is similar) we have counted 10 references to Jewish terrorism and 32 to Palestinian terrorism (i.e. to the words 'terror', 'terrorist', and 'terrorism'). In the RV, these figures have become 4 references to the terrorism of Jewish groups (all references to 'Jewish terrorism' and 'Zionist terrorism' have been removed) and 61 references to Palestinian terrorism. Jewish 'terrorists' become 'paramilitaries' (CME p.11) or 'guerrillas' (p.15), whereas Palestinian or Arab 'militants' frequently become 'terrorists'. The OVs take a neutral view on this terminology by saying that 'Fedayeen were Palestinian freedom fighters or terrorists, depending on one's point of view'. The neutral view is appropriate because of the lack of scholarly consensus on this issue. However, in the RVs, this has been replaced by the statement that 'Fedayeen were terrorists who fought for Palestinian freedom' (CME p.26). In summary, the RVs unjustifiably amplify the extent of Palestinian violence, and play down the extent of Israeli violence.

b) The Context of Violence

Violence by either side requires interpretation. The revisions consistently single out Israeli violence for contextualization and explanation, while in the treatment of Palestinian violence, contextualization and explanation have been removed. For example, in the CME OV an extract from an Israeli reservist's criticism of the IDF for its violent tactics during the first Intifada is quoted as a 'Source'. This is replaced in the RVs by an Israeli newspaper extract saying that Palestinian violence justified Israeli force (CME p.82).

The same logic in reverse is applied to a passage in the MECCC OV which notes that 'as Jews migrated in unexpectedly high numbers to Palestine tension with the outraged local Arab population led to clashes.' In the RV, the same passage drops the context and reads: 'there was tension with the local Arab population some of whom began to instigate violent clashes' (MECCC p.2). This is a typical example of how the RVs remove contextual explanations from statements about Arab or Palestinian violence. The effect is to make Israeli violence look more justifiable and rational, and Palestinian violence look less justifiable and more irrational.

c) The Treatment of Suffering

The textbooks have been revised in ways which diminish our sense of how Arabs and Palestinians suffered, and increase our sense of how Jews and Israelis suffered. In the OVs,

for instance, a single paragraph on Palestinian suffering under military occupation (CME p.80) has been extensively re-written.

First, we read in the OVs that 'For ordinary Palestinians, life in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank was harsh.' In the RVs 'ordinary Palestinians' is downgraded to 'many ordinary Palestinians' and the word 'harsh' is replaced with the less severe word, 'difficult' (whereas 'harsh' is *retained* for the conditions for Jewish immigrants: CME p. 28). Second, the OVs state that 'Living conditions were crowded, basic and unhygienic', while the RVs, against much evidence, removes the word 'unhygienic'. Third, while the OVs do not make any claims about what Israeli rule meant for Palestinian living standards, the RVs make the highly contestable claim that there had been 'major improvements in the standard of living, health and education under Israeli rule'. Fourth, the OVs state that 'To make money, many Palestinians had to work in Israel, where they did unskilled jobs even if they were well educated.' This is revised in the RVs to read 'While some Palestinians benefited from higher wages from working in Israel, they often did less skilled jobs even if they were well educated'. The revised text thus unjustifiably removes the element of compulsion.

There are even two further edits in this short paragraph. In the OVs we read that 'They [Palestinians] had to pay Israeli taxes but they had no say in the Israeli government. They also had the daily humiliation of being under Israeli military occupation.' In the RVs, this has been softened to read: 'They had to pay Israeli taxes (some of which were used for public services), but they had no say in the Israeli government. Living under Israeli military occupation was also a daily humiliation for some.' These numerous edits are concentrated into one half of a paragraph; and all debatably and unjustifiably play down Palestinian suffering.

Other edits down-playing the impact on Palestinians are scattered in otherwise unaltered text. Thus a 'Source' description by a Haganah member of the mass expulsion of traumatised Arabs in the 1948-9 war has been replaced by another describing the much more peaceful departure of a single Arab family (CME. p.25). Similarly, an OV 'Source' description of the horrifying expulsion of a Palestinian family in 1971 has been replaced by another containing a mention of a 1967 expulsion (but with no reference to violence) as part of some reminiscences of ordinary life (CME, p.60).

The RV does not, however, water down accounts of Jewish or Israeli suffering, and sometimes further intensifies them, for example by the addition as a 'Source' document of an excerpt from a 1992 academic article on the psychological impact of missile attacks on Israeli civilians (CME p.87).

d) The Selection of Facts

Across a range of issues, both facts and arguments that support Israel have been added, while facts that support Palestine have been removed. Thus the OVs note that in 1967 Israel 'refused Jordan's offer of a ceasefire until it had control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem'. This fact is commonly cited to support a well-known argument that Israel acted aggressively in that conflict. In the RVs, this fact has been excised (CME p.48), making the more pro-Palestinian interpretation look much less plausible. Or, in regards to a key debate

about 1948, a 'Source' document with evidence that in 1948-9 Palestinians were *not* told to leave their homes by Arab leaders is replaced by a report that they *were* told by Arab leaders to do so (CME, p.25). Here, evidence for a widely accepted interpretation for the departure of the Palestinians from Mandate Palestine in 1947-48 is removed and replaced with evidence for a heavily contested pro-Israeli explanation. This selection of the facts ignores contrary evidence, and distorts the historical record. No such deletions or replacements are made to facts cited to support common pro-Israeli arguments. Indeed, we could not find a single instance where such facts had been removed or replaced. On the contrary, facts capable of generating cognitive dissonance with a pro-Israeli account are carefully excised, as for example when 'anger about Israel's advance into Egypt' is replaced by 'hostility towards Israel and her allies' (CME, p.69).

Another, more subtle example, runs as follows. In the OVs, we read that

For many devout ['very religious' in MECCC] Jews, Israel's victory in the Six Day War was a sign from God that the ancestral homeland has been restored and it was their duty to settle in the West Bank and Gaza. Others were encouraged to live in occupied territories by generous Israeli subsidies and tax breaks.

In the RVs, these uncontroversial statements have nonetheless been edited to read:

For some religious Jews, Israel's victory in the Six Day War was a sign from God that the ancestral homeland has been restored and it was their duty to live there. Others were encouraged by Israeli subsidies and tax breaks, or because housing was less expensive (CME p.80).

We note the differences. 'Many' devout [or very religious] Jews has become only 'some' religious Jews; the word 'settle' has been replaced by the more positive word 'live'; the terms 'West Bank' and 'Gaza', which might draw attention to Palestinian realities, have been removed; the word 'generous', which could draw attention to the activities of the Israeli state, has been removed from the phrase about subsidies, and a fact about cheap housing has been added, which makes settlement appear more rational. Finally, the phrase 'occupied territories', which is generally accepted usage, but refers to an illegal Israeli activity, has been removed altogether. The individual changes are subtle, but the overall effect is dramatic: Jewish settlement and Israeli military occupation are made to appear reasonable and contrary evidence is ignored and removed.

In all these ways and more facts are curated carefully in order to craft a pro-Israeli narrative.

e) Selecting Interpretations

Biased treatment similar to that applied to facts takes place when it comes to deleting or selecting interpretations of events. The RVs have, for instance, deleted the following statement that appears in the OVs: 'Even if it was not the intention, one modern Israeli historian has written that Plan D 'paved the way for the ethnic cleansing operation in Palestine'' (CME p.19). In the RVs this well-known interpretation of Plan D, clearly inconsistent with a pro-Israeli position, is simply removed altogether. Elsewhere, a description by Avi Shlaim, a Jewish Israeli who is Professor of International Relations at

Oxford, of how Netanyahu deliberately undermined the Oslo accords (MECCC p.97) is, again, simply removed.

f) Double Standards on Perceptions and Controversy

A consistent pattern is that potentially unjust Israeli actions are dealt with using the language of perception and controversy, while potentially unjust Palestinian actions are dealt with using the language of fact and objective certainty. Thus a statement that Palestinians were evicted from East Jerusalem at the hands of Israelis has been edited to say that they '*felt* that they had been forcibly evicted' (CME p.53 *emphasis added*). By contrast, in the case of Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza, their previous 'expulsion' decades earlier, becomes a matter of reported fact, not of perception (CME p.80).

On the 1967 War we read in the OV that 'Given the aggressive actions of the Arabs before the war, Israel's attack on 5 June was seen as a justifiable pre-emptive strike, and it was admired for its brilliant tactics' (CME p.47). This view is thus reported as an objective, uncontested fact, even though there is no scholarly consensus on this issue; and it does remain in the RV. However, on the next page of the OV an alternative perspective on the origin of the war is given under the heading 'An Alternative Interpretation: Egypt's Point of view'. Even though this presentation already carries less authority than the simple statement of Arab aggression on the previous page, this is not enough for the reviser, who has rewritten it under the new heading as 'Debate over the Six Day War', omitting a key Egyptian claim and adding several Israeli ones.

Taken individually, each treatment may seem plausible. When the examples are arrayed and compared, however, it is impossible not to conclude that double standards have been applied to describing the actions of the different sides in the conflict.

g) Distorting Definitions

The description of any situation is dependent on terms being used in their normal sense. The RVs introduce distorted terminology in ways which serve a pro-Israeli viewpoint. For instance, in the OVs, Jewish settlers are defined as 'Jews who lived in new settlements built in the West Bank and Gaza' (CME p.80). In the RVs, Jewish settlers are defined as 'Jews returning to villages they were expelled from in 1948, and others building new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.' The numbers, those returning, conceptually added to the settler total by this attempted change in definition is tiny as a proportion of the 600,000 now living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The function of this revision is presumably to supply a fig leaf of apparent legitimacy to what is a major violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that 'The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies'. The RVs offer, in effect, a grossly distorted definition of this key term.

h) Changing the Law

The OVs correctly summarize a cornerstone of international law since 1949 in pointing out that 'international law states that a country cannot annex or indefinitely occupy territory gained by force'. In the RVs, however, this is edited to read, 'Some argue that international

law states that a country cannot annex or indefinitely occupy territory gained by force' (CME p.52). This change clearly replaces an accurate and unambiguous description of the internationally accepted legal position by a 'fudge' that implicitly throws doubt on that position. In order to leave conceptual room for a legal interpretation that is unique to Israel, this statement radically misleads students on a key aspect of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. Here again we find an unjustified decision on revision which operates in a one-sided manner.

i) Directing Students

A final feature of the revision process refers to the suggested Activities to which students are directed in order to extend their knowledge. These too have been changed, in a consistently pro-Israeli direction.

Thus in the OVs we have 'Write down what point you think Zapiro is making and whether you agree with his [pro-Palestinian] interpretations of the Six Day War. What extra evidence would help you to make up your mind?' In the RVs, not only have some of the facts that might support Zapiro's cartoon been removed, but the Activity is revised as 'Write down what point you think Zapiro is making and, based on what you have learned, what information disagrees with his interpretation?' (CME p.49). Students are thus no longer asked to adjudicate between interpretations. Instead they are steered towards supplying information opposing a pro-Palestinian one.

There are also subtle changes which steer students towards pro-Israeli interpretations. For instance, a sample student essay has been edited to help justify a pro-Israeli interpretation of the 1982 war. In the OV MECCC, the sample student essay claims that an attempted assassination in London gave Israel 'the excuse that it needed to go ahead'. In the RV, the word 'excuse' has been removed, and the putative student has now written 'Israel decided to go ahead' (MECCC p.83). Even in the sample student essays, therefore, it is clear that students are being directed towards pro-Israeli interpretations in the revised textbooks.

4. Conclusion

This Report aimed at determining what revisions have been made to these GCSE textbooks, and whether or not the revision process has been fair and impartial. Although the publication details give no discernible indication that a revision has been carried out, we have found numerous, extensive and detailed changes, which make these revised GCSE textbooks not simply more pro-Israeli than their original versions but dangerously misleading.

The examples reproduced in this Report are representative of the extraordinary number of changes that have been made to these books. They illustrate our finding - that this process has not rectified bias, but has increased it. We show above how the revisions have consistently under-played and explained Jewish and Israeli violence, while amplifying and leaving unexplained Arab and Palestinian violence. They have extended or left intact accounts of Jewish and Israeli suffering, while downplaying and editing accounts of Arab and Palestinian suffering.

The revisions have changed the presentation of the facts in ways which bolster pro-Israeli narratives, and make pro-Palestinian narratives less credible. Explanations of the events recorded have also been treated in a selective manner, with potentially pro-Palestinian interpretations removed, and pro-Israeli interpretations augmented. The revisions exhibit troubling double-standards at a very basic level: potentially unjust Israeli actions are dealt with in the language of perception and controversy, while potentially unjust Palestinian actions are dealt with in the language of fact and objective certainty. The revisions also offer distorted definitions of key terms, such as Jewish 'settlers', and mislead students about matters on which there is a wide consensus, such as international law. The revisions direct students towards activities and interpretations that favour and explore a pro-Israeli narrative.

In sum, we have found the process to have been biased and the outcome misleading. The outcome is two textbooks that distort the historical record, failing to offer students a balanced view of the conflict. These books, we conclude, are not fit for purpose. School children should not be supplied with propaganda under the guise of education.

Annex

A statement issued by the British Board of Jewish Deputies (7.9.2020) includes this description of the process by which these two books were revised:

After initial constructive conversations with Pearson, the Board of Deputies worked together with UKLFI [UK Lawyers for Israel] to produce thorough comments on both textbooks, which Pearson have received and acted upon. After detailed and lengthy process over a number of months, the books have now been published for students to use in the 2020-1 academic year.

Board of Deputies of British Jews President Marie van der Zyl said: "We applaud Pearson for their openness to constructive feedback and willingness to revise these textbooks. We are pleased with the final material which gives a balanced and accurate portrayal of the Middle East conflict. I would like to pay specific tribute and thanks to UKLFI for their hard work on this project and their collaborative effort with us to get these textbooks to where they needed to be."