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## **Parochial education in a global world? Teaching history and civics in Lebanon**

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*Abstract: This exploratory article is based on a research project which runs from 2011 to 2013 that examines how global processes are expressed in educational policies and pedagogical texts in Lebanon, Sweden and Turkey by focusing on school subjects like civics, history, geography, and religion. In this text we discuss the development of education in Lebanon, the development of history and civics after the civil war, and on opinions about these school subjects in order to make a preliminary analysis of how the future Lebanese citizen is depicted in policies, curricula, and textbooks. Lebanon is interesting because of its unique education system in which foreign international institutions rather than national ones have the task of preparing individuals for a globalized world. Material for the study were collected from a sample of curricula used in private and public or national schools for history and civics/citizenship education in grade 8 as well as interviews and conference proceedings and conversations with activists, teachers and principals. We also reviewed findings of relevant empirical studies conducted in Lebanon. Our data collection was guided by three questions: how is the right citizen depicted in the Lebanese material? How is the relationship between national and global perspectives treated in guidance documents and pedagogical texts? What civic rights and obligations are given attention and what individuals are included/excluded? Our preliminary findings imply that there is no consensus on the importance of teaching a unified history and civics book and subjects in Lebanon. Other findings indicate that private and international schools have a greater impact than national schools on preparing Lebanese students as future citizens.*

KEYWORDS: HISTORY, CIVICS, LEBANON, FUTURE CITIZEN

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Leadership and Continuing Professional Development for school principals and teachers. She has presented at regional and international conferences and among her recent publications there are *Principals' Views on Teachers' Professional Development*, *School based professional development in one Lebanese school* (forthcoming); *How much is too much* (2012), and *Cultures of engagement in challenging circumstances: Four Lebanese Primary Schools in urban Beirut* (2012).

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## Introduction

‘We are in a collective permanent amnesia in this country’ photo-journalist Chérine Yazbeck insisted on a satellite link from Beirut when interviewed on the French channel TV5. The program, *Maghreb Orient Express*, aired February 3, 2013 was devoted to discussing two new documentary films about Lebanon, Frédéric Laffont’s *Liban, des guerres et des hommes*, and Joana Hadjithomas’ and Khalil Joreige’s *The Lebanese Rocket Society* with the three filmmakers themselves. Laffont said he was shocked when he realized that there was still no school material teaching school-children about the civil war between 1975 and 1990. He wanted to give voice to ordinary Lebanese and their memories of this period. Joreige, on the other hand, said that neither amnesia nor memories was Lebanon’s problem, but history. ‘There is no official history of the war. No one has been made accountable for what happened during the war, and a general amnesty was given to all combatants after the signing of the peace agreement in Taif in 1990’, he said. Yazbeck underlined that all Lebanese, all families, have their own history of the war – an intimate history - but a common history is rejected. She compared this to the school material produced by France and Germany on their common history, their conflicts and how conflicts were resolved.<sup>1</sup> She also wondered if the general Lebanese public wants to know what really happened during the war. For many people it might be too painful to relive history.

Lebanon is a country with great educational challenges, as indicated by this television program. It is a small but politically and socially complex country which is - and for a long time has been – open to the world.<sup>2</sup> For thousands of years Lebanese have voyaged, worked in and migrated to all corners of the world, and have throughout history been influenced by passing or settling migrants, travellers, and conquerors. Today far more Lebanese live outside the country than inside. Foreign and semi-foreign educational institutions in the country abound and exercise strong influence over the hearts and minds of many citizens while national public educational institutions are weak and often seen as inferior. There are seventeen recognized religious communities<sup>3</sup> which are extremely important for how political life is organized and for the civil identity of citizens. There is, for example, no civil and secular family law outside the laws of each community. The country has been strongly and simultaneously linked to processes of internationalization and communalization.

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<sup>1</sup> See Stober (2011) for a discussion of the joint French-German textbook discussions.

<sup>2</sup> Lebanon is about a third the size of Belgium. There are about 3.5 million people living in the country and it is estimated that around 4 million Lebanese live outside. All numbers are estimates. Demographic issues in Lebanon are politically very sensitive and there has been no real census since 1932.

<sup>3</sup> The politically most important religious communities on the Muslim side are the Sunni, the Shiite, and the Druze and on the Christian side the Maronite and the Greek Orthodox.

## The Future Citizens research project

Material for this article has been collected within a research project the aim of which is to examine how globalization processes are expressed in educational policies and pedagogical texts in Lebanon, Sweden and Turkey.<sup>4</sup> The empirical focus of the research is school subjects like civics, history, geography, and religion in the later years of the compulsory school, particularly the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>5</sup> The starting point of the research project is our belief that school remains an important educational arena where the citizens of the future both emerge and are constructed. We try to find out how the 'right' kind of citizen is presented and depicted and what values are highlighted concerning a national and a global level in textbooks and educational policies. In this project we are not investigating normative aspects about global citizens or global citizenship.<sup>6</sup> We are rather examining how future citizens are envisioned in policies and pedagogic texts. Furthermore, we are not focusing on the three classical didactic questions – what, why, how - which are (and ought to be) important to teachers. Instead we have turned the didactic questions into research questions connected to curricula and pedagogic texts. We want to find out: What is being taught? Why has this choice been made?<sup>7</sup>

In our research project Lebanon poses a challenge, and even a counter case, since national policies are either absent, weak or non-enforceable. Furthermore, school books in many school subjects vary in terms of language used and perspectives taken. At the same time Lebanon provides a very interesting case to explore links between globalization and education for several reasons. First of all the country has a very long history of foreign institutions in its educational system, secondly because education has been market-oriented for a long time and thirdly because of the great heterogeneity in educational philosophy and didactics in schools across the country. Finally Lebanon is interesting from a globalization point of view since many schools have strong transnational links and produce pupils for whom higher education and/or employment outside the country is both common and natural.

In the overall research project curriculum theory (Englund 1986, Gundhem & Hopmann 1998, Lundgren 1989) is an important analytical frame of reference. The fundamental questions in curriculum theory - the formulation of educational objectives, the selection of knowledge for learning and the development of methods for teaching - contribute analytical entry points for studies of the governance and

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<sup>4</sup> The research project *Future citizens in pedagogic texts and educational policies. Examples from Lebanon, Sweden and Turkey*, is financed by the Swedish Research Council's Committee for Educational Sciences (2011-2013). In addition to Rima Bahous, Mona Nabhani and Annika Rabo, who focus on the Lebanese case, Marie Carlson and Tuba Kanci (focusing on Turkey) and Sabine Gruber (focusing on Sweden) make up the research team.

<sup>5</sup> The use of terminology and the content for the school subjects in Turkey, Sweden and Lebanon are not totally comparable.

<sup>6</sup> For critical discussion of global citizenship education see for example special issue of *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 2011 Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4 edited by Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti.

<sup>7</sup> Professor Ola Halldén has inspired us to broaden our understanding of didactics and research.

organization of citizenship education in schools. These questions also draw attention to the tensions between different decision-making levels (international, national, individual schools, local conditions, specific classroom contexts) and different actors (politicians, professionals, citizens in society) and their importance for curriculum issues.

Most formal educational contexts have both national and local guidance documents that regulate classroom practices. In Lebanon there are no local, but only national documents for the public schools (Kobeissy 1999). Private schools, however, do have local documents. Such documents belong to one and the same genre and are interesting to study since they are produced on arenas with an explicit policy ambition and use explicitly normative language (Lundgren 1989). Like pedagogical texts, these documents contribute – in combination with other media that students interact with on a daily basis, both inside and outside the school world – to the shaping of views about what is normal and desirable (c.f. Apple 1979, Carlson 2002, Eilard 2008, Mattlar 2008, Luke 1990, Popkewitz 1998).

This article constitutes a first exploration of some of the material we have collected in and on Lebanon. We lean on previous research on education in Lebanon but mainly on material such as a sample of curricula and schoolbooks used in private and public schools for history and civics/citizenship education in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We have also interviewed principals, school teachers, researchers and experts on education, NGO activists working on civic awareness and employees in the Ministry of Education.<sup>8</sup> Proceedings of and conversations during relevant education conferences are also part of our data. Our data collection was guided by the following questions:

- How is the 'right' citizen presented and depicted in the Lebanese material?
- How is the relationship between national and global perspectives treated in relation to the 'citizen' in guidance documents for schools and pedagogical texts?
- What civic rights and obligations are given attention and what individuals are included or excluded at both national and global level?

In this article we will focus on the development of education in Lebanon, the development of history and civics after the civil war, and on opinions about these school subjects. Finally we will highlight the challenges we face in our continued work and how we plan to proceed in light of our research interest in the construction of the 'future citizen'.

## **Schools and education in Lebanon**

Modern education started in Lebanon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the establishment of schools founded by Christian organizations from Europe and the USA. Catholic families mainly turned to French schools while Sunni Muslim and Greek Orthodox families mainly turned to British and American schools (Bahous, Nabhani, & Cochran

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<sup>8</sup> In Lebanon it is more correctly called Ministry of Education and Higher Education but we use the shorter name in this article

2011). This internal Christian division has largely continued until today. Muslim families who could not afford private education sent their children to public schools. At the end of the Ottoman period all the religious groups in Lebanon had their own educational institutions (Bahous et al. 2011:145). Although a law from 1913 demanded that local authorities set up schools all over the country, the rural areas were educationally disadvantaged. This public-private, and urban-rural, dichotomy, where public (and rural) schools are considered inferior to private (and urban) ones - continued after independence in 1943 and has persisted until today (Bahous & Nabhani 2008).

But the separation between the public and the private sector is not total in Lebanon. During the French mandate private schools were subsidized by the state in return for accepting poor students which released the state from the obligation of building and running schools for all (Bahous & Nabhani 2008). This policy has continued until today. Private schools with public economic support has to register with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and their curricula is generally close to the national Lebanese for elementary school in order for students to be able to sit for the national 6<sup>th</sup> grade examinations, the so called *certificate*.<sup>9</sup> Private schools and private subsidized schools can be run as private companies or as part of a secular or a religious organization (Bahous et al. 2011). Some schools are run and owned by foreign countries or organizations. Schools mainly teaching in French and/or following the French school system still dominate over schools mainly teaching in English and/or following the American or the British school system, but the latter is gaining ground since English is seen as a globally useful language (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani 2011). Many Lebanese are trilingual in Arabic, English and French (Shaaban 1997; Bahous et al. 2011) and see this as a good way to be competitive on the national, regional and global job market.

Public spending on education is low<sup>10</sup>; the private school sector is larger than the public, and it has increased at the expense of public school enrolment. For the school year 2011-12 public schools had about 236 000 students enrolled while the private schools had about 636 000 students. Out of these about 126 000 were enrolled in private subsidized schools. The number of students in such schools has remained constant since the end of the civil war (El Amine 2013).<sup>11</sup> Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are educated in UNRWA schools.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This official exam has ceased to exist since the 1970s.

<sup>10</sup> According to statistics from UNDP Lebanon only spent an average of 2.6% of its GDP on education between 1995 and 2005, while Cyprus spent an average of 6.3% and the USA 5.1% (UNDP 2008:21)

<sup>11</sup> Adnan El Amine links the decreasing rates of enrolment in public schools to a new law in 2001 which put less emphasis on the professional educational competence for teachers employed in the public sector schools. Short term contracts also became more common causing a de-professionalization in public schools which made many parents try to find money for private schools. The problem of teachers and their educational background and competence is outside the scope of this article, but still of great relevance for understanding the balance between public and private education in Lebanon.



Many Lebanese parents are willing to make great economic sacrifices to be able to send their children to a 'good school'. Tuition in private schools ranges between USD 3000 and 12 000. Schoolbooks and school material also have to be paid for in both public and private schools. Books used in public schools are however subsidized and quite cheap while they can be very expensive in private schools. Many parents also spend money on private tutors. 'Good education' and education from schools with a 'good reputation' is very important when considering university education and future careers. At the same time the high costs of living in Lebanon has led to increasing economic differences in the country where more families struggle to survive and some families grown increasingly rich. The Lebanese middle class is today squeezed and often sees migration as the best choice for their children. Salaries in the country are not compatible to the costs of living. Unqualified workers can get around USD 400 per month while fully employed teachers get between USD 800 and 1000 per month. This is still not considered as a good income for people with a (often costly) university education.

From the 1950s until the outbreak of the civil war Lebanon used to be a very important regional educational hub. In comparison to the rest of the region it had excellent educational institutions on all levels. It still has some of the best schools and universities in the region but competition has increased and currently universities recruit less from the region.<sup>13</sup> Lebanon, as a small country with few natural resources but a well-educated population, has always been influenced by regional and international changes. With the 15 year long civil war a growing number of institutions in the oil-producing countries replaced many services that Lebanon was famous for whether in banking, education, industry, agriculture and others (UNDP 2008). Lebanese products - which were once popular in the Arab markets - also faced competition from products from OECD countries, and from former Soviet republics. Lebanese industry, furthermore, suffered competition from Chinese products (Labaki 2003). However, in the 1990s, Lebanese companies and individuals were successful regionally and internationally in many other fields and this brought revenue to Lebanese families. Several studies found that the 1990s showed an increase in unemployment and emigration (Labaki 2001; Kasparian 2001; Ministry of Labor 2000). Remittances from emigrants are extremely important for the Lebanese economy. In 2010 they made up almost 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (Fargues 2013:17).<sup>14</sup> At the same time there are many labour migrants in Lebanon working in domestic service, in agriculture and in construction.

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Relief and Work Agency, UNRWA, is a special agency devoted to support Palestinian refugees. Its schools used to have a good reputation until the early 1980s. Now drop-out and repeater rates are increasing (El-Madi 1996).

<sup>13</sup> There are about forty universities in this small country and many cater the considerable diaspora. Many of these universities are not internationally accredited or recognized.

<sup>14</sup> This level of remittances to Lebanon is the highest in the world, according to Fargues (2013:17).

Education in Lebanon is in principle obligatory until the age of 16, but the law is not enforced. Furthermore, reported enrolment rates for public schools cannot always be trusted since drop out rates are high in certain areas. Considering the poor quality of education in many economically deprived areas of the country and considering the low level of public expenditure on education, literacy rates are surprisingly high. According to a UNDP report on education and citizenship in Lebanon (2008:21) the adult literacy rate was 88.5 % in 2004.

The Lebanese school system is geared to pass often gruelling examinations. Apart from yearly or bi-annual exams there are the important 9<sup>th</sup> grade *brevet* and the 12<sup>th</sup> grade *baccalaureate* which are organized and controlled by the Ministry of Education. The Lebanese authorities do not recognize foreign secondary school diploma for students who want to enter national Lebanese universities or become part of Lebanese professional associations. In order to become a public employee one needs to pass the two national examinations (UNDP 2008). Many pupils in private schools sit for both the national and foreign examinations like the *French* or *International baccalaureate* or the US influenced *high school preparatory* program. Many Lebanese pupils thus struggle with simultaneously following at least two curricula. The state does not have monopoly on textbooks and does not produce its own books except for civics. In many of the private schools where French or English is the language of instruction texts in teaching history and civics are often produced in, and focus on, other parts of the world (Abi Fadel 1993). All the above means that many Lebanese students may be less familiar with the history of Lebanon than with the history of the rest of the world. Many private schools can thus be said to foster citizens who are globalized and who have been inoculated with the need to be physically mobile to earn a living.

While Lebanon, as has been briefly described above, has developed its own particular education system it is, of course, simultaneously influenced by global educational trends and policies. The Lebanese situation is an extreme example of educational heterogeneity where 'national' interests are very weak and where the various communities, interest groups or foreign organizations push their own interests through their own schools - or have them pushed upon their children. From that point of view the country has had a globalized and liberal educational policy since its birth where the choice (of parents) has played an important role in political rhetoric as Lebanon prepares students to compete in the regional and international job market (cf. Carnoy 1999). Spring (2009:1) notes that international educational organizations exert direct and indirect influence on national education systems whether in promoting concepts such as 'lifelong learning, global migration and brain circulation' or promoting English as the language of global business or promoting information and communication technology, or promoting institutions such as NGOs that work on human rights, environmental and female issues. Lebanon is part of all these developments and receives experts or aid from institutions that influence education

policy such as the World Bank, UNESCO, USAID and regional development organizations.<sup>15</sup>

## **History and civics after the civil war**

In 1991, at the end of the civil war, the so called Taif Agreement - concerning issues for the future of Lebanon - was signed by all the warring parties (Azar 2005). Private education would be protected but state supervision would be reinforced, and the quality of the national Lebanese University would be improved. The Taif agreement was followed by a major educational reform in 1993 which resulted in modifying the school structure and subject content in all pre-university education. But the new curriculum was mandatory only in public schools. This means that the majority of the Lebanese students are not touched by this reform. Closer supervision over private schools was never achieved.

One of the important decisions of the Taif agreement was to unify and standardize history and civics textbooks and that these books would be used by all Lebanese students in public schools and by students in private schools sitting for the national examinations. A special committee was set up which included representatives of various religious and political groups, in order to achieve a common curriculum and unified textbooks in history. It was felt that this was necessary to heal the wounds from the war and to build a new common ground for the country.

## **The struggle over history**

The objectives for teaching history were many and both vague and precise. They included: ‘raising national awareness, developing the national collective memory, recognizing the importance of the Lebanese culture and the contribution of the Lebanese in the broader Arabic civilization, recognizing the impairment that had been caused by internal disputes, identifying the role played by foreign powers, extending appreciation toward religious values (Christianity and Islam), and recognizing the treachery entailed in Zionism (Nehme 2006:47-48). These objectives combine what Barton and Levstik call the identification stance and the moral response stand but much less the analytic stance which they see as crucial to ‘identify the connections, relationships, and structures that tie together individual events or pieces of evidence’ (2004:69). These identifications were clearly the very bones of contention in a post-war Lebanon where no one was made accountable for crimes committed. It is, thus, not very surprising that the special committee charged with history and civics curricula had great difficulties. The Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) which is closely affiliated with the Ministry of Education, imposed many

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<sup>15</sup> Lebanon has received – and still receives – aid and loans for the development of public education and NGOs and PVOs also support various educational institutions in the country. A closer look at this aid and support in terms of scope and conditions would be very interesting but it is outside the scope of this article.

modification on the committee. The work was hindered by long deliberations followed by resignations of some members. When the new national curriculum was finalized and presented to the government for approval in 1996, the history subject was not included. After another three years a document which Bashshur (2003: 163) describes as 'tamed, desensitized' was resubmitted to the government.<sup>16</sup>

In 2000 the *General Principles and Specific Goals of the Teaching of History*, i.e. the overarching aim of the school subject, was finally produced and approved by the government.<sup>17</sup> For example, the item in these principles that underlines Lebanon as a homeland for all of its people and as being 'Arab in identity' was modified by CERD to become 'Lebanese identity' and 'Arab affiliation'. This modification shows that Taif agreement had failed to solve the historical tension in Lebanon between those claiming that the country is part of the Arab world and those denying it. Terms such as 'committed to Arab culture' were removed from other paragraphs as well (Bashshur 2003:164-165). These debates and the changes made by CERD hence underline that the Lebanese politicians were still not in agreement about the basic identity, history or destiny of the country.

Although *the Lebanese Curriculum and its Objectives* (1997) were finally agreed upon, the concrete writing of textbooks proved impossible. In 2001 new history books were issued for elementary grades 2 and 3 and soon objections were voiced against including 'Arabs' among other 'foreign conquerors' that 'occupied' then eventually left Lebanon in previous times (Wettig 2004). CERD had to issue a statement that those particular pages were to be removed from all existing and future copies of the textbooks. Thus, Bashshur concludes (2003: 167) that more than a decade after the Lebanese civil war ended and after the Taif agreement, the different Lebanese groups could still not agree on how to write their history. Efforts to unify the curricula went to no avail. A decade after Bashshur's research this is still true. There is, in other words, 'no history' after the Lebanese civil war.

Currently there are several history textbooks in Arabic used in public schools. The content is very similar since it is written to comply with the government policy issued in 1970. All books used have been approved by CERD. Rita Nehme who has investigated the influence of politics on history education, underlines that in Lebanon 'the issue of having a standardized history textbook is not just a neglected matter; it is actually treated as a taboo' (2006:96). When she conducted her research textbook writers avoided talking to her and CERD made it hard for her to obtain primary sources.

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<sup>16</sup> Bashshur relies in his analysis on an original document written by Hoteit (1998) in which he describes the work of the history committee that worked for CERD. The paper was published in AL Marqab magazine in 1998.

<sup>17</sup> The Ministry of Education issues a *Guiding Document* with the *General Principles* for teaching each subject and specific goals for each grade level. In some subject, e.g. civics, the latter are three grade levels (e.g. 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>). The specific goals show the purpose of education in that particular subject for that particular level.

## Unified civics

While there has been no development of the history textbooks since 1970, *National education. Civil upbringing*<sup>18</sup> (civics) was actually developed as a unified school subject and has a common curriculum used all over the country. Civics is taught in every class from grade 1 to 12 one hour every week in schools that follow some kind of national curricula. The same book is used throughout the country in the public schools and all who sit for the national examinations in the private schools also use that book. When the guiding principles for each subject were worked upon by the Ministry of Education committees of experts were selected from various academic Lebanese, American and French universities, also making sure that the six main political and religious sects were represented to ensure that the textbook is acceptable to all diverse parties and offensive to none.

The textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade has 17 names listed as the authors and three persons are listed as supervisors in compiling and composing the book. The book has three themes. The first concerns citizens' rights and duties and their social and economic responsibilities and includes excerpts from the UN Declaration of Human Rights and from other international conventions on economic, social and educational rights.

The second theme concerns family relationships and the third theme is about political systems in the world and in Lebanon. Here we find excerpts from the Lebanese constitution and these are used as evidence of the democratic character of the country.

Civics has the main purpose of promoting unity, solidarity, among the Lebanese at all levels of social life as stated in the introduction by CERD director and authors' committee. The objectives are written in line with international standards of democratic citizenship that require skills in deliberations, decision making, civic engagement and values of fairness and responsibilities. There are nine general aims for civics, such as 'preparing learners morally in order for them to be in harmony with values in their communities and in the country, training learners to criticize, debate, accept others, and solve problems with peers in a peaceful manner'. Learners should also 'develop social skills as members of a society whose unity is enriched by its diversity and reinforce their attachment to their Lebanese identity and to their homeland within a unifying democratic framework.' Finally, civics should also 'reinforce learners' awareness of their humanity and brotherhood with others regardless of gender, colour, language, religious or cultural differences'.<sup>19</sup>

In public schools there is very little freedom for the individual teacher to decide on what and how to teach. There are no local guiding documents but all schools and all teachers should follow the course outline, lesson by lesson, week by week, set out by the Ministry of Education. Public schools are thus very homogeneous in didactic style and in subject content. Students in private schools who choose not to take the national

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<sup>18</sup> *'National upbringing. Civil education'* is the official name in Arabic for this subject which can be translated as civics.

<sup>19</sup> This document has been translated from Arabic by us.

examinations may select not to study Lebanese history or civics at all. Private schools are, on the contrary, very heterogeneous and publish mission statements with the values and didactic profile of the schools and extra-curricular activities. The textbooks and the guiding documents for students following a non-Lebanese curriculum are often produced far away from the country.

History and civics have been the objects of intense political and educational conflicts in the post civil war period, as discussed above. But the subjects themselves are not very 'valuable' in the Lebanese education system which is focused on sciences and languages. History and civics subjects have fewer hours and fewer credits than sciences and languages. While math and sciences are taught seven lessons each a week in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, civics is taught one and history two lessons per week. In the *brevet* (9<sup>th</sup> grade) examination civics, history and geography together give a maximum of 60 points, while the other subjects give a maximum of 60 points each. The Lebanese decision makers and the public at large are not alone in putting more value on science and math education than on history, civics and other social science subjects. They are furthermore not alone in contesting the content of the latter subjects much more than the former and debates about history, as underlined by Barton and Levstik, often become 'the subject of public discussion' (2004:2). As they succinctly state: 'No one like the way history is taught' (ibid:1). But the reasons for these dislikes of course differ. In Lebanon there are two reasons for a lack of emphasis on the teaching of civics and history, as has been discussed. First of all there is a consensus that knowledge in these subjects is not as career-enhancing and as globally useful as skills in languages and sciences. Secondly, the very lack of consensus over content in history subject has led to an avoidance of this subject. These two reasons also feed into and mutually reinforce each other.

Teachers and student teachers we talked to told us that the 8<sup>th</sup> grade history and civics textbooks are rarely read to the end. After the spring break students stop reading the 8<sup>th</sup> grade books and start on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade ones in order to prepare for the national examination the year after. They also underlined that history and civics are taught in a manner that students can score maximum points on the national 9<sup>th</sup> grade (and 12<sup>th</sup> grade) examinations. This way of managing instruction is obviously not unique to Lebanon. Barton and Levstik (2004: 252) underline that teachers, especially in history and social studies 'are expected to (a) cover the curriculum and (b) maintain control.' They continue: 'If teachers perceive that primary sources, or student interpretation will interfere with that goal, coverage will win out, because covering the curriculum is what teachers do'(ibid). Yet this drive to cover the curricula does not preclude, that teachers, researchers and education experts have strong, and often conflicting, ideas about what and how to teach in an ideal situation. Nor does it preclude that they discuss possibilities to improve the current classroom situation.

## Opinions about the teaching of history and civics

‘Why do we teach history and civics? Is it not because we want to have a committed citizen?’ These two questions were the starting point of a presentation made by a school principal in a conference for continuing professional development for Lebanese teachers, held at the Lebanese American University in Beirut in early March 2013. Her school is run by Makassed, a well-known and old Lebanese Islamic philanthropic association.<sup>20</sup> She voiced concern over how various Lebanese groups view each other. The diversity in Lebanon, she contended, was not regarded as an asset in society or in education and the lack of new and modern history and civics books was not helping students to learn to solve problems in society.

Researchers in Lebanon and our own interviews with teachers, education experts and activists, show that this school principal is not alone in raising questions about history and civics. One essential issue in the debates concerns content. Should there be a common and unified Lebanese history or should instead different historical perspectives be put forward? Highlighting or neglecting any group in a country like Lebanon could cause resentment. Another issue in the debates concerns methods of teaching. Should there be a common book speaking in an authoritative voice? Or should there be more use of primary sources?

Adnan El Amine, who has been an important member of the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, engaged in an NGO supporting research and educational development, told us that he did not like the idea of a unified history book approved of by the authorities. ‘Since students have different beliefs they will not accept having one view forced on them’. The Lebanese history curriculum has to start from scratch, he said. Instead teaching should be based on standards. ‘We have curricula with purposes of education but the books do not meet these. Standards are better and should be used for all grade levels to identify the skills needed to analyze, to explain event and to collect data.’ He underlined the need to avoid any negative opinions about any group in the country. He stressed the need to expose students to primary sources and let them think creatively in order to develop thinking skills that can be transferred to other learning situations. Instead of using the mandatory book in civics, the content of which is decided by CERD, he prefers having curriculum standards. That would open up for having more publishers to compete on the Lebanese market by trying to meet these standards with a creative handling of the content.

Other opinions were voiced in a seminar on citizenship education and the teaching of history and religion organized by the Ministry of Education and UNESCO in February 2013 in Beirut. Several civil society activists and academic experts had been

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<sup>20</sup> The Makassed philanthropic association was set up in 1868. Its schools accept students of all religions but it mainly caters to Muslims. On its homepage it states that ‘a Makassed student is attached to his Lebanese citizenship that is not distinct from his Arab identity. He is also attached to Islam of which he has a modern, integral and open understanding. Tolerant towards other races, religious beliefs and political convictions, the Makassed student is self-confident, independent and creative in his thinking and able to cope with the scientific and technological changes.’ ([www.makassed.org/education.html#n2](http://www.makassed.org/education.html#n2))

invited in order to come up with recommendations for policy makers. One expert said: 'Each group has the right to write its own history. So there is no need for a unified history book in Lebanon but several books supported with primary sources and documents. This way the Lebanese get to know the others' perspective.' Another suggestion was to focus these books 'not on previous wars and conflict, since all previous leaders have done wrongs to others at one point, but on achievements and contributions to Lebanon'. Another participant thought that writing a unified history book is not possible now in Lebanon. Instead she called for allowing students to write their own account of historical events after exposing them to the different historical documents written by various sects. This will teach the students the skill of identifying similarities and differences and research skills to investigate further. She believes this is important for Lebanese unity and for living together under a common law, the sole unifier, in what it entails in citizen rights and duties.

The Makassed principal, mentioned above, told the audience of a survey she had conducted in her school to find teachers' attitudes to the present history book and the present type of history teaching. The vast majority of the teachers thought that the textbook was obsolete and in no way prepared the students for solving Lebanon's problems. They also thought that their own teaching style was obsolete. She also underlined the difficulty of recruiting good teachers for history, civics and geography. University students planning to become teachers did not want to study social sciences or history since these are regarded as problematic and with low prestige. The principal also gave examples of controversial topics - such as the role of a special historical figure who is regarded as a hero by some Lebanese groups and a villain by others; the very different understandings of how and why the civil war started; and the campaigns for and against civil marriage - that could be used to train students to accept different understandings of an issue are possible. Laying bare and discussing controversial issues will not solve the controversies or the different visions of Lebanon which underpin them, but it will train students to see that differences have to be accepted, she said.

Hassan Fattah (2007) and Dalal Mawad (2009) argue that Lebanese students need to learn 'the real history' i.e., insinuating the need to expose students to primary sources, and that a common unified history will not be believed. Mawad (2009) recommends an approach that presents multiple perspectives of events to students so they identify similarities and differences. They also advocate the use of authentic history documents in teaching to enable pupils to learn to critically assess and take a more 'professional' attitude to history. Educational expert and researcher Munir Bashshur (2005:1-2) advocates 'telling the truth...but not necessarily the whole truth' in a country like Lebanon with 'many historical fault lines.' But the use of authentic documents and 'telling the truth' do not solve the problem of what to include; of choice of content.

Bashour criticizes the current history curriculum by referring to two studies. In 1994 a survey was conducted in all Catholic schools in Lebanon to discern the views of the history subject matters among teachers, coordinators and principals. Results show that history textbooks are used to prepare students for the official exams that



rely on rote learning. No controversies are presented ‘under the pretext of objectivity’ and ‘ideology upholding coexistence takes precedence over historical acts’ (Bashshur 2005: 5). In 2000 another study was conducted in several schools with different religious affiliations. Although they all use the government approved history textbook, each supplements this with another book ‘that is particular to its own inclination and...religious identity’ (ibid: 6). These schools thus work with a double – perhaps conflicting - perspective. Pupils are taught how to manage the national exams in history and at the same time they are exposed to a more partisan book which reflects the ideology of the school (and probably the parents).

A team of Lebanese researchers experimented with two teaching methods; one traditional and one inquiry based (Shuayb, Akar, Makkouk, and Hachicho 2011). They wanted to critically assess the purposes and focus of teaching history in Lebanon. After the experiment they examined students’ attitudes, engagement, and concept understanding. In the traditionally taught classroom teachers lectured to transmit lesson content and used some audiovisual material and focused on having students memorize the content. In the inquiry based classes students learned the same lesson by examining causes and effects. Students said they enjoyed linking information and applying it by participating in class, and said that the aim of learning history was not only to learn new information but also to learn how to analyze history and how to deal with future learning.

Textbooks and curricula work on a discursive level where ideals are formulated but what is actually taking place in schools – how ideals are realized in classrooms - can be something quite different, as briefly discussed above. In a focus group discussion with student teachers one of them commented that the Lebanese civics program is not bad, ‘but the problem is the way it is taught’. Some of the teachers we have interviewed agree and claim that too many teachers are biased and partisan and are unable to initiate and handle debates in controversial issues. Not only pupils are culturally, religiously and politically diverse in Lebanon, but teachers too, of course.

Lebanon’s diversity and how to handle them was discussed in the Ministry of Education-UNESCO seminar mentioned above. The coordinator of the seminar, an official working with UNESCO and the Ministry on several projects, said that citizenship education in Lebanon is unlike the idea of the universal and ‘similar’ citizen which has spread to many countries after the French revolution. ‘Diversity’ has to be accepted in school policy when planning for citizenship education. ‘In Lebanon we find an acceptance and respect of religious diversity as part of citizenship education. In the Holy Book, the Koran, a verse reads: “...had God willed it He would have created the world as one nation”. So respect for diversity is in religion.’ She continued: ‘We believe that in Lebanon, citizenship education without the concept of diversity built into it is an illusion. Practically, we care not only about citizenship education but we are open to any educational process that we can execute i.e. the education process in its entirety...’ She tried to underline that assimilation of one group into another is not possible in Lebanon. ‘Better is to have a partnership and accept diversity’. The Lebanese Constitution respects religious diversity and protects it, and the purpose of national education is to state form a Lebanese citizen proud of

his identity and belonging and accepting religious diversity and open to other cultures which will lead to shared living.<sup>21</sup>

But Adnan El Amine, when we interviewed him, underlined that the term ‘diversity’ is non-existent in the Lebanese curriculum. ‘We do have various kinds of diversities - even of colour – but our schools are homogenous and universities are homogenous. The national Lebanese university has two campuses, one in the Muslims part of Beirut and the other in the Christian part. Staff and students are recruited from the geographical area in which the campus is situated’ he noted. Parents typically put their children in schools which share their fundamental values or their particular view of religion.

A recent study highlights the issue of ‘diversity’ by discussing the complexities of Lebanese identities and the teaching of civics. Bassel Akar (2012) elicited teacher’s perceptions of citizenship education and of their classroom experiences in teaching civics. The purpose of the study was to shed light on methods of teaching civics and on teachers’ reflections on citizenship education and on their classroom realities in order to better understand the challenges they and other teachers face in teaching this subject in Lebanon. A sample of 19 secondary school teachers was selected from 16 private schools of various religious identities across Lebanon. The teachers in his study spoke of the challenging aspects of teaching civics, and reflected on the meaning of citizenship, on the nationalist aspect of teaching civics i.e. whether citizenship education promotes love of one’s country by, for example, cherishing the flag and the anthem, by understanding the laws and one’s responsibilities and rights and by seeing ‘nationalism as a solution for the troubles in Lebanon’ (Akar 2012:473). Six teachers in the study expressed concern that students deviate from citizenship when they develop ‘blind commitments’ to leaders and family groups or derive their identity from their religious sect rather than Lebanon. Most teachers believed that students’ exposure to the others who differ in religion or political affiliation would decrease the isolation of groups from each other. Some teachers worried that emigration of youth abroad could be due to this loss of Lebanese identity and faith in Lebanon.

## **Contours of future Lebanese citizens**

From the discussion above we are not yet able to generalize or to find clear answers to the questions we posed to our material, except perhaps concerning the relationship between national and global perspectives in curricula and textbooks. One of the most outstanding historical and contemporary features of Lebanon, briefly mentioned earlier, is the importance of migration. Yet migration is very poorly

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<sup>21</sup> In the preamble to the Lebanese constitution, adopted May 23 11911126, it states that ‘Lebanon is a parliamentary democratic republic based on respect for public liberties, especially the freedom of opinion and belief, and respect for social justice and equality of rights and duties among all citizens without discrimination’. (Translation by Paul E. Salem for the Lebanese Center of Political Studies)

covered.<sup>22</sup> In the civics book for 8<sup>th</sup> grade there are a few paragraphs about some individual internationally famous Lebanese who left the country due to wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but who excelled abroad. But the economic importance of remittances and the continuous flow of people out of Lebanon are not discussed for 8<sup>th</sup> grade (or any other grade). Nor is there any discussion about the transnational links that are forged when the Lebanese migrate for longer or shorter periods. Finally there is no mention in the curricula or in schoolbooks of the many labour migrants coming to Lebanon. They are totally invisible. On the other hand mobility and the importance of getting a marketable education is, as has been discussed, very important in how many private schools present themselves to potential customers. In those school settings migration is thus very much present, albeit in an indirect way. In Lebanon, unlike countries with a strong public sector for education, the state and its agencies are only marginally involved in pushing global connections. It is rather the private sector which is active in preparing students with knowledge, skills and attitudes befitting international individuals capable of adapting to and accepting other cultures.

Take for example, the *Model United Nations* which in Lebanon is hosted by the Lebanese American University.<sup>23</sup> The aim of this worldwide role play is to train young participants in global diplomacy. *Model United Nations* is very much appreciated by the participants (recruited from private schools) because it trains them to think critically and to find solutions for political and economic conflicts through deliberation. But although *Model United Nations* brings together young Lebanese of various backgrounds, the national problems are not discussed. These young people thus learn to think about solutions for citizens in other countries, rather than their own. Thus we could conclude that education in Lebanon today - just as earlier - does not contribute to the cohesion of the country. It can on the contrary be said to contribute to the continued fragmentation of it.

Civic rights such as a right to education and a right to vote are given attention to in the curricula, in textbooks and – according to teachers we interviewed – in classrooms. Obligations towards family and nation and the importance of acting civilized in public space are also brought out. Basic education in a great many countries continues to have a nationalist agenda (cf. Schiffauer et al. 2004, Schissler & Nuhoglu Soysal 2005). But this agenda is today often more indirect or expressed in new and different ways.<sup>24</sup> This is true for Lebanon as well. The aim of education in the Lebanese *Guiding Principles* as underlined by one of our informants is to form a citizen who is proud of his identity, who is open to religious diversity and to other cultures. But what kind of identity should a pupil be proud of in a country where there are strong and conflicting communal and sectarian identities?

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<sup>22</sup> Lebanese migration and the Lebanese diaspora is, however, an important research topic. (See for example Paul Tabar (ed.) 2005)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.lau.edu.lb/news-events/news/model-united-nations/>

<sup>24</sup> See Rabo (2008) for a discussion on how the official consensus on multiculturalism in Sweden indicates a particular nationalist agenda.

Kenneth Nordgren's research on historical consciousness in multicultural Sweden demonstrates the impact of an ethnic and religious identity among Assyrian/Syriac immigrants to Sweden (2006). He shows how the Swedish 'majority' school had difficulties in handling Assyrian/Syriac demands to teach 'their' history and doing it the 'right' way. This dilemma is similar to that in Lebanon where many different groups have made claims for correct and fair representation in textbooks and in classrooms. In Sweden such demands are often made within a public school system while in Lebanon religious or political groups set up their own schools to redress a perceived imbalance. Barton and Levstik describe research from Northern Ireland where history taught in secondary schools with the aim to be balanced is different than that used and propagated by the pupils themselves outside school and on the streets. The aim of the latter was to 'establish identity, justify political positions, or "annoy" people' (2004: 19). The pupils were quite aware of these differences and were able to 'code switch' between the different uses of history in the different settings. Lebanese situation is similar in that many and conflicting histories are available outside the school setting and continuously used by political protagonists. But the use of history in Lebanese public schools differs from Northern Ireland since the curricula and the textbooks have not yet been able to address the civil war.

The 'right' and the 'future' citizen in our material is not one but many. We have not found a distinct 'national' Lebanese citizen, but rather a citizen who can often combine a very parochial and narrow outlook on Lebanon with an open and inclusive outlook on the world outside the country. The Lebanese, one can say, are caught between the global and the parochial, with little place for the national. Education in the country both reflects and contributes to this dilemma. Based on the discussion above and based on the international understanding of the purposes of teaching history and civics, it is possible to conclude that curricula and textbooks in these subjects do not prepare Lebanese students for democratic citizenship. But we actually want to end our discussion on Lebanon with examples of Lebanese who struggle against the sectarian political and civil ordering of the citizens.

First of all, in a survey on education and citizenship among 3111 students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade from all over Lebanon conducted in 2007, 5.3 % of the students did not declare their religious affiliation (UNDP 2008:52). Clearly there can be several reasons why students want to remain without this affiliation. But one among them is certainly a wish to be counted as a national rather than a 'religious' citizen. Secondly, in the end of February 2013 the very first civil marriage was celebrated in Lebanon. Although civil marriage has been considered impossible in Lebanon (but possible to register in Lebanon if the couple married abroad), Kholoud Succariyeh and Nidal Darwish, fighting their way through the judicial system (with the help of activists and lawyers) managed to write a civil marriage contract and register it with the Public Notary and Ministry of Interior.<sup>25</sup> Finally we like to highlight a comment by the assistant director

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<sup>25</sup> For the interesting twists and turns of this story see [https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/lebanons\\_first\\_civil\\_marriage](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/lebanons_first_civil_marriage)

of academic affairs for the Makassed schools, in response to the Makassed school principal. She claimed, as discussed above, that civics needed to be fundamentally altered to educate students to see beyond the parochialism of their own communities. He retorted by saying: 'Children do not want to be like their parents. The new generation has a much better civic attitude, they are less prejudiced and do not want to keep on with the old sectarian conflicts in the country'. That is a hopeful comment, we think but it also underlines that schools and formal education in Lebanon have so far not contributed to this development.

This article has been exploratory where we have presented some of the material gathered in Lebanon. In light of the above we plan to continue our work by asking policymakers, education experts and teachers if the stances used for history by Barton and Levstik (2004) – identification, analytic, moral response and exhibition – has anything to offer education in Lebanon. We also want to ask if they think that civics and history are actually needed in Lebanese schools. We also need to reanalyse our curricula, textbook and interview material to examine if and how gender intersects with ideas of the future citizen and how diversity is both depicted and produced. For our larger research project - where also Sweden and Turkey is included - we need to collect more material concerned with globalization. What is considered as 'appropriate' and 'relevant' curricula for the future Lebanese citizens (cf. Gough 2000:81). To find that out we plan to interview more policymakers, education experts and teachers about their views on the future of education in Lebanon in a globalized world.

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