

# The Portrayal of Women in Israeli Arabic Textbooks on Druse Heritage

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Teaching heritage to a nation is important. The Israeli Arab curriculum on Druse heritage helps students connect religion with modern society. The textbooks that are still used were written in the end of the 1970s and do not reflect the changing reality of Druse women. This research shows that women must be portrayed in more diverse roles in textbooks and there must be more articles written by women. If teachers are to prepare pupils for the future, they must have more current material. If not, teachers have the obligation to model new ways of seeing women so that young Druse women can achieve equality in work and education and lead modern lives, and so that young men will accept and encourage their advancements.

*Keywords:* Druse, women, heritage, curriculum, gender

## Introduction

The textbooks used in the Israeli Arab curriculum on Druse heritage are outdated and focus on boys and men. The textbooks portray girls and women in limited ways. They do not show how women's roles have changed within Israeli Druse society and how they should continue to change. The author researched these textbooks and has devised new strategies for teachers who use these textbooks so they are aware of the textbooks' limitations and how they can teach students.

## Theoretical Framework

Two public committees were appointed in the 1970s to examine the state of the Druse sector: The first was Ben Dor Committee headed by Professor Ben Dor, and the second was the Shechterman Committee headed by M. K. Shechterman who was then the Head of the Education and Cultural Committee of the Knesset.

In two government meetings in June 1975 and in October 1976, it was decided to accept the recommendations of the committees and a committee was elected regarding Druse issues.

The Ministry of Education and Culture was the first to apply the government decisions, and set up an independent department for caring for Druse education (Loton, 2005), and a headquarters in the head office called "The Committee for Druse Education and Culture", headed by Salman Falah who was appointed over Druse education in Israel.

There was opposition to learning about the Druse heritage two bodies by some Druse religious leaders who feared that the secrets of the religion would be exposed. Other critics were concerned emphasizing the uniqueness of the Druse heritage that would lead to distancing Israeli Druse from the national Arab heritage.

The textbooks were written despite the opposition. For the past 40 years, the same textbooks have been used, while at the same time, Druse women have made enormous advancements within Israeli society. There are now Druse women dentists, doctors, lawyers, and professors. The curriculum, however, does not reflect women's changing roles. Therefore, teachers using these textbooks had no available material to educate pupils to prepare for current reality and the future. The question remains: How can research into the portrayal of women in textbooks on Druse heritage help teachers develop new strategies to encourage equality in work and education within the Druse community?

### Methodology

In the "Druse heritage", curriculum material was included regarding the sect, its culture and uniqueness, principles of belief, and religious and historical figures. A series of books were published on Druse heritage for Grades 3–12. The Druse students who learn in Druse schools must take a matriculation exam of one compulsory and one elective unit in Druse heritage (Falah, 2000, p. 195).

The books the author researched are:

*Min Bustan Torathi (From the Orchard of My Heritage)* for Grade 3 (1993), Haifa;

*Jikayat Min Korana (Stories from Our Villages)* for Grades 3 and 4 (1982 and 1995);

*Min Adabana Wa'adatna (Manners and Customs)* for Grade 5 (1986);

*Kiyam Wtakalid (Values and Customs)* for Grade 6 (1978);

*Min Al-Salaf Al Saleh (Our Wise Grandfathers)* for Grade 7 (1979);

*Min Al Torath Al Shabi (Primary Heritage)* for Grade 8 (1996 and 1997);

*Min A'alam Al Druse (Famous Druse)* for Grade 9 (1980);

*Min Oyonn Torath Bane Maruf (From the Springs of Druse Heritage)* two parts for high school (1987);

*Min Torath al Mowahidin Al Druse (From the Heritage of the Monotheist Druse)* for high school (1993);

*Al Aid (Holidays)* for all grades (1979);

*Teachers' Guide* (1979).

The texts were examined to research:

"Stories about women";

"Images of women in the textbooks";

"The images of Druse women in the textbooks";

"The frequency of Druse women versus that of men".

Four representative books were examined, the first book of the series for Grade 3, the second for Grade 7, the third for Grade 9, and the last for high schools. The results are seen in Table 1.

Table 1

*Min Bustan Torathi (From the Orchard of My Heritage), for Grade 3*

Lesson name	Pg.	The female	Action	Role
In the name of God and thank God	16	Grandmother	Do not eat this way Wash your hands Wait for grandfather who is at work	Moralizing
Holiday	19	Mother	Mention the name of the holiday	Social holiday
The Oath	26	Mother	My mother swore for my brother	Swearing for a son
The Halwa (prayer hall)	28	Women	There is one room for men and one for women in the Halwa	Information

(Table 1 continued)

Religious and Secular	35	Religious and secular	--	--
Al Nekab	43	Grandmother	Grandmother wore one	Wearing a Nekab
(Covering the head)		Mother and sister	Mother and sister did this	White kerchief
Eating what is prohibited (1)	54	Mother	Mother asked: Where are the grapes from She said: Did he give permission Mother is angry: Do you know that eating these grapes is prohibited	Moralizing
Eating what is prohibited (2)	56	Mother	Gave a present to mother. She said: It was prohibited because it was stolen	Education
The Kosher money	58	Yasmin	Counted her money and gave the seller his money back	Honesty
Wrong and mistake	63	Freda Mother Teacher	Not nice girl Hat is not allowed	Moralizing Education
Giving back the treasure	78	Girl	The judge ruled: the man will marry the girl	No role
Help and cooperation	88	Queen of doves	We must fly together	Wisdom
Reward and punishment	91	Kamla	Kamla traveled with her father, she was sad	
Exercises for heritage lessons	108	Rafika Salha	She returned the pencil that she found Salha goes to pray twice a week	Honest Religious
		Salwa	Salwa does what his mother asks	Obeying

### Findings

The first book “*The Orchard of My Heritage*” for Grade 3 includes 39 lessons and only 14 of them mention females, only 35.8%. Six times the image was a mother out of 20 female images. Thirty percent of the time the mother appeared, the grandmother appeared twice and a sister appeared once.

Six girls appeared: Yasmin, Freda, Kamala, Rafika, Salha, and Salwa—also 30%.

There were only two who had a role (10%): (1) The teacher explained that what they said was not nice and prohibited; and (2) The queen of doves was wise and saved the girls.

Men appeared in many forms: religious, wise, and religious, Emir, Wise Sheik, Rich man, and a judge (Kadi). The men were authoritative.

Famous men also appeared: Al Amir Al-Si'id, Sultan Al Atrash, Al Sheik, Al Fadel, Alexander of Macedonia, Abraham the Father, and Eben Adham.

Many boys appeared, they were active, thinking, and drew conclusions, such as in the book *On the Land* (pp. 105-106).

The six girls who appeared were: (1) Yasmin: honest; (2) Freda: receives a moral; (3) Kamla: sad; (4) Rafika: honest; (5) Salha: religious; and (6) Salwa: obeys.

They were passive and they obeyed. Three were the heroes of the lesson: Yasmin who was the honest; Freda who was educated, and Kamala who was sad.

The message for girls in third grade: You must be religious, obey, and honest, and if something happens you can be sad.

Pictures and drawings: In the lesson on the holiday, there is a picture of boys and girls playing. In the lesson on the holy place, there are girls playing. There is a picture of girls visiting a holy site, a girl with a kerchief on her head and next to her there is a little girl (five to six years) with a short skirt.

In the lesson “On the Head Covering” (p. 42), there is a picture of a woman in traditional garb (p. 44), there is a picture of a woman in traditional garb.

Out of 36 pictures of people in the book only four pictures appear of girls and women (11%).

*Min Al-Slaf Al Salah (Our Wise Grandfathers)* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1979)—This is the fourth of the heritage books and it is aimed at Grade 7.

The book begins with the introduction: “Dear students: This is our fourth book from among the Druse heritage books and its topic is our wise grandfathers. The book tells the story of the lives of good men” (p. 43).

In fact, the book deals with the story of the lives of seven good believing and religious men. There is not one mention of women in the book. Are there no women who were believers who dedicated their lives to belief and to good works? The author thinks that they do exist.

In the book *Min Alam Al Druse (Famous Druse)* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1980) for Grade 9 there are 140 individuals mentioned and only one women is mentioned in the titles, this is 0.071%.

The last book that the author investigated was *Min Tarthi al Muhdin Al Druse (From the Heritage of the Monotheist Druse)* for high school (Ministry of Education, 1993). This book includes material for the matriculation exam in Druse heritage. The material is varied: wills, speeches, and sociological article related to the Druse, education, history, individuals, literature, poetry, philosophy, etc..

There are 24 lessons (topics). The last lesson in the first unit (number 14) is called “The Druse Woman” by Dr. Nejala Abu Ezaldin. The article is seven pages long and discusses the special status of the Druse women in religion and religious law. The article gives examples of women who ruled, such as Jonblat, and women who were religious and believers, such as the mother of Ali Fahri of the Lebanese Shuf (Ministry of Education, 1993). Finally, it mentions Druse women who are famous, all of them from Lebanon.

At the beginning of the second unit, there is an article again by Dr. Nejala Abu Ezaldin “Morals among the Druse”. The article discusses the seven principles of Druse belief, and it is a three and a half-page article.

There are two articles written by a Druse woman among 24 articles (0.083%), and one lesson (article) discussing the Druse woman.

Teaching heritage to the entire nation is important. Hershkowitz (2000) claimed that heritage is a synonym for culture, and culture is “a group of behavioral elements that separate a certain society” (Ika, 2009). If heritage is a culture that separates a society and separates between it another cultures, why should we not be familiar with it?

The problem among the Druse is difficult. On the one hand, the religion is secret and a non-religious individual may not know the secrets of the religion. On the other hand, there must be something that sets the members of the sect part from other sects in Israel (Kasem-Falah, 2011). Every other religion learns about its special customs and laws.

The problem with the curriculum is the status of the woman in the study material. Of course, the material that is taught in schools affects the education and behavior of students.

Four out of 10 books were examined: In the first book, women and girls appear the most from among the four books (35.8%). The mother and the grandmother play the role of moralizing and educating. The girls are passive and obey or they are good (honest); In the second book, there is no mention of one good female; In the third book, one out of 14 individuals mentioned is a female (0.071%).

The last book aimed at high school has an innovation as there is a woman doctor who writes two of the articles, one about Druse women. There is almost no mention of educated or religious women or leaders. The ratio between men and women in the book is 8.77% women versus 92.33% men.

As mentioned above, religion calls for equality between men and women and even scientific equality, but

the facts in the field are different.

The following are the findings:

- (1) The percentage of appearance of girls and women in the text is very low (8.77%);
- (2) Most of the girls that appear in the texts have passive traits and lack initiative;
- (3) No intellectual women are mentioned;
- (4) Most of the texts were written by men aside from Nagila Abu Ezaldin.

The purpose of this paper is to help teachers improve their teaching skills in the following ways:

(1) To take the research as an example for the discrimination of women and girls in the academic curriculum;

(2) To learn to improve different academic curriculum reflecting women's current reality in society;

(3) The impact and effect of this discrimination on both male and female students and the way their character development is impacted because they adapt to the discrimination and therefore perpetuate inequalities within Druse society;

(4) Teachers can learn from this research and then work on improving their teaching methods to counter the inequality in the texts that they teach;

(5) To become aware and make certain they are not discriminating against girls inside class;

(6) The discrimination effects female students' achievement because they then perceive from the texts that their future is to be at home and be a mother and wife and that it should not concern them what profession they have or their social status and rights;

(7) Examination of the research helps teachers decide whether to use or abandon texts and to implement language that is appropriate along with appropriate illustrations;

(8) The research will help experts write academic curricula to emphasize women's roles.

### Summary

Learning tradition can contribute much to promoting the status of the Druse woman as well as learning texts written by women.

Learning about the life of religious women, politicians, intellectuals, writers, etc. is crucial to society's development.

Teachers can learn from this research and then work on improving their teaching methods to counter the inequality in the texts that they teach. Teachers with an awareness of the bias in textbooks will be able to instruct their students to believe that women deserve equal rights. They will be able to transmit the idea that religious beliefs can be incorporated into modern society.

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