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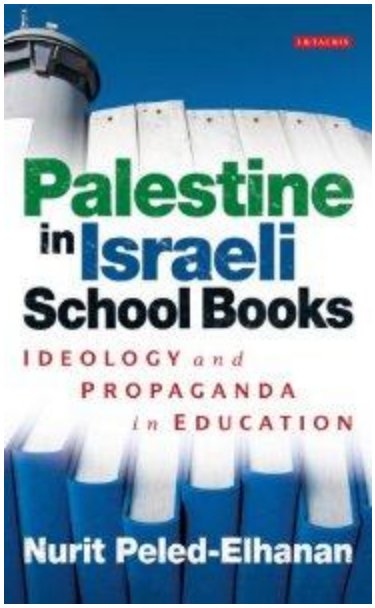
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Peled-Elhanan, Nurit. (2012) *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*. London: MacMillan (Tauris Academic Studies).

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Reviewed by Robert Naiman
Washington, D.C.

There is a plan on the table to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict: a two state solution on the 1967 borders with mutually agreed minor adjustments to the border. The key obstacle to the realization of this plan has been that it has not been supported in practice by the Israeli government and there appears to be little short-term prospect based on present trends that it will be supported by an Israeli government in the future. Israeli advocates of the status quo — foremost among them, the West Bank settlers and their supporters — have politically dominated Israeli advocates of a political resolution, and according to current trends,

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there is little prospect that this will change in the future that we can see.

Resolution of the conflict will require the agreement of the majority of Israel's citizens. The international community has so far and is likely to continue to be unable and unwilling to impose a resolution against the will of the majority of the Israeli electorate. The rest of the world has been willing to employ some pressure on the Israeli government, but not nearly enough to impose a resolution. Although external pressure on the Israeli government for a resolution is likely to increase, it is not likely to increase in the foreseeable future to a level sufficient to impose a resolution on a very unwilling Israeli electorate. At the moment that electorate appears to be quite resistant; among other things, it continues to elect governments apparently uneager (to say the least) to reach agreement based on the international consensus for the two-state solution, namely, (roughly) the 1967 borders.

At the same time there is reason for urgency: the ongoing occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza entails great suffering for Palestinian civilians, in the form of land expropriations, house demolitions, imprisonment, unemployment and poverty caused by economic restrictions. And it is widely perceived , as recently stated by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, that the window is closing for a resolution on the basis of the international consensus regarding the two-state solution. Kerry said the window to save the two-state solution was one to two years.

Thus, the question of achieving a political resolution has two key parts: (1) How much can international pressure increase? But also, (2): How much can Israeli society move? And these two questions are linked, since the key way that augmented international pressure can have an impact is by helping to alter Israeli public opinion. Therefore, it is essential that those in the international community who wish to see a resolution should seek to understand the dynamics that keep Israeli society from moving.



In *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*, Hebrew University education professor **Nurit Peled-Elhanan** explores how Palestinians are depicted in Israeli school books. She investigates Israeli

textbooks as instruments of propaganda designed to prepare Israeli youth to serve in the Israeli Army and enforce the occupation.

Peled-Elhanan notes [1] that in February 2010, an Israeli survey found that 50 per cent of Israeli Jewish high school students believed that Palestinian citizens of Israel — 20 per cent of the Israeli population — should not be granted equal civil rights and that 56 per cent of Israeli Jewish high school students believed that Palestinian citizens of Israel should not be allowed to be elected to the Knesset, Israel's parliament. Peled-Elhanan argues that these attitudes are the product of Israeli education.

If the majority of young Israeli Jews don't believe that the Palestinian citizens of Israel shouldn't have civil rights that they currently have, their receptiveness to arguments that Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza should have rights that they do not yet have is not likely to be great.

One of the most internationally controversial Israeli policies is the policy of demolishing Palestinian homes. In a 2004 report, Amnesty International wrote: [2]

> For decades Israel has pursued a policy of forced eviction and demolition of homes of Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the homes of Israeli Arabs in Israel… The seizure and appropriation of land for Israeli settlements, bypass roads and related infrastructure and the discriminatory allocation of other vital resources, including water, have had a devastating impact on the fundamental rights of the local Palestinian population, including their rights to an adequate standard of living and to housing.

But Peled-Elhanan notes that the Israeli high school geography textbook "The Geography of the Land of Israel" tells a very different story: [3]

> Illegal Construction in the Arab villages: Most of illegal houses are built on municipal land and agricultural lands that belong by Israeli law to the state. Illegal building is also a result of wishing to evade payment for license.

In fact, when Palestinians in the West Bank have the misfortune to live near Israeli settlements — that is, when Israeli settlers covet the land on which Palestinians live — it's virtually impossible for Palestinians to get building permits.

Such was the case for the Al Zaloum family of Hebron, who had the misfortune to live near the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba in the West Bank. Their house was destroyed by the Israeli government in February 1996. I am familiar with the case because I was one of four American peace volunteers who attempted unsuccessfully to block demolition of the house by sitting on top of it. [4]

A common claim made by Israeli and U.S. opponents of an agreement that ends the conflict has been that efforts to reach such an agreement are certain to be futile since Israel has no Palestinian "partner for peace," [5] although Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has negotiated for years with Israeli leaders to try to achieve a two-state solution. Why is the "no partner for peace" claim so persistent?

Demonization of Palestinian leaders in Israeli education is a likely cause. Peled-Elhanan notes that the Israeli history textbook *The 20th Century*" tells us that "The Prime Minister saw in Arafat the embodiment of Hitler" and "Arafat was considered as the personification of Satan and the PLO as a clan of murderers." [6] These claims are never contradicted by the textbook writer, she notes. Peled-Elhanan notes that there has actually been a regression in Israeli textbooks written by the same co-author from earlier progress in portraying Palestinians with more nuance. In "Modern Times II" (1999) the issue of Israeli reprisals against Palestinian "infiltrators" is addressed thus: [7]

> The border with Jordan, which had been delineated arbitrarily and separated Arab villagers from their lands, became a real line of fire. This…entailed infiltrations that were mostly attempts by villagers to return to their homes … only a few of them were Fadayun — armed Palestinians sent to carry out intelligence and terrorist activities … But Israel refused to acknowledge the difference and her reprisals were harsh.

But in "Nationality in Israel and the Nations: Building a State in the Middle East," (2009), whose authorship overlaps with the previous book, there are no longer any "villagers" and the issue of infiltration and reprisal is rendered thus:

> From 1952 on, there were many cases of infiltration from Jordan for the purpose of robbery and sabotage, and even murder … the terrorist acts of the infiltrators created serious anxiety among the citizens of Israel and the state was obligated to react.

In the former book, the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, whose inhabitants were massacred in 1948, is depicted as "a friendly village, whose inhabitants signed a non-aggression agreement with the Hagana [the main Jewish militia-RN] and kept it meticulously," but in the latter book, Deir Yassin becomes "a base for aggressive attacks on Jerusalem." [8]

Here's how the 1987 Palestinian uprising, or "intifada," and the Israeli military response are described in a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine*:

> Its primary weapons were the sort that transform weakness into strength: the stone, the barricade, the boycott, the strike. The Israeli response to the revolt — in 1988, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin reportedly authorized soldiers to break the limbs of unarmed demonstrators — began tilting international public opinion toward the Palestinian cause for the first time in decades. [9]

Here is the treatment in the Israeli history textbook, "Nationality — Building a State in the Middle East":

> The Palestinian uprising included continuous attacks against civilian and military Israelis, especially in Judea and Samaria [i.e., in the West Bank-RN] and Gaza. The attacks included throwing stones and Molotov bottles, barring roads, stabbing and running over Jews with cars in central bus stations. The IDF's attempts to suppress the Palestinian uprising included siege, checkpoints on the roads, increased presence in Palestinian villages, arrests and punishments to the offenders. The IDF was not prepared, either

> militarily or psychologically, to warfare against civilian population. [10.]

In "Geography of the Land of Israel," Palestinian citizens of Israel are portrayed as an "enemy within," to be contained by Israeli development policy:

> The purpose of the foundation of Mitzpim [Jewish settlements built among Arab villages in the Galilee-RN] is to preserve the national land and protect it from illegal invasion by the non-Jewish population, to acquire land for development in order to prevent a territorial sequence of non-Jewish settlements, for fear that an Arab sequence would cause the detachment of Galilee from the state of Israel. [11]

In Chapter 4, Peled-Elhanan examines how massacres committed by Israeli forces are legitimated in Israeli history textbooks. She considers three examples: the massacre in the village of Deir Yassin west of Jerusalem during the 1948 war; the Qibya massacre in the West Bank (then under Jordanian control) in 1953; the Kafr Qasim massacre, in an Israeli Arab village on the border with Jordan, in 1956. She reports that some textbooks present the massacres as routine battles while others treat the massacres as deviations from official plans but nonetheless legitimate them as having had a positive outcome.

In the case of Deir Yassin, the positive outcome was encouraging the mass flight of Palestinians which, when they were not allowed to return, allowed Israel to have a Jewish majority.

Peled-Elhanan writes: "The goal of having an Arab-free land is never spelled out explicitly in Israeli school books, but the crucial importance of a Jewish majority is," and cites the closing paragraph of the chapter that includes the report on the Deir Yassin massacre in the textbook *The 20th Century*:

> In the eyes of the Israelis the flight of the Arabs [enhanced by the Deir Yassin massacre] solved a horrifying demographic problem and even a moderate person such as [the first president] Weitzman spoke about it as “a miracle.” [12]

According to Peled-Elhanan, all the texts say the slaughter of Palestinians at Deir Yassin brought about the flight of other Palestinians which enabled the establishment of a coherent Jewish state. [13]

About the Qibya massacre, a retaliatory 1953 IDF raid led by Ariel Sharon ordered on the West Bank village of Qibya in which 69 people were killed — Sharon ordered his troops to achieve "maximal killing" — the textbook says the slaughter brought confidence to Jews in their homes and three texts say the assault restored morale and dignity to the IDF. [14]

From 1949 to 1966, Palestinians in Israel lived under direct military rule, and were subject to a nightly curfew. On first day of the 1956 war the nightly curfew on Palestinians living in villages along the border with Jordan was suddenly moved two hours earlier without giving time to notify Palestinians who were at work, and an order was given to shoot to kill any Palestinian on the street after curfew. In the village of Kafr Qasim, that order was carried out, and 49 villagers were killed. In the other villages, commanders rejected the order to shoot. Israeli judges later found that the order to shoot to kill was "manifestly illegal" and should have been disobeyed.

About the Kafr Qasim massacre, three texts emphasize the positive outcome that the court ruled that the shoot to kill order was "manifestly illegal" and one text emphasizes the positive outcome that the massacre helped lead to the end of military rule over Palestinian citizens of Israel ten years later. [p.178] Peled-Elhanan notes that these accounts leave out troubling questions: why was the "manifestly illegal" order given in the first place? Why were those who followed the "manifestly illegal" order held to account but not those who gave it? Why were the sentences of the killers commuted? Why was the person who gave the "manifestly illegal" order promoted? Why was the curfew changed without telling the villagers? Failure to address these questions obscures the motivations of the government, including encouraging more Palestinians to flee.

If it's true that Israeli textbooks are preparing young Israelis to enforce the occupation, what could be done about this? The choice of textbooks is under the control of

the Israeli Ministry of Education, which is part of the elected government, and is explicitly and self-consciously making choices that support government policy. There is little prospect that the Ministry of Education will change, so long as Israelis are electing right-wing governments.

One possibility is trying to "de-program" young Israelis from the ideology they learned in school. To be successful in countering years of education, such efforts, in aggregate, would have to be "to scale." One way to get to scale is through popular culture.

The Palestinian-Israeli documentary *5 Broken Cameras* represents one such effort. The movie, nominated for a 2012 Academy Award, documents nonviolent protests in the Palestinian village of Bil'in against the Israeli "separation barrier" and the concomitant Israeli confiscation of village lands, from the perspective of Bil'in resident Emad Burnat. The Israeli co-director of the film, Guy Davidi, has launched a project to bring the movie to Israeli youth. [15]

Similarly, the award-winning Israeli-Palestinian documentary *Budrus* tells the story of the largely successful nonviolent protest campaign of the villagers of *Budrus* against the separation barrier and its concomitant confiscation of lands. [16]

These documentaries present images of Palestinians that run completely counter to the depictions that Nurit Peled-Elhanan found in Israeli textbooks. Palestinians are portrayed as human beings working nonviolently for justice.

What could Americans do? One thing we could do is be a better audience for such efforts. To a significant degree, we're part of the same audience as the Israeli youth. The fact that *5 Broken Cameras* was nominated for an Academy Award means that more Israelis will see it, and it was Americans who made the decision to nominate the movie.

As I travel around the country giving talks to peace activists, I am struck that very few Americans, even among peace activists who say they are concerned about what is happening to the Palestinians, report that they have

seen these movies. What could be easier to organize than watching a movie — especially given that these movies are available on Netflix? Let's impose this as a new bar for social expectation. Friends don't let friends drive drunk. They also don't let their friends ignore attempts to tell the story of Palestinian nonviolence. Have you seen *5 Broken Cameras* yet? Have you seen *Budrus*?

Endnotes

1. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 57-58.

2. "Israel and the Occupied Territories: Under the Rubble: House Demolition and Destruction of Land and Property ," Amnesty International, 17 May 2004, http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE15/033/2004/en

3. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 60.

4. "Hebron Home Demolition; CPT Members Held," Cole Hull, CPT Net, 28 February, 1996.

5. For example, "Israel still has no partner for peace," Steve Huntley, Chicago Sun-Times, January 24, 2013, http://www.suntimes.com/news/huntley/17775059-452/israel-still-has-no-partner-for-peace.html; "The perception in the Israeli public is that there is no partner for peace on the Palestinian side," Gadi Baltiansky, director-general of the Geneva Initiative's Israel headquarters, cited in "Shalom, Saeb Erekat here," Alon Goldstein, Ynet Magazine, 8.29.10, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3945358,00.html

6. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 69.

7. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 89.

8. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 89.

9. "Is This Where the Third Intifada Will Start?" Ben Ehrenreich, New York Times Magazine, March 15, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/magazine/is-this-where-the-third-intifada-will-start.html

10. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 96.

11. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 108.

12. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 174.

13. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 178.

14. "Palestine in Israeli School Books," p. 178.

15. "'Broken Cameras' director unsurprised by Oscar nod," Jessica Steinberg, Times of Israel, January 13, 2013, http://www.timesofisrael.com/broken-cameras-director-unsurprised-by-oscar-nod/

16. "Budrus Shows 'White Intifada' Can Beat the Israeli Occupation," Robert Naiman, Huffington Post, 5/11/11, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-naiman/budrus-documentary-white-intifada_b_860501.html

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