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# Peace and conflict in Israeli state-approved textbooks: 2000–2018

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## ABSTRACT

The current article describes the peace and conflict educational approaches found in the Jewish-Israeli curricula between the years 2000–2017. Using thematic analysis, it extracts the dominant themes and messages towards Muslim, Arab and Palestinian ‘others’. The study follows 123 textbooks recommended by the Israeli Ministry of Education for grades 7 through 12 of the Jewish state and state-religious sectors for the 2000–2019 academic years. The academic subjects or disciplines represented in the study include history, geography, civics, (Jewish) religious studies and Hebrew language and literature studies. Study findings indicate that current Israeli textbooks do not contain any overt racism or incitement against Palestinians. However, ethnocentric perceptions and victim mentality are two themes that still dominate curricular discourse and are counterproductive to peace education goals. Additionally, the paucity of Palestinian narratives is another potential hurdle to achieving peace education goals.

## KEYWORDS

Curriculum; peace Education; prejudice; middle East

## Introduction

Peace education focuses on relationships between groups, and strives to change attitudes, reduce prejudices and stereotypes, increase tolerance and change perceptions of the ‘self’ and of the ‘other’ (Bar-Tal, 2002; Bjerstedt, 1995; Salomon, 2004a; United Nations, 1999). For that purpose, this type of education strives to attain the legitimization of the other side’s perspective—its collective narrative, its experiences, fears and dreams—and reinforce a sense of collective identity (Salomon, 2004a, 2004b).

Peace education or curricula does not necessarily have to attempt to ‘solve’ the conflict. Some curricula, perceiving actual conflict resolution (e.g. reaching a peace agreement) as depending largely on political and economic powers, only attempt to promote societal improvement in terms of mutual understanding, tolerance and reduction of violence between groups (Bar-On, 2000; Ross, 2000; Salomon, 2004a). This is true especially in cases of protracted or intractable conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where conflicts are severe and complex and sometimes perceived as irresolvable (see e.g. Bar-Tal, 2007; Kelman, 1999). In such cases, peace education can therefore serve for motivation and openness to the idea of peace, as well as contribute to peace sustainability. As Alayan and Podeh (2018) suggest, school textbooks are not neutral, and are intended to support agendas of certain groups or institutions, often used as socialization tools to maintain or foster hegemonic influence. The other side of this equation is that textbooks can be seen as a reflection of a society’s belief and value systems (Ibid: pp.1–2). In this case, the themes observed in Israeli textbooks could therefore be seen as a reflection of Israeli views regarding Arab-Israeli relations. It is therefore reasonable to stipulate that changes in the Israeli government and other significant political or otherwise national events could potentially influence the content of state approved textbooks. The current study explores whether these trends continued after the Palestinian uprising of 2000 (also termed ‘the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada’ or ‘Al Aqsa

*Intifada*), and the ascension of a predominantly right-wing government led by PM Binyamin Netanyahu in 2009, or whether they were abandoned or changed.

Despite official Israeli government statements to the contrary, Israeli school textbooks have repeatedly been accused of being prejudiced, stereotypical and inciting towards Arabs, Muslims and—most of all—Palestinians (e.g. Bar-Tal, 2001; Peled-Elhanan, 2010, 2012). However, some significant improvement in messages regarding peace and the Arab ‘other’ were observed in textbooks published in the later 1980’s and in the 1990’s, as noted by several scholars who studied the Israeli curricula.

Israeli textbooks have been described by some scholars as a socialization tool that promotes a victim or ‘siege’ mentality (Bar-Tal, 1998; Firer, 1998) and a collective narrative that includes moral superiority and ethnocentricity, as well as animosity, stereotypes and prejudice towards current and historical rivals—Arabs and Palestinians in particular (*ibid*, as well as Podeh, 2002). Such trends, it has been argued, are harmful to the attitudes of students and generally detrimental to the opportunity of real peace between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as with other Arab and Muslim entities (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2007). However, as the following review will show, the same scholars have testified that Israeli textbooks have improved their attitudes towards the ‘other’, particularly Arabs, Palestinians and Muslims, in the past few decades, and see the 1980’s and especially the 1990’s as a turning point in this regard. They are in agreement that the representations of the Arab-Israeli or Israeli-Palestinian conflict is currently depicted in a more balanced and objective manner in these textbooks (especially in History and in Civics books) than it was in the past, and that books tend to show more of the ‘other’s’ point of view than their predecessors. Although this is indeed an encouraging turn of events, these same scholars also note that there is still room for positive change in this regard.

For example, Bar-Tal (1998), in his analysis of the textbooks recommended by the Israeli Ministry of Education in 1994, concluded that there was a change in the content of the textbooks used in the 1990’s in comparison to those that were published until the 1970’s. Both in this study and a later study of 124 Israeli textbooks he published in 2004 (Bar-Tal, 2001), he found that some negative stereotyping of Arabs was still present in more recent books, but contended that only a small part of the school textbooks focused on societal beliefs concerning security, positive self-image and the victimization of Jews, and that the de-legitimization of Arabs all but disappeared. In addition, writes Bar-Tal, some textbooks even show new beliefs that promote peace and coexistence with the Arabs.

In her study of 67 History and Civics textbooks and five peace education manuals, published in Israel from the 1950’s on, Firer (1998) found that some books still convey cultural condescension and prejudice, and a depiction of Israel as a nation of people trapped by their own ‘siege mentality’. Firer and Adwan (1997) maintain that even in the 1990’s most History books still imposed a ‘classic’ Zionist view of history, based on the following assumptions: Jews were victims throughout history; only the Jewish Zionist state can end the suffering of the Jews and revive the Jewish people; and that Zionism’s pioneers and warriors changed the course of Jewish History (for the better). However, Firer (1998) has also found that attitudes towards Arabs (and additional ‘others’) have greatly improved during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, Firer and Adwan (1997) also argue that Israeli textbooks progressively contain less and less Arab stereotyping and more recognition of the Palestinian national identity.

Podeh (2002) distinguishes three periods in the history of Israeli textbooks: the ‘childhood’ period (1948–2000), the ‘adolescent’ period (1967–1985) and the ‘adult’ period (after 1985). During the latter time period he observed a major change occurred in the presentation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israeli History and Civics textbooks. Podeh argues that until 1967 books focused on instilling Zionist values and their narrative was simplistic, biased and stereotypical, filled with omissions, distorted representations and absent information concerning Arab History and culture. These books also omitted any criticism or any facts or claims that could suggest that Israel was at fault or that the Jews were not entitled to the Land of Israel. During the ‘adolescent period’ of 1967–1985, the historical narrative became less biased and contained fewer stereotypes, and Arabs were no longer viewed as one large group, but rather separate peoples, including the Palestinian people. These textbooks still showed prejudice, but in a more ‘sophisticated’, concealed manner, and Israel was still absolved of all culpability.

The most important change, argues Podeh, occurred during the 'adult' (post-1984) period, when the historical narrative became more objective and balanced. He maintains that although textbooks from 1985 onwards are not perfect, Arabs are no longer stereotyped in them, they present a balanced picture of the Arab-Israeli conflict (though it is still viewed primarily from a Zionist perspective), and a visible attempt is made to understand the Arab point of view of the conflict. Podeh pointed out two possible factors that might explain this change: the appearance of a new historiography based on newly released archival material, more critical of Israel and the Zionist movement; and the changes in Israeli society with regard to the perception of the 'other'. A third and perhaps the most obvious formal change was the directive of 1 February 1984, sent out by the Director General of the Ministry of Education, detailing the basic guidelines of an education programme oriented towards 'Jewish-Arab Coexistence'.

Manor (2008) explains that the new educational and pedagogical coexistence-oriented policy of 1984 was carried out by all the successive Israeli governments, in spite of changes in government and the deterioration of Israeli-Palestinian relations. This new policy was put into action by the implementation of five main themes: 'Considering the "other" first as a human being'; 'Overcoming suspicion, hatred and prejudices'; 'Knowing and respecting Islam and the Arabs'; 'Admitting the legitimacy of the opposing national movement'; and 'presenting the conflict in a more balanced way'. Manor has found that all five themes are prevalent in Israeli textbooks, and adds that turn-of-the-century Israeli textbooks do not seek to build the national identity of Israeli Jews upon the rejection of identity and national legitimacy of the Palestinians. In fact, he argues, young Israelis are taught to perceive Arabs and the Palestinians both as individual human beings, and as a people having a legitimate national movement, despite the illegitimate means to which it sometimes resorts (e.g. terrorism) to further its cause.

Finally, a recent American-Israeli-Palestinian three-year project commissioned by the 'Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land', examined both Palestinian and Israeli textbooks and published its findings in 2013 (Adwan, Bar-Tal, & Wexler, 2013). The report, based on a comprehensive quantitative analysis of themes found in 74 Israeli and 94 Palestinian textbooks regarding the Israeli/Palestinian 'other', concluded that neither curriculum contained any outright de-humanization or demonization of the national 'other'; that the Israeli textbooks contained more positive descriptions of the Arab 'other' than the Palestinian textbooks regarding the Jewish or Israeli 'other'; and that in comparison to Palestinian textbooks, Israeli (state approved) textbooks contained more self-criticism in regard to events where Palestinians suffered due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, it should be added that the study also contained two other main conclusions: the first, that the Haredi (Jewish Ultra-Orthodox) education, which does not require state authorization but is partially funded by the state, showed less positive trends in regard to peace and tolerance towards the Palestinian 'other', and was in fact closer to the Palestinian curriculum's attitudes towards the Israeli 'other'.<sup>1</sup> The second finding was that both the Israeli and the Palestinian state curricula still blamed the other side for the conflict and its consequences, depicting their side as the only (or at least main) victim of the conflict.

In summation, recent studies of the Israeli curriculum have noted the positive change in the depiction of the Palestinian 'other', and agree that overt racism and de-humanization have generally disappeared from Israeli state-approved textbooks since the 1990s. Recent studies (Adwan et al., 2013, as well as Teff-Seker, 2012) indicate that these trends have continued and even improved in the 2000s, and that Israeli textbooks recognize Palestinian national identity, and to some extent the Palestinian point of view on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their suffering as a result of that conflict. However, previous studies indicate that the Israeli curricula includes some elements of self-victimization—fostering a historic narrative in which the Jewish-Israeli side is the victim of the conflict and the Arab side is the aggressor—a perception that can be harmful to any current or future peace process. The current study examined whether post-2000 Israeli textbooks still demonstrate similar themes, or whether their contents, as they pertain to peace and the Arab, Muslim and Palestinian 'other', have changed or evolved in the past two decades.

## Method

This article describes the educational messages found in 123 textbooks recommended by the Israeli Ministry of Education for grades 7 through 12 of the Jewish state and state-religious systems for the 2000–2018 school years. Since the textbooks used by the Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) schools in most cases are neither recent nor state-approved, they were not included in the current study. Moreover, the study does not include the textbooks intended for the Arab-Israeli and other minority students (e.g. Druze), which are written in Arabic, and constitute a separate state school system within the Israeli educational system. The academic subjects that were included in the study were chosen due to the amount of relevant content found in them, addressing the subject of the Arab, Muslim and/or Palestinian 'other': History (45 textbooks), Geography (26 textbooks), Civics (9 textbooks), (Jewish) bible and religious studies (12 textbooks), Arab Language for Hebrew speakers (9 textbooks) and Hebrew language and literature studies (22 textbooks). The author is bilingual (Hebrew-English) and the analysis was performed directly on the Hebrew texts, and the excerpts quoted in this article were translated by her.

The study used thematic analysis in order to extract dominant themes and messages regarding Jewish identity and the Muslim, Arab and Palestinian 'others', in order to understand the attitude of the recent curricula on the subjects of peace and tolerance towards them. The analysis process included searching for themes, messages in (verbal and graphic) textual expressions found in these textbooks. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative textual analysis to identify patterns and themes that are relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Fereday, 2006). Code analysis approaches can be theory-driven, inductive, bottom-up or result from prior-research driven codes (Boyatzis, 1998). In the current study, codes, and later themes and patterns, were derived bottom-up by the researchers' analysis of the textbooks.

The study aims to examine the attitudes towards the Palestinian, Arab or Muslim 'other' in Israeli textbooks. To that end, it asks the four following questions:

- (1) What messages are included in the text regarding war and peace with the Arab 'other'?
- (2) How is the Palestinian point of view and/or suffering represented in the text?
- (3) How is Islam, as well as Muslim and Arab heritage, portrayed?
- (4) What are the attitudes towards Arab-Israeli (Palestinian) citizens and other ethnic minorities in Israel?

These questions address the primary concerns regarding the Israeli curricula and attempt to assess the level in which it promotes peace, co-existence, non-violence and understanding of the Palestinian, Arab or Muslim 'others'. The answers to these questions, the study contends, could serve to infer the degree in which the curricula is preparing Jewish Israeli students for peace and encouraging them to promote an actual peaceful conflict resolution with the Palestinian as well as with (other) Arab and Muslim states.

## Findings

The following findings present the main themes found in the analysis of the abovementioned Israeli textbooks according to the research questions. They are thus divided into the following four categories: (a) Peace and war with the Arab 'other'; (b) Palestinian point of view and suffering; (c) Islam and Muslim and Arab heritage; (c) Arab-Israeli (Palestinian) citizens and other ethnic minorities in Israel.

### ***Attitudes towards peace and war with the arab/muslim 'other'***

The contents found in 2000–2017 state and state-religious textbooks approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education for grades 7–12 demonstrate that overall, peace is depicted in these books in a positive

manner and many textbooks portray it as advantageous and achievable. Although past wars are often described as inevitable or a 'necessary evil', the vast majority of current-day Israeli textbooks include general messages of peace or show support for peaceful conflict resolution with Palestinians and Arab/Muslim states (including non-neighbouring Arab countries), and peace is presented as mutually beneficial for both Jews and Arabs.

It is therefore not uncommon to find general messages promoting peace, asking questions such as: *'How, in your opinion, can we educate to reject violence and all its expressions and promote communication in peaceful ways?'*<sup>2</sup> or *'When, in your opinion, will the long-awaited peace with the Arab states be achieved?'*<sup>3</sup> A Jewish Heritage textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, under the heading *'Peace—Dream or Vision'* asks students: *'Write for five consecutive minutes and begin with one of these sentences: 1. My peace is .../2. When peace comes upon us .../3. If there were peace in the world ...'*<sup>4</sup> In the next page it asks students: *'4. If we as a people strive for peace, what should we do to attain it?'* and in the page after that *'Write your vision of peace and how it would affect our society'.*

General or abstract messages promoting peace are most commonly found in Israeli literature books or anthologies, and include many poems that present peace as the ultimate goal. Some of these are quite abstract, and some are even idyllic or utopian. Although a wish for peace is generally seen as a positive trend that promotes non-violent conflict resolution, this type of representation, one could argue, leaves peace as an unrealistic and therefore unachievable objective. Additionally, many poems feature peace less as an actual agreement between two opposing sides and more as the cessation of war and especially the suffering and sacrifices made by the in-group, i.e. to the Jewish-Israeli side. This also results, of course, from the multi-semantic nature of the word 'peace'—*Shalom*—in Hebrew (perhaps more than in English), meaning 'hello/goodbye' and 'tranquillity' as well as 'an agreement to end a war'. However, it should be noted that for the Israeli reader, unless it is used as a salutation, 'peace' or '*Shalom*' (שלום) will be affiliated with the notion of peace with the Arabs and often specifically with the Palestinians. Both of these notions are expressed, for example, in a poem featured in a literary anthology for the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: *"Peace" is a blessing,/"Peace" is a prayer,/[. . .] But peace, real "peace"/Is a wish, is a dream./Peace that we all want,/Always peace, not battle, not fire/Therefore we all aspire:/Let there be peace upon Israel!*<sup>5</sup>

Other textbooks, such as Geography, Civics and some History textbooks, show more realistic and pragmatic attitudes towards peace and the peace process. In these textbooks, students are also encouraged to express their opinion in regard to matters of peace and the peace process, and some textbooks even ask them to suggest solutions of their own, as is the case in an Israeli high school Geography book, asking students to: *'Devise a plan for full cooperation between Syria and Israel and mention its benefits for both partners (for instance "package tours", industrial, agricultural, water and ecological cooperation, an inter-national bridge).'*<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, compromise regarding territory in order to achieve peace is presented in these books as possible and reasonable, and past peace processes that included such compromise are portrayed without prejudice, and are demonstrated in pictures and maps as well as in written texts. For instance, a Geography book writes: *'When we try to create a balance of advantages vs. concerns, there is not a shadow of a doubt that the benefits of peace with Egypt outweigh the concerns, and it is very clear that Israel must continue and nurture good relations between the two countries.'*<sup>7</sup> More surprisingly, the Oslo Accords, although criticized by a large part of the Israeli public and parliament, are presented in Israeli textbooks as a legitimate step towards peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as can be seen in the following quote from a high school Bible studies book: *'The Oslo agreement reflected the aspiration to put an end to the violent conflict between the Palestinians and us and to open a new page of peace between the two people.'*<sup>8</sup>

However, other textbooks present both sides of the public Israeli debate, as portrayed in an Israeli high school History textbook: *'The Oslo Accords were of great importance to both sides. [. . .]. For the first time, the Oslo agreements gave the Palestinians the chance to establish their own state. [. . .] Most of the left wing supported the agreement and hoped it would bring an end to violence, while in the right there*

was harsh criticism of Yitzhak Rabin [...] Rabin was accused of endangering the safety of the citizens of Israel [...].<sup>9</sup>

This type of quote, presenting different attitudes—left and right—of a debate concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict and especially the subject of territorial concessions as part of a future peace agreement, is quite prevalent in History, Civics and Geography textbooks. On occasion, Israeli textbooks even include direct quotes from different leaders and other public figures and then ask students to make up their own minds regarding complex and even highly political historical and current events. In these situations, the authors refrain from taking sides and let the original texts speak for themselves.

While war in general is portrayed in textbooks as negative, actual Arab-Israeli wars are mostly shown as a factual event and sometimes as a justified means for survival or 'a necessary evil' for the Israeli side. This is related to the fact that Israeli textbooks portray the Arab states and/or the Palestinians as the instigators of conflict or violence when describing past and present events, and in both small and large scale incidents. For example, an Israeli high school Geography textbook portrays the Syrians as the sole instigators of the Israeli-Syrian conflict:

*"Since the establishment of the state of Israel, Syria has exhibited t extremely harsh expressions of hostility [...] Since 1982, and until the time when these words are written in 2007, Syria is agitating in Lebanon and is aiding the Shiite organization Hezbollah to attack Israel, hoping that in order to quieten its border with Lebanon, Israel will agree to withdraw from the Golan Heights. This policy creates a lot of tension in Syria-Israel relations and a constant fear of deterioration to a state of war."<sup>10</sup>*

In general, unlike Egypt or Jordan, for instance, Syria, both in the past and in the present, is portrayed in Israeli textbooks as an irrational, warmongering, terror-supporting, immoral state, that does not abide by international law or cease-fire agreements. Some might argue that there are substantial historical events that support this perspective, but nonetheless, this type of description, devoid of any actual rationale to Syria's animosity towards Israel, would lead students to believe that Syria is an irrational enemy and cannot be a potential peace partner.

Another place where textbooks portray Arabs as the sole instigators of irrational and immoral violence is when they depict the events of 1928–1929, as well as the Palestinian attacks on Jewish settlements in Israel in the 1930's. A somewhat uncharacteristic and extreme quote even depicts the Palestinians of 1933–1939 as bloodthirsty and excessively violent:

*The Arabs' violent acts [that took place in Israel in 1933–1939] focused on burning fields, setting fire to woods, destroying quarries, attacking Jewish roads [...]. However, damaging property was not enough. Most of the terrorist acts were focused on taking lives, attacking Jewish neighbourhoods and settlements. Their wrath was also turned on the British administration, and attacks took place on railroads, as well as army and police camps.<sup>11</sup>*

What is missing from this quote is a rationale to these acts; without this rationale, it would appear as senseless violence. Although this is, as mentioned, a very extreme and uncommon type of quote in comparison to other texts analysed in this study, this type of one-sided presentation of the Arab-Israeli conflict also aligns with the general tendency of Israeli textbooks to show Jews as the victims of all their enemies or subjugators, current or historic (going back to the Amalekites). The Holocaust is of course the clearest example of a time when Jews were victimized, and makes up, alongside other cases of anti-Semitic acts through the ages, a substantial part of Israeli History curricula. However, one should note that unlike Israeli politicians, media and literature, Israeli textbooks refrain from making any explicit connection between the victimization of Jews by the Nazis and the victimization of Jews by current-day Arabs. Nevertheless, some have noticed (e.g. Bar-Tal, 2007; Gavrieli-Nuri, 2007), that despite this 'victim mentality', Israeli textbooks also portray Israeli fighters as the ideal soldiers: brave, loyal, resourceful, and strategically and morally superior. The same books also show war as an expression or as an opportunity for Jewish-Israeli victory and greatness. These notions are all expressed (to some degree) in the following quote from a high school Grammar textbook writes: *'In the era of cynicism and depression that have taken over our lives, a visit to the Palma'h<sup>12</sup> Museum [...]*

can contribute to raising the national morale. The journey to the past revives the History of bravery, of few verses many, of motivated young people who had a fighting spirit, wishing to establish a Jewish state for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. [...] The experience at the museum could encourage us specifically in these difficult times of [Palestinian] terrorist attacks [...].<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the past Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations and agreements (Oslo included) are portrayed as positive: *“The purpose of the second Oslo Agreement was to enlarge the Palestinian independent administration in the West Bank by means of an elected ruling authority—‘The Palestinian Council’, and to encourage cooperation and peaceful coexistence, based on shared interests and mutual respect, while safeguarding the vital interests of the State of Israel”*.<sup>14</sup> Most geography textbooks also feature maps that include the cease-fire line of 1949, and designate the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) as special areas, separate from the rest of the state, and include Palestinian cities and villages beyond the Green Line (as shown in [Figure 1](#) below).

Textbooks encourage students to form their own opinion in regard to the Palestinian-Israeli situation, and different opinions in (Jewish) Israeli society, relating to the surrender of territories as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians, are also given. The existence of settlements beyond the ‘Green Line’ and/or occupation of these territories are described impartially, without support or judgement of either side. Moreover, Palestinian territories are occasionally referred to as such, but in some cases they are only given the names of their regions (Judea and Samaria, Gaza strip, etc.), without stating that they belong to one state or another.

Books describe past and present difficulties and hardships of the Palestinians (e.g. their banishment in 1948, refugee camps, the events of Kfar Qassem, the Sabra and Shatila massacre, Black September), and acknowledge some Israeli culpability (or at least accountability) in a few of these cases. Although often claimed otherwise, Israeli textbooks also explain the term ‘Nakba’ (*‘Catastrophe’*) as the name given by some Palestinians to the 1948 war (or ‘War of Independence’), as in this quote from an Israeli History textbook: *The War of Independence is called different names that express different points of view on the war: The War of Independence, The 5708 [Tasha’h] War, The War of Liberation, [...] and Al Nakba.*

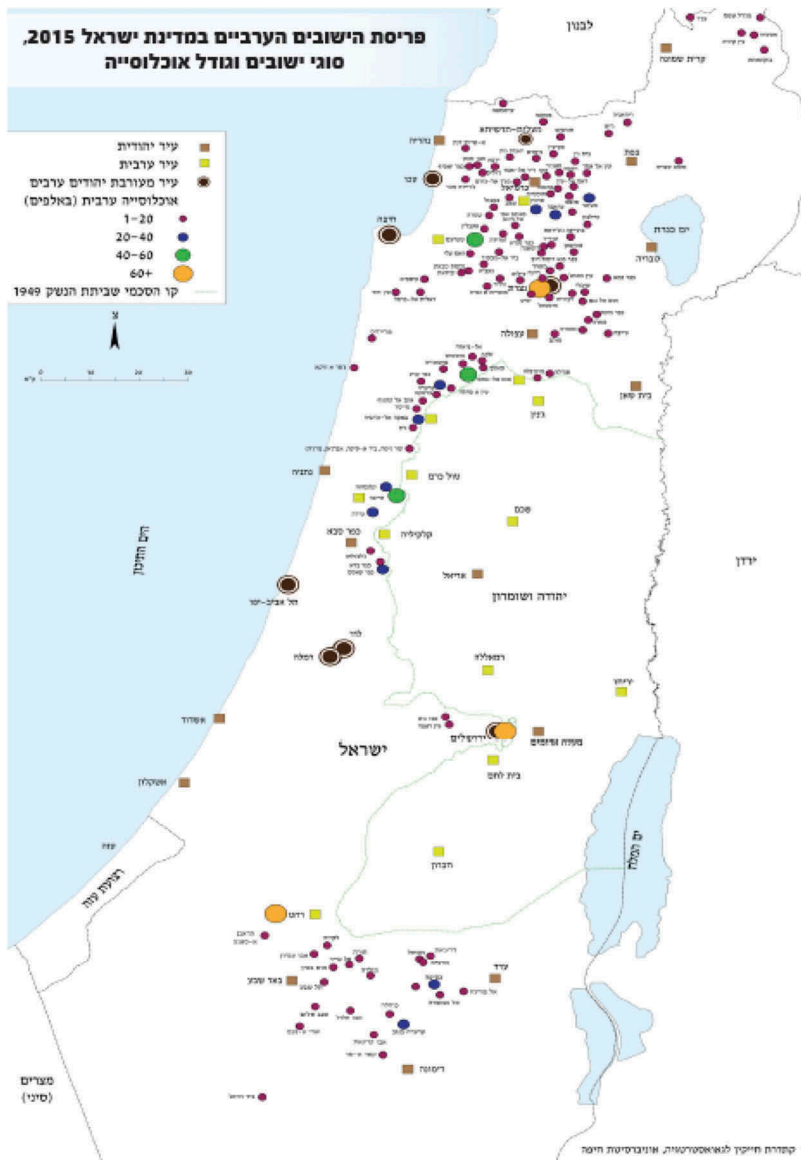
- (a) Explain the significance of the names. You can use other information sources.
- (b) Explain the different points of view that lead to the giving of these names.
- (c) Make a poster to illustrate one of the names of the war.<sup>16</sup>

### **Presenting the Palestinian point of view and suffering**

Some Israeli textbooks, and most of the newer History textbooks, present students with some type of Palestinian point of view regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the subsequent Palestinian suffering, though mostly that which is pre- or circa 1948. However, individual (personal experience) accounts given as direct quotes are rare, especially in regard to more recent or current-day (non-Israeli) Palestinians. If given, the current Palestinian point of view is presented indirectly (not as a direct quote), or is that of a Palestinian Israeli citizen (or ‘Arab Israelis’). One should point out that Israeli History books tend to linger over the events that took place until and including the 1948 war, and include shorter descriptions of events that took place after 1948 (and even more so after 1967). However, there are some cases in which Palestinian suffering is acknowledged and described with relevance for today’s Israeli-Palestinian relations. Such an example can be found in a Geography textbook for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, which reads:

[...] In [Palestinian] refugee camps the population is fast growing and the conditions are very difficult—employment rates are high, dwellings are cramped and run down, and the level of medical, educational and sanitary services is poor. The problem of the Arab refugees is a complicated one and a painful human issue, and it is one of the most difficult and complex issues in the long Arab-Israeli conflict. As part of Israel’s peace talks with its neighbours this issue is also brought to the table, and there is no doubt that its resolution is essential for achieving peace in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup>





**Figure 1.** ‘Distribution of Jewish and Arab settlements in 2015—type and population size’<sup>15</sup>. Arab/Palestinian cities are marked in yellow, Jewish cities in orange and mixed cities as brown circles. The Green Line is marked in green.

What several textbooks do, on the other hand, is ask the students to *imagine* what the Palestinian point of view may have been during events such as the 1948 war or the period leading to it, as in the two following examples: “Describe the development of the new settlement<sup>18</sup> in the Land of Israel through the point of view of a Jew from the ‘Old Settlement [Hayishuv Hayashan]’ and from the point of view of an Arab villager.<sup>19</sup>; ‘Divide into groups representing journalists from the Jewish settlers [Yishuv] and Palestinian journalists sent to cover the debate in the UN towards the decision to divide Israel. [...] Discuss the differences between the pieces written by the Yeshuv journalists and the Palestinian reporters’.<sup>20</sup> Another History textbook reads: ‘1. Why did Britain publish the Balfour Declaration<sup>21</sup>? 2. What are the difficulties that arise from the wording of the Balfour Declaration? 3. How did the Zionists, integrated Jews and Arabs

*react to the Balfour Declaration?* If one reads the document, it is clear that the answer to the second question the following paragraph of the declaration: '[...] *With the clear understanding that nothing will be done to hurt the civic and religious rights of the non-Jewish sects living in the Land of Israel [...]*'<sup>22</sup>

When it comes to recognizing Palestinian nationhood and identity, the latest Israeli textbooks recognize the Palestinian movement as a legitimate national movement and events regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are given in a more balanced and impartial manner than in textbooks published in previous years. The latter seldom referred to this type of nationhood or national identity and usually used the terms 'The Arabs of the Land of Israel' or 'The Arabs of Israel'. However, even when the term 'The Arabs of Israel' is used, it is still synonymous with the term 'Palestinians' when it describes the pre-1948 development of the Palestinian national movement, as in the case of the following excerpt from an Israeli History textbook: '*During the 1930's, national Arab movements emerged across the Middle East. Many of the Arabs of Israel also began to develop national awareness, namely, that they were not only part of the great Arab nation but that they were also Palestinians, dwellers of Palestine*'<sup>23</sup>

Books occasionally portray terrorist actions performed by Palestinians and justify fighting their perpetrators, but they also often give non-judgemental reasoning or rationale for these and other hostile Palestinian actions (e.g. their national aspirations or suffering in the refugee camps). For instance, in one History textbook it is written that: '*The conditions in the [Palestinian refugee] camps were difficult and the population living in them suffered from poverty and neglect, despite the aid they received from international organizations. The underprivileged population of the Palestinian camps was the main source of 'intruders' into Israeli territory, and later on—became the core of terrorist organizations that acted against Israel. [...]*'<sup>24</sup>

When discussing the events of 1948 or earlier, Palestinians are portrayed as initiators of violent acts and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, while the Jewish settlement is shown to merely protect itself (i.e. as the victim). In some of these cases, Palestinian leaders are described as distributing lies in order to incite their public against the Jews, thus blaming the leaders—not the Palestinian people—for violent events. This last view can be seen in the following quote: '*The Mufti Haj Amin Al Hussein enflamed the religious conflict and spread word as if the Temple Mount and within it the Dome of the Rock and the El-Aksa mosque were under danger of being overtaken by the Zionists. Every Friday sermons in the mosques incited them against the Jews [...]. These sermons achieved their goal and enflamed spirits among the Muslim believers*'<sup>25</sup>

Some textbooks remain ambiguous as to the reasons for Palestinian population shifts in and around 1948. However, most books concede that some Palestinians were chased from their homes by Jewish forces in the 1948 war, and that not all of them fled willingly, and some clearly state that the Jews banished the Palestinians from their homes: '*During the fighting many of the Arabs of Israel were banished. Some of them fled even before the Jews reached a village or an Arab neighbourhood in one of the cities, and some were forcefully banished by the conquering force*'<sup>26</sup> Additionally, it should be noted that some violent actions against the Palestinian population are also presented without any justification as in the following example: '*In the midst of 'Operation Nahshon' [April 1948] an event took place, which later on received much significance. Dir Yassin, an Arab village in the west of Jerusalem, was attacked by Etzel and Lehi members. During the taking over of houses in the village most of the villagers were killed. The number of dead is unclear and varies between 100 and 254 people*'<sup>27</sup>

Israeli textbooks also acknowledge a significant Arab presence in pre-1948 Palestine and in its (Jewish and/or Muslim) holy places, and the Arab population is even shown as larger than that of the Jewish population at that time (as is historically accurate): '*On the eve of the arrival of Zionist immigrants to Israel, it was not completely unoccupied. About 400 thousand Arabs lived in it, as well as about 25 thousand Jews*'<sup>28</sup> Despite the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is recognized as such, Israeli textbooks describe the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship as ongoing peace negotiations, in which peace has merely 'not yet' been reached but is always the ultimate objective.

As previously mentioned, the achievement of a peace agreement with the Palestinians is portrayed in these books as a positive and attainable final goal. In fact, Geography textbooks often elaborate on the necessary steps to achieve peace, alongside the practical options and the mutual advantages of a potential peace agreement, as in the following example: *'When the permanent arrangements between Israel and the Palestinians will be discussed, there will be a need to discuss and decide about the matter of the use of the Jordan river's water by the Palestinians, the water supply to Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, as well as the division of water between the two sides. At any rate, it is clear that the water in the Judea and Samaria mountains will always be shared by Israel and the Palestinians.'*<sup>29</sup>

### **Attitudes towards islam and muslim and arab heritage**

The Israeli textbooks examined in the current project have been found to show an extensive and respectful approach to the origins and religious precepts of Islam, as well as to Muslim History. A typical quote reads: *The Shi'ite count 12 Imams, their successors of the Prophet Mohamed and Ali. According to their worldview, the 11<sup>th</sup> imam died in the year 873 ad, and the 12<sup>th</sup> imam, Mohamed Al Muntazar 'vanished' and became 'The Hidden Imam', who is destined to be revealed at the end of days, become a 'Mehdi' (Messiah) and rule with infinite benevolence.*<sup>30</sup>

Textbooks addressing Islam quote Islamic religious texts and often present a historic and ideological connection between Islam and Judaism. Additionally, legitimacy is given to the holy Muslim places in Israel, noting the sanctity of Jerusalem for Muslims (as well as Christians) in particular, despite the political significance of such statements: *'The Land of Israel in general, and Jerusalem in particular, became more and more sacred in Islamic thought [...].'*<sup>31</sup>

Israeli textbooks were found to give a balanced portrayal of the interaction between Muslim Arabs and Jews in Arab countries, and most accounts show a positive relationship between the two peoples, alongside some hardships caused by the Muslims to the Jews living among them. (The positive descriptions of Muslim relative tolerance are in clear contradiction of the descriptions of blatant and harsh anti-Semitism in historic European states since the Middle Ages and until 1945). Furthermore, a broad and balanced depiction of the current and historical situation in Arab countries is given impartially, respectfully and occasionally in a glorifying manner, as in the following example:

*'In the Muslim empire culture and science thrived. Arab doctors performed complex surgery, discovered diseases and erected hospitals; Arab astronomers built an observatory, algebra was developed; the Arabs disseminated Indian numerals we use today and began using the digit zero; books were translated from Greek and philosophy books were written. In Geography, in the arts and in architecture the Arabs donated considerably.'*<sup>32</sup>

Israeli textbooks also encourage students to know and find out more about historic and current-day Arab and Muslim countries, including states such as Morocco, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Syria, and not only in relation to the state of Israel or to the Jews who lived or are still living there. Additionally, photographs, stories and poems of Arab and Muslim artists about Islam and/or Arab society and heritage are introduced to the students—especially in Literature, Civics and Geography textbooks.

### **Attitudes towards arab-israeli citizens and other ethnic minorities**

Israeli textbooks see the Arab-speaking minorities of Israel and heterogeneous, and differentiate between Israeli-Palestinians and other Arab-speaking or Muslim Israeli groups (Druze, Bedouin, Circassians etc.), and occasionally also between Christian and Muslim Israeli Arabs, as in the following quote: *'The state of Israel has 13 known religious groups [...], and the largest ones are the Jews, the Muslims and the Druze. [...] The Christians also have religious law courts and they abide by Canonic Law, which is the Christian religious law.'*<sup>33</sup>

Israeli textbooks were found to describe Arab settlements and communities in a respectful, detailed and impartial way, and to encourage students to learn more about the neighbouring Arab communities. The latter are also shown as undergoing a (positive) process of modernization:

*The changes taking place in Arab families of Israel are a result of various social and economic processes, among them a rise in the level of education, a rise in the participation of women in the employment market, a shift in women's status and a rise in the standard of living. The differences between Arab and Jewish families are influenced by cultural differences that cause different customs and lifestyles of these populations.*<sup>34</sup>

Through these textbooks, students become familiar with the customs, traditions, beliefs and social attitudes of the different minorities in Israel, and in some cases are also encouraged to get to know their neighbours outside the classroom. An example of the latter can be found in a new Civics textbook: *\*Are there contexts in which you get to meet Druze and Arab people? Describe your experiences from these encounters.*<sup>35</sup> On the same page the book reads: *'Alongside those who deepen the national rift in Israel, governmental institutions and Jewish and Arab groups are making an effort to keep a respectful relationship, to ensure equality between citizens and to protect the stability of society and state.'*<sup>36</sup>

Arabic textbooks for Hebrew-speakers often describe the everyday and personal lives of Arab citizens and include friendly dialogues between Israeli Jews and Arabs. Arab-Israeli citizens are even shown to have a natural bond with non-Israeli Palestinians and other Arabs worldwide. However, in Literature, Geography and Civics textbooks, Arab Israelis are also shown as individuals and their point of view is represented, occasionally even as a direct quote or a personal story or artistic (literary) work, as in the following poem:

*"Father and Mother/Naim Aradi<sup>37</sup>  
This woman in the blue dress and the white head scarf  
Is my mother, an Arab-Hebrew-Hebrew-  
Arab back and forth. [...]  
This man in the grey Abaya in the snow-white Kaffiya,  
Is my father.  
He wanted me to study Medicine, and Law would suffice.  
Speaks a little Hebrew. Funny accent.  
You can understand."<sup>38</sup>*

Civics textbooks emphasize the rights of minorities in general and of Arab-Israelis in particular, especially pertaining to rights promised in the Israeli declaration of independence. In fact, Civics and Geography textbooks describe and criticize the political discrimination, and encourage students to decide for themselves what they think of controversial situations, hinting that democratic values should outweigh national/religious Jewish values. Additionally, textbooks make a visible effort to describe hostility and tensions between Jews and Arabs in an objective manner, and acts perpetrated by Jews against Arab-Israeli citizens (e.g. discrimination) are described in detail and heavily criticized; as in the following question posed in a Civics textbook: *When the state was established about 15% of its residents were Arabs [...]. In theory they were Israeli citizens, but the state treated them with suspicion, forced a martial law on them [...] and actually discriminated against them in different ways. [...] Why do you think Israel's Arab citizens were discriminated against as opposed to its Jewish citizens? [...] Does this type of discrimination exist today in your opinion? Explain your answer.*<sup>39</sup>

Textbooks portray Arab-Israeli coexistence in 'mixed' cities (especially Jerusalem) as positive though complex, and Civics books emphasize the contradiction that sometimes occurs due to Israel's dual nature as Jewish and democratic. Additionally, the majority of maps featured in these textbooks include Arab (Palestinian) Israeli or other minority settlements, though some of them do not—especially if the particular discussion only involves the Jewish population of Israel (for instance in the case of historic settling patterns of Jewish immigrants). As previously mentioned, Israeli textbooks often describe laws pertaining to rights of minorities (Palestinian-Arabs, Druze, Circassians and Bedouins in particular) in Israel, especially based on the Israeli Declaration of

Independence, as in the next example: “[Article 13 of the Israeli Declaration of Independence:] The State of Israel [...] will give complete social and political equality to all its citizens regardless of religion, race and sex, will ensure freedom of religion, conscious, language, education and culture, and will guard the holy places of all religions [...]

- (1) Mark the expressions indicating that Arab citizens are also entitled to equal rights.
- (2) What rights are given to a national minority in Israel?
- (3) Give examples that express the fulfilment of the rights of the Arab minority in everyday life (including political rights)<sup>40</sup>

In general, the population of Israel is described as varied and multi-cultural, as a positive phenomenon. The personal narrative of ethnic minorities—especially Druze and Bedouin—is presented in textbooks, either directly (as a quote or a personal story) or indirectly (as a general description) and in an impartial and unprejudiced manner. The Druze and Bedouin communities, their traditions, beliefs and current situation are described respectfully and in detail in Geography and Civics textbooks. Other, smaller, minorities—non-Arab Christians, Baha’is, Samaritans etc.—are occasionally referred to briefly but otherwise in a similar manner to larger minorities).

Minority communities are often described as undergoing a positive though challenging process of modernization, despite the fact that in pictures they are frequently shown in traditional (non-modern) attire (which could perhaps be perceived as stereotypical or condescending). A typical quote reads as follows: *Today’s Bedouin society is in crisis, since it is in-between—between a magnificent and long tradition that is slowly dying and modernization, with its advantages and disadvantages, which is slowly taking its place [...].*<sup>41</sup> However, when it comes to its minority groups, Israeli textbooks not only give external scholarly explanations, but also include personal narratives, such as an interview with a Bedouin nurse working in an Israeli hospital and her day to day life and personal experiences,<sup>42</sup> a poem from the point of view of a modern Bedouin man struggling with his identity and with the fate of today’s Bedouin community,<sup>43</sup> as well as the story of a Druze family helping each other during the harvest,<sup>44</sup> a Christian Arab-Israeli boy describing his family life,<sup>45</sup> or a Palestinian-Israeli youth explaining why Israeli Palestinians feel compassion towards their non-Israeli brethren, as well as several poems and stories by Arab-Israeli authors that appear mostly in Israeli Literature textbooks. However, it should be stated that this is still a small-scale phenomenon, with 2–3 such quotes per Civics, Geography or Literature textbook. In Arabic textbooks for Jewish-Israeli students, however, most dialogues include at least one native Arab speaker, mostly Muslim and Christian Arab-Israelis.

## Discussion

The current study of 123 state and state-religious Israeli schoolbooks for grades 7–12 for the 2000–2019 school years found that Israeli education shows a genuine attempt to impart values of peace and tolerance towards others, although some books still show some Jewish ethnocentrism and victim mentality that might hinder the instilment of such values. Some messages found in these textbooks imply that Jewish Israeli identity is partially based on attitudes regarding the ‘other’. The Jewish people are frequently presented as a victim of other peoples (e.g. the Greeks, Romans, Turks, Germans, and Arabs), and most textbooks omit or only briefly describe the suffering of more current rivals (e.g. Palestinians), although this is perhaps to be expected in an ongoing conflict. However, at the same time, Israeli textbooks clearly attempt to promote peaceful conflict resolution, as well as deeper understanding, empathy and respect towards national and religious others, including Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians.

The study has examined trends promoted by the Israeli education system following the events of the Second Intifada (2000–2005) regarding: the portrayal of Arab and Muslim History, representation of ‘others’ (Palestinians, Arab countries, and Muslims), depiction of the Arab-

Israeli conflict and its potential resolution, and cultural tolerance and civil rights for Arabs and other minorities. Findings show that Israeli textbooks do refer to the difficult refugee status of many Palestinians following the 1948 war, and that they accept some Israeli accountability for tragic events that caused Palestinian suffering (e.g. the Dir Yassin massacre, or the expulsion of some Palestinians from their homes in 1948). Additionally, the controversial term 'Nakba' (addressing what the Palestinians term the 1948 'catastrophe'), is also used and explained in several post-2000 textbooks, as one that reflects part of the Palestinian narrative, as the current findings as well as other recent studies suggest. Nets-Zehngut (2013), as well as others (Shochat, 2018; Teff-Seker, 2012), have noted that including the term Nakba in Israeli history textbooks in the 2000s is part of a shift to a more critical analysis of historic events than the previous ethnocentric Zionist approach in history textbooks. This is despite the public controversy surrounding the term, and previous demands and decisions to omit the Nakba from the Arab-Israeli curricula (BBC, 22.07.2009).

In addition, the rational or expressed viewpoints of Palestinian or Arab states are also given in most texts (especially in History textbooks), which aid in presenting those 'others' not as blood-thirsty or hateful warmongers, but rather as opposing political movements that have rational and sometimes even legitimate reasons for their hostile actions (though perhaps less legitimate than those of the Jewish or Israeli side). This is so, despite other findings indicating that there is still a perception of the national collective Jewish self as a just, tolerant and peace-seeking perpetual victim, and also despite the fact that current-day (post-1967) Palestinian suffering is usually presented in a brief and superficial manner in these books, especially those written before 2007.

The depiction of Jews and Israelis as the main victim (and almost never as the aggressor) influences the manner in which Arabs and Palestinians are portrayed, because they are the other side of this equation, and if Jews are always the victim and always peace-seeking, then Arabs are always the aggressors, and it is their fault that peace has not yet been achieved. They are therefore shown not to be good partners for peace, which hinders the ability of students to believe that peace with the Palestinians and other Arab or Muslim people could be possible in the near future (if at all). Moreover, the increased tendency in recent textbooks to address both sides, right and left, as they discuss the Oslo Accords and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, could both indicate a more pluralistic approach, but also one that now provides more representation to right-wing criticism of peace agreements or the option of territorial compromise as part of a past or future peace process. Support for the latter can be found in the fact that, as indicated in the work of Teff-Seker regarding Israeli textbooks published recommended by the Ministry of Education between 2009–2012, presented the Oslo Accords more favourable, and generally addressed them as a positive step towards peace.

Therefore, students are still given a somewhat skewed description of Arab-Israeli and specifically Israeli-Palestinian relations, decreasing the sense of peace likelihood. Ways to improve this approach, such as presenting Arab (especially Palestinian) viewpoint and suffering, as well as showing Arab efforts—or voices—attempting to promote peace, are, as demonstrated, already visible in some Israeli textbooks, but should be amplified and extended. However, Israeli textbooks differ from each other and include a variety of attitudes both regarding Israeli national identity and regarding other social or ethnic groups. An analysis of the findings according to academic subject indicates that different disciplines present different trends and especially themes that pertain to conflict and the Palestinian, Muslim or Arab 'other'.

## **History**

Findings show that Israeli History textbooks attempt to present a balanced and objective picture of the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process, while presenting not only the Jewish point of view but also Arab opinions, narrative and rationale, often as a national group or sub-

group but occasionally also as individuals (as is the case with the Palestinian, Druze and Bedouin citizens in Israel). However, quite often, the Arab or Muslim side is shown as the aggressor, while the Israeli or Jewish side is portrayed as defending itself from such an attack; though since the Arab (and especially Palestinian) rationale for these acts is also presented, whether as a response to a perceived Israeli/Jewish threat, or whether as protest or revenge for an Israeli/Jewish action seen as hostile or damaging.

As a rule, History textbooks also recognize the historical existence of a Palestinian national movement—already shown as substantial in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—and Palestinians (or “the Arabs of the Land of Israel, as many books call pre-1948 Palestinians) are described as the majority residents of Israel before the vast post-WWII Jewish immigration began. Additionally, textbooks present conflicts and peace agreements (including the Oslo agreement) in a factual manner, and provide a plethora of opinions from different political, cultural or other public figures, from left and right, occasionally including Arab leaders, politicians and artists on the matter. Textbooks then ask the students what their opinion is in regard to difficult and substantial issues that regard the Arab-Israeli conflict and/or peace negotiations, so that the students can formulate their own (independent) opinion in these matters.

### **Civics**

Civics books describe the complex identity of the Palestinian Israeli citizens, and the democratic rights of Arab or Muslim minorities objectively and in detail, supporting equality and peaceful coexistence for all Israeli citizens. Textbooks also show the complex and sometimes problematic nature of the Israeli state as being both Jewish and democratic.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the different opinions surrounding it are described factually and impartially, showing the different political (Jewish and non-Jewish) views and beliefs in Israeli society, including views for and against territorial concessions in negotiations with the Palestinians. Moreover, Civics textbooks criticize Israeli society and government for non-democratic or discriminative behaviour towards non-Jewish (mostly Arab) minorities.

### **Geography**

Geography textbooks include maps that also feature the Palestinian Authority according to the Oslo agreement or show the ‘Green Line’. Some maps display A, B and C territories (areas with various degree of Palestinian control, according to the Oslo Agreement) as Palestinian, others only A territories, and some show no spatial differentiation between Israeli and Palestinian territories, especially when this is not the subject at hand, but they often mark main Palestinian cities and settlements. Additionally, Geography textbooks also deal with the subjects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, giving historic and current facts, and address Palestinian lives, point of view and suffering today and in the past. These books also invite students to assess the situation themselves and form their own opinion regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process. Geography books also include extensive segments on current relationships with neighbouring Arab countries (including the PA), and see prospective peace agreements as mutually beneficial, possible, necessary and quite immanent.

### **Literature and Hebrew language**

Literature anthologies and Hebrew Grammar and language textbooks include poems, stories, reading passages and famous quotes that introduce both sides of the Arab-Israeli relationship: on one side, there are texts that emphasize the pain and anguish caused by the Arabs at times of war and glorify Israeli soldiers or Jewish combatants that fought bravely for Israel and for the Jewish people; and on the other side there are many poems glorifying peace as the ultimate goal of the Jewish sides

and as the best solution for all, and showing Palestinian-Israeli co-existence (especially Israeli Palestinian citizens) as ideal.

Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Ben-Gurion are often quoted in these books. Interestingly, they are both quoted to represent the two sides of the Israeli political debate: both as people who fought the Arabs and Palestinians for Israel and the Jewish people, but also as men of peace. Rabin is quoted both after the Israeli victory in 1967, and during the signing of the Oslo agreement; Ben-Gurion is quoted both as the man who (before and during the 1948 war) decided that the Jewish settlement must abandon the path of peaceful resolution with the Arabs in regard to the Land of Israel, and also as the man behind the Declaration of Independence, in which he and the Israeli leadership offered to extend their hand in peace to all of Israel's Arab neighbours and to give equal rights to the Arab residents of the new state of Israel.

### ***Bible and judaism studies***

These textbooks attempt to interpret and explain the Bible and other Jewish scriptures and traditions to today's students. Part of this is done by referencing current events and comparing them to biblical ones or analysing them according to Jewish historical or traditional laws and perceptions. Occasionally, the Arab-Israeli conflict or peace process become the centre of that illustration, in which case the texts almost always promote peaceful conflict resolutions and reject violence. However, no references are made to the suffering or to the point of view of Arabs or Palestinians, perhaps due to the small amount of current references found in these books to begin with.

### ***Arab language***

Textbooks used to teach Arabic to the Jewish sector contain many stories and dialogues that include or revolve around all Israeli Arab-speakers: Palestinians, Bedouins and Druze (as well as Arab-speaking Jews), and present their point of view and everyday life to the students. These books also teach students about Islam: its laws, precepts and History, as well as direct quotes from the Koran. All of these are presented respectfully, objectively and without prejudice or judgement. Peace agreements with Arab states are mentioned favourably, though peace negotiations and events that have to do with the Palestinian Authority are described briefly and factually, and textbooks refrain from expressing any opinion other than a general support for peace in the Middle East.

### **Conclusion**

In the 123 Israeli textbooks examined for this study, it was found that, as a rule, these textbooks demonstrate a visible effort to provide messages of understanding of other cultures, to portray events in a balanced and objective manner, and not to include messages presenting negative stereotypes, racism or ethnic hatred. These positive trends were noted by other researchers in this field, and first traced to the late 1980's and the 1990's, at least partly due to the 1984 Israeli Ministry of Education's coexistence-oriented directive and the ensuing ministry policies. The findings of the current study support the work of other scholars in the field, who note that the Israeli curriculum has also become more critical in comparison to previous, more ethnocentric, Zionist approaches found in pre-2000 textbooks.

However, it is the conclusion of this article that even more steps can be taken to provide pupils with the notion that Arabs and especially non-Israeli Palestinians are individual human beings ('just like you and me'), and that they too suffer greatly from the ongoing conflict between the two peoples. Since it is the premise of this article that Jewish Israeli self-identity is highly influenced by the perception of the 'other', then the more textbooks show Palestinians as individuals and portray their suffering, the more Jewish identity ceases to revolve around self-victimization and enables the evolution of a world view that promotes true understanding, empathy and perhaps even identification with those whom are



sometimes viewed as the ultimate 'other'. Since textbooks already promote a Jewish Israeli self-perception of a peaceful and social tolerance-seeking people, this is not necessarily such a revolutionary next step. Moreover, the growing trend to include critical views of recent peace processes and agreements in the last decade, in particular towards the Oslo Accords, might encourage a pluralistic and open political debate on one hand, but could also decrease support for a future peace process, as well as the perceived likelihood of a successful, imminent peace agreement.

The findings also indicate a notable lack of consistency in Israeli textbooks on key issues such as the Nakba and the related Palestinian narrative, the depiction of Israeli vs. Palestinian territory or sovereignty in geography textbook maps, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As there are often several government-approved textbooks for the same subjects that cover similar material, this means that teachers and schools can choose to teach one textbook over the other, and that different students in the same school system would receive different information that could potentially support different agendas and worldviews, especially in regard to Israeli-Palestinian relations. Further study of these two issues is necessary for understanding the reasons behind these inconsistencies, as well as for understanding the manner in which textbook material is actually used in the classroom.

## Notes

1. It should be added that the Ultra-Orthodox education has unique characteristics: it is not supervised by the state, it has many streams, female and male students receive a completely different education, and it is often anti-national.
2. *Civil Studies for Matriculation Exams: A Jewish and Democratic State Facing Reality*, 2006, p. 355.
3. *Hebrew—Comprehension, Language and Grammar*, 2007, p. 159.
4. *The Wisdom of the Forefathers Builds Generations*, 2014, p. 133.
5. *The Way of Words*, Book 2, 2007, p. 155.
6. *Geography of the Middle East: Changes on the Verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2008, p. 307. Parentheses appear in the original version.
7. *Ibid*, p. 293.
8. *Destruction, Exile and Salvation: Chapters in Bible Studies with a Guide for Matriculation Preparation*, 2005. p. 21.
9. *Time Travel: Building a State in the Middle East*, 2009, p. 206).
10. *Geography of the Middle East: Changes on the Verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2008, p. 353–354.
11. *Revolution and Change between Two World Wars 1920–1939*, 2005, p. 73.
12. *Palma"h* is an abbreviation for 'Plugot Mahatz' or 'strike brigades'—an elite fighting force of the *Haganah*, the underground army of the Jewish community in Israel during the the British Mandate in the 1940s.
13. *Language Stepping Stones: Understanding, Expression and Grammar in its Textual Context*, Part A, 2010, p. 98.
14. *This is the Land—an Introduction to Israeli Studies*, 1999, p. 21–22.
15. *Being Citizens in Israel, In a Jewish and Democratic State*, 2016; p. 464.
16. *A Journey to the Past: Selected Subjects in History. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century \* The 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 2007, p. 184.
17. *Man and Environment in the Global Age: Geography and Environmental Development*, 2013, p. 158.
18. Here I use the word 'settlement' for *Yishuv*, as it refers to township and community establishment in what was considered Southern Syria provinces (Palestine) during the Ottoman period.
19. *Nationality—The Beginning*, 2008, Part A, p. 165.
20. *Journey to the Past: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century—Because of Freedom*, 1999, p. 294.
21. Published 1917, the Balfour Declaration was a document sent to Lord Rothschild, in which it is written that Britain supports the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.
22. *Nationality in Israel and the People: From the Beginning to 1920*. 2014, p. 194.
23. *History of Today, the 21<sup>st</sup> century—on the verge of Tomorrow*, 1999, p. 85.
24. *The Main Mountain: Judea, Samaria, the Plain and the Jordan Valley*, 2002, p. 346.
25. *1870–1970 The Era of Dread and Hope: History Chapters for High School*, 2001, p.163.
26. *History of Today—The 20<sup>th</sup> Century: On the Verge of Tomorrow, History for 9<sup>th</sup> grade*, 1999, p. 143.
27. *A Journey to the Past: Selected Subjects in History—The 19<sup>th</sup> century \* The 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 2007, p. 174.
28. *1870–1970 The Era of Dread and Hope: History Chapters for High School*, 2001, p. 40.
29. *Geography of the Middle East: Changes on the Verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2008, p. 183.
30. *Travel through Time—Cities and Communities*, 2008, p. 68.
31. *This is the Land—an Introduction to Israeli Studies*, 1999, p. 161.
32. *Travel to the Past: From the Middle Ages and until the Early Modern Period—History for Junior High School*. 1997, p. 14.

33. *Religion, Society and State in Israel*, 2006, p. 160.
34. *Israel—Man and Space*, 2007, p. 30.
35. *Being Citizens in Israel, In a Jewish and Democratic State*, 2016; p. 483.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Areidi is a Druze poet, although this is not mentioned in the textbook.
38. *Simply Literature: A Guided Tour to Classic Literature*, 2002, p. 46.
39. *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century: On the Brink of Tomorrow*, 1999, pp. 160–161.
40. *A Journey to Israeli Democracy*, 1994, p. 89.
41. *Geography of the Middle East: Changes on the Verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2008, p. 89.
42. *To the Negev—Chapters in Geography of the South of Israel*, 2000, p. 140.
43. *The Negev: Man and the Environment through the Ages*, 2004, p. 235.
44. *Step 1: Hebrew—Understanding, Expression and Grammar*, vol. 2, 2006, p. 100.
45. *A Good Word 1: Comprehension, Expression and Grammar*, 2008, p. 119.

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## Notes on contributor

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