



Book review: how Israeli school textbooks teach kids to hate

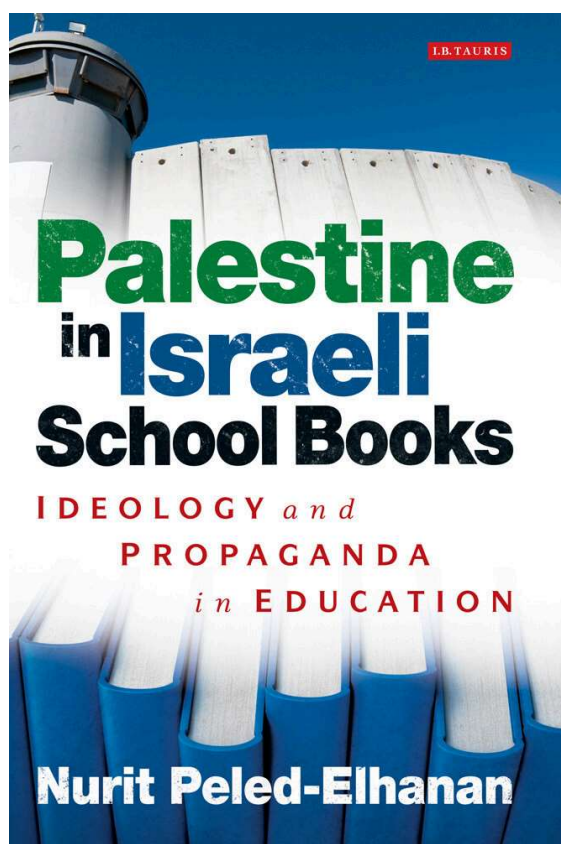
[Asa Winstanley \(/people/asa-winstanley\)](/people/asa-winstanley)

[The Electronic Intifada \(/people/electronic-intifada\)](/people/electronic-intifada)

[London \(/location/london\)](/location/london)

11 August 2012

At the height of Israel's brutal [2008-09 assault on the Gaza Strip](#)



(<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/operation-cast-lead>), then-foreign minister [Tzipi Livni \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/tzipi-livni\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/tzipi-livni) claimed that “Palestinians teach their children to hate us and we teach love thy neighbor” (232).

The first part of this myth is propagated by people like US Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/hillary-clinton\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/hillary-clinton), and more recently [Newt Gingrich \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/newt-gingrich\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/newt-gingrich), who both spread the baseless claim that Palestinian schoolbooks teach anti-Semitism. This calumny originated with anti-Palestinian propagandandists such as [Israeli](#)

[settler Itamar Marcus \(https://electronicintifada.net/content/will-palestinians-hit-hillarys-glass-ceiling/7836\)](https://electronicintifada.net/content/will-palestinians-hit-hillarys-glass-ceiling/7836) and his “Palestinian Media Watch.”

In an important new book, *Palestine in Israeli School Books*, Israeli language and education professor [Nurit Peled-Elhanan \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/nurit-peled-elhanan\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/nurit-peled-elhanan) buries the second part of Livni’s myth once and for all.

Peled-Elhanan examines 17 Israeli school textbooks on history, geography and civic studies. Her conclusions are an indictment of the Israeli system of indoctrination and its cultivation of anti-Arab racism from an early age: “The books studied here harness the past to the benefit of the ... Israeli policy of expansion, whether they were published during leftist or right-wing [education] ministries” (224).

She goes into great detail, examining and exposing the sometimes complex and subtle ways this is achieved. Her expertise in semiotics (the study of signs and symbols) comes to the fore.

Inculcation of anti-Palestinian ideology in the minds of Israel’s youth is achieved in the books through the use of exclusion and absence: “none of the textbooks studied here includes, whether verbally or visually, any positive cultural or social aspect of Palestinian life-world: neither literature nor poetry, neither history nor agriculture, neither art nor architecture, neither customs nor traditions are ever mentioned” (49).

Palestinians marginalized, demonized by Israeli textbooks

On the occasions Palestinians (including [Palestinian citizens of Israel \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/palestinian-citizens-israel\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/palestinian-citizens-israel)) are mentioned, it is in an overwhelmingly negative, Orientalist and demeaning light: “all [the books] represent [Palestinians] in racist icons or demeaning classificatory images such as terrorists, refugees and primitive farmers — the three ‘problems’ they constitute for Israel” (49).

“For example in MTII [*Modern Times II*, a 1999 history text book] there are only two photographs of Palestinians, one of face-covered Palestinian children throwing stones ‘at our forces’ ... [t]he other photograph is of ‘refugees’ ... placed in a nameless street” (72).

This what Peled-Elhanan terms “strategies of negative representation.” She explains that “Palestinians are often referred to as ‘the Palestinian problem.’”

While this expression is even used by writers considered “progressive,” the term “was salient in the ultra-right-wing ideology and propaganda of [Meir Kahane](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/meir-kahane) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/meir-kahane>),” the late Israeli politician and rabbi who openly called for the Palestinians to be expelled. Peled-Elhanan finds this disturbing, coming as it does “only 60 years after the Jews were called ‘The Jewish Problem’ ” (65).

She reprints examples of the crude Orientalist cartoon representations of Arabs, “imported into Israeli school book [sic] from European illustrations of books such as *The Arabian Nights*” (74). Arab men stand, dressed in Oriental garb, often riding camels. The cartoons of Arab women show them seated submissively, dressed in traditional outfits. Meanwhile, two Israelis on the same page are “depicted as a ‘normal’ — though caricaturistic — Western couple, unmarked by any ‘Jewish’ or ‘other’ object-signs” (110-11). The message is clear: Arabs do not belong here with “us.”

Justifications for massacre

Peled-Elhanan concludes: “The books studied here present Israeli-Jewish culture as superior to the Arab-Palestinian one, Israeli-Jewish concepts of progress as superior to Palestinian-Arab way of life and Israeli-Jewish behavior as aligning with universal values” (230).

While Israeli war crimes are not entirely ignored, the textbooks do their best to downplay or justify massacres and ethnic cleansing. “[T]he Israeli version of events are stated as objective facts, while the Palestinian-Arab versions are stated as possibility, realized in openings such as ‘According to the Arab version’ ... [or] ‘Dier [sic.] Yassin became a myth in the Palestinian narrative ... a horrifying negative image of the Jewish conqueror in the eyes of Israel’s Arabs’ ” (50-1).

[Deir Yassin](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/deir-yassin) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/deir-yassin>) was a Palestinian village where, in 1948, a notorious massacre of around 100 persons by terrorists from the Zionist militias Irgun, Lehi and Hagana took place. Yet note in the example above that it is only the *negative image* of Israel that is “horrifying.” The massacre of unarmed men, women and children is otherwise not a cause for concern.

Israeli education going backwards

With reference to previous studies of Israeli school textbooks, Peled-Elhanan finds that, despite some signs of improvement in the 1990s, the more recent books she examined have if anything got worse. The issue of the [Nakba](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/nakba), (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/nakba>) the forced expulsion of Palestinians

from their homeland in 1948, is for the most part not ignored, but instead justified.

For example, in all the books mentioning Deir Yassin, the massacre is justified because: “the slaughter of friendly Palestinians brought about the flight of other Palestinians which enabled the establishment of a coherent Jewish state” — a result so self-evidently good it doesn’t need explaining (178).

Contrary to the hope of previous studies “for ‘the appearance of a new narrative in [Israeli] history textbooks’ ... some of the most recent school books (2003-09) regress to the ‘first generation’ [1950s] accounts — when archival information was less accessible — and are, like them ‘replete with bias, prejudice, errors, [and] misrepresentations’ ” (228).

There is some sloppy editing here, and the academic jargon at times slips into the realm of mystifying. But those quibbles aside, Peled-Elhanan’s book is the definitive account of just how Israeli schoolchildren are brainwashed by the state and society into hatred and contempt of Palestinians and Arabs, immediately before the time they are due to enter the army as young conscripts.

Asa Winstanley is a journalist from London who has lived and worked in occupied Palestine. His website is: www.winstanleys.org. (<http://www.winstanleys.org>).

🔖 [racism \(/tags/racism\)](/tags/racism). [education \(/tags/education\)](/tags/education). [Nurit Peled-Elhanan \(/tags/nurit-peled-elhanan\)](/tags/nurit-peled-elhanan). [Hillary Clinton \(/tags/hillary-clinton\)](/tags/hillary-clinton). [Itamar Marcus \(/tags/itamar-marcus\)](/tags/itamar-marcus). [Newt Gingrich \(/tags/newt-gingrich\)](/tags/newt-gingrich). [Tzipi Livni \(/tags/tzipi-livni\)](/tags/tzipi-livni). [Operation Cast Lead \(/tags/operation-cast-lead\)](/tags/operation-cast-lead). [Palestinian citizens of Israel \(/tags/palestinian-citizens-israel\)](/tags/palestinian-citizens-israel). [Meir Kahane \(/tags/meir-kahane\)](/tags/meir-kahane). [Orientalism \(/tags/orientalism\)](/tags/orientalism). [Deir Yassin \(/tags/deir-yassin\)](/tags/deir-yassin). [Nakba \(/tags/nakba\)](/tags/nakba).

💬 Comments



[Eighty-five dollar? There is \(/comment/9452#comment-9452\)](/comment/9452#comment-9452)

🔗 [\(/comment/9452#comment-9452\)](/comment/9452#comment-9452) eGuard replied on Sat,

08/11/2012 - 16:27

Eighty-five dollar? There is a £15 paperback.



[I am not surprised by this. \(/comment/9463#comment-9463\)](/comment/9463#comment-9463)

[_\(/comment/9463#comment-9463\)](/comment/9463#comment-9463) rainintheface replied on Sun,

08/12/2012 - 14:19

I am not surprised by this. All conquerors will dehumanize those they have conquered. For years the Europeans of North and South America have dehumanized the Native people. They referred to the Native people as savages. The Native people were depicted as wild beasts who wanted nothing less than to murder the White man and steal his woman. The Native children in Canada were forced to attend residential schools where they were beaten for speaking their own language. They were told that they were savages and must learn the ways of the WHITE MAN and follow their ways.

And the dehumanizing of the Natives did not stop in the schools. One has only to watch some of Hollywood's movies to see what popular culture taught us about the Native people. According to Hollywood the Native American was nothing less than a blood thirsty maniac bent on killing and destroying all of the "civilized" World, read White European World. The White man dehumanized the Native people and ridiculed their leaders. A prime example of this is the Great Sioux warrior and leader , Crazy Horse. His real name was Spirit Horse but the White man changed it to CRAZY HORSE to belittle him.

This is exactly what the Israelis are doing to the Palestinians. In Hollywood films the Arabs are all terrorists while the poor Israelis are THE GOOD GUYS. I have yet to see one Hollywood film where the Arabs are not out to destroy Western (read civilized) society. If noting else , the Israelis have their lesson well.



[Whenever I try to explain to \(/comment/9465#comment-9465\)](/comment/9465#comment-9465)

[_\(/comment/9465#comment-9465\)](/comment/9465#comment-9465) Chris replied on Sun, 08/12/2012

- 19:06

Whenever I try to explain to my friends the extent of Zionist racism, I exchange the word "Palestinian" with "Jew" and the word "Israeli" with "Aryan/German", e.g. lets picture a modern-day German textbook stating that "the massacre of friendly Jews brought about the flight of other Jews which enabled the establishment of a coherent Deutchen Nationalstaates.".

Anyway, justice will come.



[Nurit Peled'Hannan's recent \(/comment/9805#comment-9805\)](#)

[_\(/comment/9805#comment-9805\)](#). Jennifer Killen replied on Wed,

08/29/2012 - 05:10

Nurit Peled'Hannan's recent book, *Palestine in Israeli School Books*, is indeed important and I would like to thank you for publishing Asa Wistanley's review. I write as a teacher and would recommend this book, not only for the excellent work it does in exposing the hidden ideology in Israeli texts, but also for the tools it provides us to analyse the textbooks used in any country or jurisdiction.

Peled'Hannan shows us how to analyse not just the words and language, but the whole text, where language, image and other representations work together to propose a particular world view.

While Wistanley suggest that "the academic jargon at times slips into the realm of mystifying", one must remember that this is an academic work and a degree of technicality is needed to for the author to fully and clearly convey her message. It is this technical language which allows her to uncover the more "subtle ways" these textbooks work to indoctrinate Israeli children before they enter the army.