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Palestine In Israeli Schoolbooks



By **Prakriti Paudel** February 9, 2024



Nurit Peled-Elhanan inquires about the depiction of Palestine and Palestinians, whom young Israelis may potentially need to use force against, in the school system.

Israel enforces strict segregation between Arab Palestinians, Jews, and non-Arab non-Jews, which laws legally sanction and uphold.

I believe that education in Israel reinforces this division not only through the existence of two separate education systems but also by depicting Arab Palestinians, both citizens of the state and those in the occupied Palestinian territories, in negative and stereotypical ways if they are represented at all.

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Thesis Of "Palestine in Israeli School-Books: Ideology and Indoctrination in Education"

The central thesis of my latest book, "Palestine in Israeli School-Books: Ideology and Indoctrination in Education," asserts that Israeli textbooks foster ignorance and employ racist language and imagery to portray Palestinians in subjects such as history, geography, and civics.

All 20 books I analyzed, released between 1996 and 2009, hold certain fundamental assumptions concerning Palestinian Arabs:

1. Jews possess historical entitlements to the Land of Israel, encompassing Palestine.
2. Palestinian citizens represent a demographic challenge that could evolve into a 'demographic threat' if left unregulated.
3. Palestinians in the occupied territories are viewed as an ongoing security concern and necessitate regulation.

Representation Of Palestine In Israeli School Textbooks

Israeli school children are taught about the Land of Israel, of which the state of Israel is considered only a small part. However, Palestinian people, cities, and institutions are notably absent from maps and texts. Most of the occupied Palestinian territories are depicted as part of Israel, with no distinct representation of Palestinian presence.

For instance, in the Geography book Israel-Man and Space, these areas are colorless on a population map, with a legend indicating a lack of data for this region within Israel. Furthermore, maps of universities highlight Jewish settlements in the West Bank but overlook major Palestinian universities.

When depicting Palestinians, textbooks often portray them collectively and characterize them as primitive farmers, nomads, refugees, or terrorists. These stereotypical portrayals, situated in undefined and anonymous settings, dehumanize Palestinians and represent them as symbols of the perceived 'problems' or 'threats' they pose to Israel: backwardness, terrorism, and the refugee crisis.

According to The 20th Century (1998), the portrayal of these issues tarnishes Israel's global image and strains its international relations. Building a Nation in the Middle East (2009, p.158) describes the refugee crisis as a looming threat to the existence of the state of Israel.



From GLI: 195.

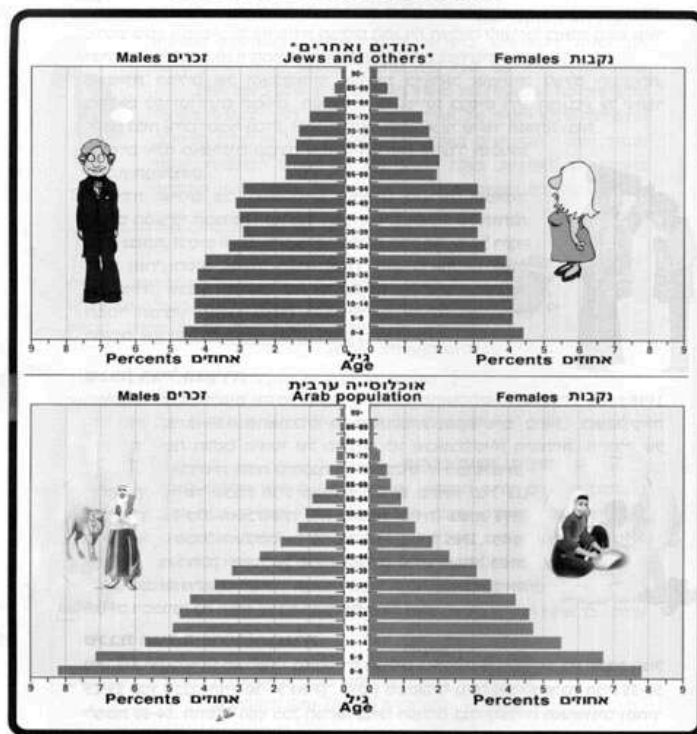
פריט ב17: גיל הנישואים הממוצע לאישה במבחר מדינות, 1990



From PIS: 76. Average marital age for women in a number of countries 1995.

*Note: The Israeli data refer only to the Jewish population.

**פירמידות הגילים: אוכלוסייה יהודית
מול אוכלוסייה ערבית, 2000**

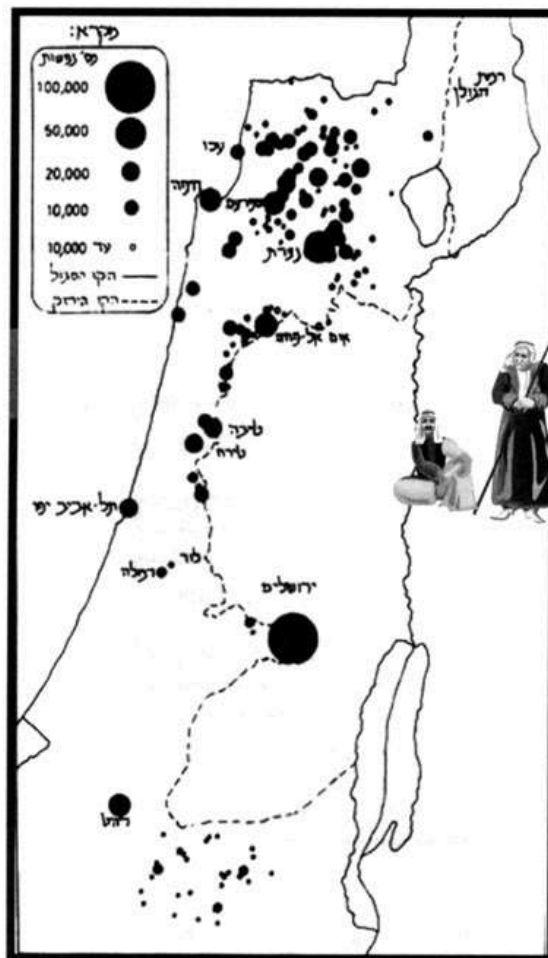


מחור: שנתון סטטיסטי לישראל, מס' 52, 2001



From GLI: 149. Age Pyramid: Jewish population versus Arab population 2000.

התפוצת הגיאוגרפית של היישובים הערבים בישראל



From GLI: 135. Geographic spread of the Arab population in Israel.

Implicit Goal Of Maintaining Jewish Majority In Israeli School Textbooks

While Israeli school textbooks do not explicitly state the aim of achieving a land devoid of Arabs, they emphasize the necessity of maintaining a Jewish majority. For instance, the history book *The 20th Century* (p.249) argues that annexing Palestinian-occupied territories to Israel would result in Jews becoming a minority in their own land, likening the situation to a "South African nightmare" and undermining the Zionist dream.

According to *The Geography of the Land of Israel* (p.240), the purpose of Judaizing the Galilee is to safeguard the national land from unauthorized encroachment by the non-Jewish population and prevent the establishment of contiguous non-Jewish settlements, which could potentially lead to the separation of Galilee from Israel.

The book depicts Palestinians negatively as inherently resistant to change and innovation, describing them as traditional and opposed to adopting new practices (p. 303). Additionally, it portrays them as tax evaders, criminals, and perpetrators of water theft.

Legitimization Of Palestinian Killings In Israeli School Textbooks

Israeli school textbooks justify the killings of Palestinians as justified responses to perceived "Arab hostility," rationalizing them based on their perceived effectiveness and utility (Bar-Navi 1998, Blank 2006, Inbar 2004, Nave et al. 2009, Domka et al. 2009). These reports advocate the belief that positive outcomes, particularly for Israelis, may justify or excuse the harm inflicted on Palestinians.

Portrayals of events like the Dir-Yassin massacre suggest that they encouraged a mass exodus of Palestinians, thereby facilitating the establishment of a Jewish state with a Jewish majority. Similarly, the depictions of massacres such as the one in Kibya and other "reprisals" suggest that they bolstered the morale and dignity of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and instilled confidence among Israeli citizens.

Impact of Israeli School Textbooks On Perception And Interaction With Palestinians

Israeli school textbooks are not unique in their use as tools for promoting national narratives and shaping perceptions; however, due to mandatory military service and the ongoing occupation, they have a more direct and immediate impact in Israel.

Students graduate with limited knowledge about the history and boundaries of the state, often viewing Palestinians as invaders or threats. This perception can influence their interactions when they are deployed to control or engage with Palestinians, sometimes resulting in violence.

Additionally, the insular nature of education in Israel can isolate students from neighboring communities, hindering meaningful contact and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. Israeli students enter their military service without a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical realities of the region.

Upon completing their education, they often hold the belief that Palestinians are a "problem" that needs addressing, and they perceive empathy as contingent upon race or religion rather than as a fundamental aspect of human interaction.

This mindset shapes their interactions with their Palestinian neighbors, whom they view as being at their mercy. Furthermore, they are led to believe that utility should be the primary factor guiding their behavior towards Palestinians.

Also Read: [John Bright And America](#)