The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks, 1948–2000

ELIE PODEH

Bergin & Garvey
Westport, Connecticut • London

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Podeh, Elie.
The Arab-Israeli conflict in Israeli history textbooks, 1948–2000/Elie Podeh.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.
ISBN 0-89789-755-2 (alk. paper)
1. Israel—History—Study and teaching. 2. Arab-Israeli conflict—Study and teaching—Israel. 3. Jews—Palestine—History—Study and teaching—Israel. 4. Palestinian Arabs—Foreign public opinion, Israeli. 5. Public opinion—Israel. I. Title.
DS126.5.P615 2002
956.94–dc21 2001025179

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2001025179

ISBN: 0-89789-755-2

First published in 2002
Bergin & Garvey, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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"The education system set curricula aimed at imbuing Israeli citizens with a love of the fatherland and enhancing their faith in the just of the State's cause."

(Eyal Naveh, *The Twentieth Century,* History for Ninth Grade, 1999)

"As known to all, it is easier to bear the myths and legends than the bare reality."

(Tahar Ben-Jelloun, *L'enfant de Sable*)

"The temptation is often overwhelmingly strong to tell it, not as it really was, but as we would wish it to have been."

(Bernard Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*)

"If, for example, Eurasia or Eastasia (whichever it may be) is the enemy today, then that country must always have been the enemy. And if the facts say otherwise then the facts must be altered. Thus history is continuously rewritten. The day-to-day falsification of the past, carried out by the Ministry of Truth, is as necessary to the stability of the regime as the work of repression and espionage carried out by the Ministry of Love."

(George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*)

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PREFACE

In Israel, curiously, it is considered odd for a historian of the Middle East to focus on Israeli history and culture. An inherent division exists in our academic institutions between the study of Israeli history and Judaism, on the one hand, and Middle Eastern history and Islam, on the other. This separation (the result of a number of historic circumstances that will not be analyzed here) is largely artificial and is detrimental to both students and scholars, especially in a period when the "iron curtain" that has separated Israel from the Arab world is gradually falling away The conviction that this division is anachronistic has led me to explore the linkage between Israel, the Arab states, and the Middle East in various areas.[1]

One such area is the field of education. In May 1997, an academic poll revealed that 40% of Jewish high school students "hate" Arabs and 60% "felt a strong urge to take revenge." The study also showed that there had been a gradual increase in the articulation of negative Jewish attitudes toward the Arabs since the 1970s.[2] Although the reasons for these worrying results are multifaceted, it is likely that biased school textbooks constitute an important factor in the adoption of negative attitudes toward the Arabs. In an era in which wars and violence have characterized the Arab-Israeli conflict, and personal Jewish-Arab encounters have been a rare phenomenon, school textbooks have become a key medium for acquaintance with the "other." For many Israelis who have not met personally with Arabs, school textbooks, along with children's books, historiography, and the media have constituted a central prism through which the image of the Arab and information on the Arab world have been filtered. Conceivably, these conceptions accompany the student into adulthood and affect his later political views as well. "We cannot have a perception of the present," wrote one

scholar, "that is not strongly influenced by a version of the past—some sort of version—which we have internalized in the course of growing up, and articulated in our adult lives. Such versions vary and matter because they determine how we understand and behave towards events that occur in our own present world."[3]

This research is an attempt to analyze the presentation of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the image of the Arab as reflected in Israeli history and, in certain cases, civics textbooks in the Jewish education system since the establishment of Israel in 1948.[4] A period of more than fifty years may be viewed as long enough to reveal how and to what extent the historical narrative has been transformed. Although the study of school textbooks is generally the province of scholars in the field of education, this study is carried out from a historical perspective. It is hoped that the historical method will provide a better understanding of the explicit and implicit biases of commission and omission to be found in the textbooks.

Admittedly, the aims of this study are not merely academic, as its findings are relevant to the ongoing efforts toward a peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a novel by Margaret Atwood, the heroine observes that "the whole point about being a historian…is that you can successfully avoid the present, most of the time."[5] In this historical analysis there is no attempt to avoid the present. I believe that biased Israeli and Arab textbooks have fostered and maintained a kind of silent conflict between the parties. Although this battle of textbooks has not resulted in physical injuries, it has contributed indirectly to the exacerbation of the armed conflict. More important, the negative repercussions of this silent conflict may be abiding, lasting long after the guns fall silent. Therefore, my hope is that better textbooks—free of bias, prejudice, inaccuracies, and omissions—on both sides of the conflict will result in a better atmosphere, congenial to the successful consummation of peaceful relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. "If there were favorable change in curricula," wrote Alouph Hareven, a leading educator, back in 1978, "then a new generation of Arabs and Israelis would arise whose perception of one another is different from that of the previous generation. Conversely, if such a change were not to take place, in all probability the next generation of Arabs—and maybe the next generation of Israelis—will be educated according to the same [biased] attitudes prevailing today."[6] Over twenty years later, the new history textbooks do indeed generate hope that the young Israeli generation will be exposed to a different kind of approach. Naturally, the same process must take place on the Arab side as well.

This study owes much to the support and help of friends and colleagues. I would like to thank my students in my courses on Arab-Israeli relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who, by their frequent observations along the lines of "this is not what I had studied at school," impelled me to unearth the reasons for it. Special thanks are due to Mrs. Naava Eisin, at the

Aviezer Yelin Archive for Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora at Tel Aviv University, who provided me with valuable material and was kind enough to guide me on the workings of the Israeli education system. I would like to thank Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University, who enriched my thinking by his insights and consistently encouraged my research. Dr. Falk Pingel, deputy director of the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, Germany, was kind enough to invite me to participate in a conference on Israeli-Palestinian textbook revision. My stay at the institute's library, which is second to none with respect to the study of textbooks, helped me to overcome my initial gaps in the theoretical sphere of international textbook revision.

I would like to state my indebtedness to the late Professor Hava Lazarus-Yaffe. As the first Israeli scholar to analyze Arab textbooks, and the author of valuable textbooks on Islam used in the Jewish school system, she was deeply interested in the findings of the present research. She read the first draft of this manuscript meticulously, and, by her comments, helped me recognize and divest my own biases. I would also like to thank Dr. Yoshua Mathias, who formerly headed the history team at the Curriculum Planning Department in the Ministry of Education, and Mr. Itzhak Komem, a Jerusalem high school teacher, both of whom read an earlier Hebrew version and offered important insights. Professor Ami Ayalon of Tel Aviv University and Professor Ella Landau-Tassron of the Hebrew University offered important comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript. Thanks are due also to Professor Moshe Ma'oz, former head of the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, at the Hebrew University, and Professor Amnon Cohen, the present head of the Truman Institute, both of whom supported my research through the David Ben-Rafael fellowship. The Institute was also kind enough to publish a short Hebrew version of this study in the Gitelson Peace Publications Series in January 1997. Dr. Susan Varda Gitelson, who established this series in memory of her father, has keenly supported projects to facilitate Israeli-Arab understanding. I would like to thank the Faculty of Humanities and the Institute of Asian and African Studies at the Hebrew University for helping fund this project. I would also like to thank the following institutions for permissions to use illustrations and photos appearing in the book: Ministry of Education, Hagana Archive, Central Zionist Archives, K.K.L. Photo Archive, Government Press Office, Keter Publishing House, and Rafael Bass. Thanks to my research assistant, Nimrod Goren, who was instrumental in acquiring these permissions. I am also thankful to Judy Krausz for her editorial assistance. Lastly, I wish to dedicate this book to my mother-in-law, Ruth Kedar, who has taught me the meaning of tolerance and giving.

Elie Podeh
October 2000

NOTES

1. E.Podeh, "Rethinking Israel in the Middle East," *Israel Affairs,* Vol. 3 (Spring/Summer 1997), pp. 280–95. Reprinted in E.Karsh (ed.), *From Rabin to Netanyahu: Israel's Troubled Agenda* (London: 1997), pp. 280–95.
2. *Ha'aretz,* 26 May 1997.
3. P.J.Rogers, "Why Teach History?" In A.Dickenson, P.J.Lee and P.J.Rogers (eds.), *Learning History* (London: 1984), p. 20.
4. On the Israeli education system, see Y.Iram and M.Schmida, *The Educational System of Israel* (Westport, CT: 1998).
5. M.Atwood, *The Robber Bride* (Toronto: 1993), p. 32.
6. A.Hareven, "Are Confidential Relations between Israel and the Arab States Possible at All?" In A.Hareven (ed.), *If Peace Comes: Risks and Prospects* (Jerusalem: 1978), p. 27 (Hebrew).

CHAPTER 1
THE STUDY OF SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

TEXTBOOK RESEARCH IN THE WEST

It is common knowledge that school textbooks in social sciences and humanities do not merely convey an objective body of information. Textbooks, according to Howard Mehlinger, are the modern version of village storytellers, since they "are responsible for conveying to youth what adults believe they should know about their own culture as well as that of other societies." In his opinion, none of the socialization instruments can be compared to textbooks "in their capacity to convey a uniform, approved, even official version of what youth should believe."[1] Moreover, although textbooks pretend to teach neutral, legitimate knowledge, they are often used as ideological tools to promote a certain belief system and legitimize an established political and social order. In other words, the selection and organization of knowledge for schools involves an ideological process that serves the interests of particular classes and social groups.[2] In his analysis of the American education system, Michael Apple concludes that what counts as legitimate knowledge "is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender/sex, and religious groups."[3]

It is difficult to establish the exact role played by textbooks in comparison to other socialization instruments. The growing exposure of the younger generation to the electronic media undoubtedly has diminished the centrality of the textbook as an instrument of education. Still, most scholars in the field of education tend to agree that textbooks have remained crucial. In his analysis of European history textbooks in the last hundred years, Wolfgang Jacobmeyer came to the conclusion that "our modern societies have developed history textbooks as the most remarkable medium for the

transmission of history, outnumbering press, radio, and TV."[4] Philip Altbach, too, observed that "in an age of computers and satellite communications, the most powerful and pervasive educational technology is [still] the textbook."[5] A recent study found that although some 85% of students' knowledge came from outside the school and from sources other than their teachers, "dependence on textbooks in some form or other was likely to remain an important element in the learning of history, geography and social studies."[6]

An inherent problem in the study of textbooks is that although they constitute the core of the school curriculum, it cannot be assumed that what is included in the text is actually taught or learned. According to Apple, students respond to the text in three different ways: in the first, dominant way, the student accepts the messages contained in the text at face value. In the second, negotiated way, the reader may dispute a certain claim but accept the overall interpretation of the text. In the third, oppositional way, the student rejects the dominant interpretation of the text. In addition to the fact that texts may have contradictory messages, Apple concludes that "audiences construct their own responses to texts. They do not passively receive texts, but actively read them based on their own class, race, gender and religious experiences."[7] Although these observations are illuminating, it may be assumed that most students lack sufficient historical knowledge and consciousness to prompt them to contest existing historical narratives. It is likely, therefore, that most students, especially in nondemocratic societies, belong to the dominant or negotiated categories.

Furthermore, textbooks carry the authority of print. Written texts, according to David Olson, "are devices which separate speech from speaker, and that separation in itself makes the words impersonal, objective and above criticism." In his opinion, textbooks resemble religious rituals since both "are devices for putting ideas and beliefs above criticism."[8] When the message originates in the textbook, which teachers and parents themselves consult, students attach greater authority to them. Moreover, since textbooks often constitute the ultimate reference source for the student (as well as for the teacher, in certain cases), it is likely that beliefs implanted through them will "persist for a lifetime."[9] A recent study found that when pressed, students chose the textbook as the most accurate of reference sources because "its apparent objective, encyclopedic nature fit more readily with their view of history and because many of their classroom activities involved searching for facts."[10]

The role ascribed to the textbook of legitimizing an established political and social order is particularly relevant to textbooks in the field of history. Because each generation makes a considerable effort to transmit its traditions and belief system to the next generation, history textbooks have been traditionally "geared to the teaching of the national past and to generating an identification with it."[11] Ever since the rise of the nation-state in Europe

in the nineteenth century, history textbooks were used by states as instruments for glorifying the nation, consolidating its national identity, and justifying particular forms of social and political systems.[12] Many studies in the West have demonstrated that ethnocentric views, myths, stereotypes, and prejudices often pervade history textbooks. Apple concludes, therefore, that most history textbooks present a biased view of conflicts: "Our side is good; their side is bad. We are peace-loving and want an end to strife; they are warlike and aim to dominate."[13] By defaming the adversary, the education system in general and history textbooks in particular play an important role in molding and reinforcing the state's national identity.

History textbooks also play a significant role in developing the "collective memory" of any given society, which is a necessary component of the national identity. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the first to use this term, explained that "every group develops the memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. These reconstructed images provide the group with an account of its origin and development and thus allow it to recognize itself through time."[14] The process of molding a nation entails the "building" of a collective memory, which necessitates rediscovering, reconstructing, or even fabricating the national past. This past includes myths, symbols, and other shared memories that provide "maps" and "moralities" delineating between "we" and "they." Anthony Smith observed that the creation of nations is a recurrent activity that "involves ceaseless re-interpretations, rediscoveries and re-constructions. Each generation must re-fashion national institutions and stratification systems in light of the myths, memories, values and symbols of the 'past,' which can best minister to the needs and aspirations of its dominant social groups."[15]

The act of remembering and forgetting is not only a formal procedure dictated from above but is also linked to the social environment. According to Eviatar Zerubavel, this environment plays a major role in helping us determine what is "memorable and what we can (or even should) forget," and it is often "society that determines which particular bygones we let be bygones."[16] He claims that each community has a different mnemonic tradition (one example is the Zionist tradition), which leads to cognitive differences between "thought communities." He emphasizes the existence of "mnemonic battles" that are "fought over the 'correct' way to interpret the past. As we develop a collective sense of history, we may not agree on how a particular historical figure or event ought to be remembered."[17] Clearly, history textbooks play a "crucial role" in the mnemonic socialization of present and future generations.[18]

Interestingly enough, historians and sociologists generally fail to note the political and social links between school textbooks and collective memory. Scholars dealing with the tools used by the state to create its own collective memory—such as historiography, literature, cinema, or national

commemorations—tend to overlook the role played by textbooks. At the same time, scholars in the field of textbook research barely analyze them in the context of attempts to build a collective memory usually ignoring the social environment that helps shape textbook content as well.[19] One rare exception, Ya'el Zerubavel, notes that "early childhood education in particular reinforces those shared images and stories that express and reinforce the group's memory. Children…thus learn about major historical figures or events from stories, poems, school plays and songs."[20] Another noteworthy scholar, Eric Hobsbawm, points out in a study on nations and nationalism in Europe, that "states…use [their] increasingly powerful machinery for communicating with their inhabitants, above all in the primary schools, to spread the image and heritage of the 'nation' and to inculcate attachment to it."[21]

Since in many Western democracies, and certainly in nondemocratic societies, the state controls the education apparatus, it can shape the nation's collective memory by determining what is to be included and what excluded from the curriculum and from textbooks. Such a course of action opens the way for the manipulation of the past in order to mold the present and the future.[22] In this respect, the school system, and textbooks, become yet another arm of the state, agents of memory whose aim is to ensure the transmission of certain "approved knowledge" to the younger generation. Textbooks thus function as a sort of "ultimate supreme historical court" whose task is to decipher "from all the accumulated 'pieces of the past' the 'true' collective memories which are appropriate for inclusion in the canonical national historical narrative."[23] In constructing the collective memory, textbooks play a dual role: on the one hand, they provide a sense of continuity between the past and the present, transmitting accepted historical narratives; on the other, they alter—or rewrite—the past to suit contemporary needs.[24]

The manipulation of the past often entails the use of stereotypes and prejudice in describing the "other." Stereotypes are patterns and images that reduce the complexities of a phenomenon, thus portraying the reality in a narrow, incomplete, and rudimentary way. Although such a depiction of reality is often false, stereotypes "fulfill an important function in that they make it possible for people to orient their actions and reach decisions, even when they do not have sufficient information at their disposal."[25] Prejudices, by comparison, are the result of preconceived attitudes. Gordon Allport defined prejudice as "thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant."[26] Highly emotional and resistant to change, prejudices "portray reality from a selective point of view, reflecting the interests of the person articulating the prejudice."[27] Carried to the extreme, stereotyping and prejudice foster delegitimization—the "categorization of groups into extreme negative social categories which are excluded from human groups that are considered as acting within the limits of acceptable norms and/or val-

ues."[28] Common means used for delegitimization, according to Daniel Bar-Tal, are dehumanization, outcasting, trait characterization, use of political labels, and group comparison.[29] Textbooks offer an excellent starting point for studying the function of stereotypes and prejudice in the forging of society's identity vis-à-vis the "other." At the same time, history textbooks contain a self-image "which may be no less stereotyped than the perceptions of other countries."[30]

The argument that history textbooks convey the "approved" knowledge that the state or the ruling elite aspires to transmit to the next generation is self-evident. Yet textbooks should also be regarded as cultural or social expressions, reflecting the *Zeitgeist* and the changes that take place in society as a result of meaningful historical events and new historiography. The Ministry of Education, too, is not immune to calls for change coming from the "field" and is bound to respond to these pressures. In such cases, the content of a given textbook may reflect a synthesis between what is directed from above and what is transmitted from below. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the more centralized the educational system is, the less likely the curricula and the textbooks will be affected by changes from below.

Historically, already in the late nineteenth century it was recognized in Europe that school textbooks of any given state contain stereotypes and prejudice toward neighboring countries and states with which it is in conflict. The academic study of textbooks, however, commenced only after the First World War, with the realization that chauvinistic textbooks were causes of aggression and hostility between nations. The notion of international textbook revision that consequently emerged aimed at avoiding future wars. Initially, the process was concerned with "the decontamination of textbooks and with purging history textbooks of the 'drum and trumpet' school of history."[31] In 1945, the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) was founded, with textbook revision one of its primary tasks. The organization's charter stated that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."[32] Four years later, UNESCO published a guideline called *A Handbook for the Improvement of Textbook and TeachingMaterials*.[33] Assisted by the Council of Europe, which was founded in 1949, UNESCO initiated a series of international conferences that made recommendations for textbook analysis, which forms the basis of international textbook revision to this day. Since 1975, the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig has served as Europe's acknowledged center for administering, organizing, and sponsoring the study of international textbook revision.

The first phase of textbook research concentrated on identifying and eliminating factual errors, obvious prejudices, deliberate omissions, and distortions. The main task of these studies was to analyze the texts, compare findings, relate them to acknowledge academic research, and formu-

late recommendations.[34] These studies tended toward "a simplistic heroes-and villains format, in the dismissive wording of one group of scholars."[35] The initial outcome, however, seemed rather impressive: various reports indicated the decline of nationalistic bias in history textbooks. After having scrutinized six European countries, one study came to the conclusion that "school propaganda in all Western countries had to give way to a more complex, internationally-oriented presentation." This conclusion, according to the report, did not mean that indoctrination and propaganda had altogether disappeared from textbooks but that "nationalism had lost ground, while the idea of peace is more strongly emphasized."[36]

The second phase in textbook research began in the early 1970s. Change was manifested on several levels: thematically, the focus of the research shifted to topics previously neglected, such as ethnicity and gender. The new studies focused not only on textbook content, but also on structure, the process of textbook approval and publishing, and the impact of the textbooks on student and teacher.[37] Methodologically, studies went beyond the traditional aims of exposing and eliminating errors, distortions, adverse images, and prejudices. Research was now more concerned with revealing "the deep-seated and one-sided patterns of perception with regards to our awareness of history and politics." These were the "underlying assumptions"—unconscious presuppositions rooted in the collective consciousness. As Fritzsche put it, "Historical or political facts are not of primary interest in this respect; what is of interest is the manner in which these facts are interpreted."[38] In his view, "defeat or victory in wars, successful or failed revolutions maybe facts, but these facts allow for various interpretations and are remembered in different ways. It is the way they are represented and absorbed into our consciousness which is the decisive factor as to their influence on present or even future actions."[39] Textbook research, he concluded, concentrated on those assumptions "which are based on ignorance, ethnocentric or nationalistic perspectives or a repression of the past."[40]

Three main approaches have been developed in the study of textbooks. The traditional, called the hermeneutic or descriptive-analytical method, focuses on the study of the written content, concentrating on the disclosure of explicit biases and prejudices in textbooks. The second approach, the quantitative analysis of content, is based on empirical research in the social sciences and concentrates on "spatial analysis"—the number of lines or pages devoted to a particular issue, and "frequency analysis"—the number of times a certain term or phenomenon is mentioned. The third approach, the qualitative method, advocates a synthesis, preserving the best aspects of the two methods and reducing their innate weaknesses in order to "quantify qualitative elements."[41]

Although the quantitative and qualitative analyses seemingly offer more sophisticated tools for studying textbooks, they still suffer from certain problems that characterized the old hermeneutic method—namely,

objectivity. The authors of a study on South African textbooks asserted that "while qualitative analysis in not value-free, neither is the risk of subjectivity entirely eradicated in quantitative analysis, since the researcher identifies the concepts for measurement and sets the rules for their classification according to his own preferences."[42] Moreover, while statistical measurement can be applied to explicit forms of prejudicial attitudes, only the textual method (namely, the hermeneutic method) can disclose implicit and hidden forms of prejudice, as well as the omissions in the text.

THE PRESENT STUDY

A brief glance at textbook analyses will show that most studies have been conducted in Western democracies or between two partners in which at least one side belonged to this category. Moreover, most of the theoretical framework developed in this field is relevant to the experiences gained in Western societies. In contrast, few studies were concerned with textbooks in Third World countries. This observation is crucial since there seem to be substantial differences in the role of the textbook in Western and Third World societies. While in the West the textbook constitutes only one socialization instrument, the textbook in the Third World is considered "over-whelmingly important" and its influence is potentially greater than in the West. Altbach points out that "the text [in non-Western societies] is very frequently the *only* book that a student uses, and the goal of one book per student has [even] eluded many countries." Moreover, he adds, "the text is the link between the student and the wider world of learning, and where the teacher is not well trained and does not have access to additional educational materials, the textbook is a major resource."[43]

The second major difference on the role of the textbook in Western and Third World societies is related to the fact that in many Third World states the elites are still struggling to form and maintain their legitimacy as well as forge the state's national identity. Largely following the older Western model, these elites use textbooks—and history textbooks in particular—as a tool to build their own collective memory. Unsurprisingly, therefore, textbooks generally embody the "illustration of national will and of national policy," particularly in the fields of history and social sciences.[44] A comparison between the Third World in the 1990s and nineteenth-century America or Europe, however, while helpful, is misleading since the issue of nation-building is far more complex for textbook authors today than it was then.[45] This is so because many Asian and African states, as Anthony Smith has observed, lack "any shared historical mythology and memory on which state elites can set about 'building' thenation."[46]

Culturally, Israel is considered part of Western society, but in sociological terms it has undergone some of the processes that characterize newly developed countries. First, developing a shared collective memory has

been a major task for Israel during its first fifty years of statehood; school textbooks, it may be assumed, have been a major instrument in this process. Second, the country's system of education is highly centralized and is responsible for curriculum planning as well as textbook writing and authorization. For most of the period under review, textbooks have largely conveyed the "official" or "approved" knowledge that the state aspires to transmit to the next generation even if they were not actually written by the Ministry of Education. Third, in terms of textbook research, Israel lags behind Western democracies, because this field has not developed beyond the first, traditional stage.

Despite important differences between the West and Third World countries in terms of textbook research, any analysis of Israeli history textbooks must take into account the impressive body of work that had been accomplished in this field in Western Europe and the United States. Such a comparative approach, according to Hanna Schissler, "modifies views about the uniqueness of one's own national development, moves away from re-constructions of history which are frequently unlinear and give the appearance of inevitability, and thus creates a basis for an enlarged understanding."[47] Indeed, I believe that only by moving outside the realm of the Arab-Israeli conflict to other international conflicts one can fully grasp that the way societies portray their enemies is basically similar,[48] and that such one-sided depictions in themselves have constituted a prime cause of the aggravation of conflicts.

Studies of the Arab-Israeli conflict have usually concentrated on its historical, political, military, and economic dimensions, ignoring the equally important cultural and psychological aspects, reflected in the attitudes and behavior of the participants. Since human behavior is largely shaped not only by reality but by the perception of it, it is highly likely that perceptions (whether genuine or false) of this conflict affect the future course of events. As in other international conflicts, these perceptions are often expressed in ethnocentric terms. A sharp distinction is made between the "we" (Israelis) and the "they" (Arabs), which is essential for maintaining a distinct Jewish-Israeli identity and sustaining the ability to compete successfully with the Arabs.[49] Ethnocentric views are largely responsible for the formation of different, if not dichotomic, historical narratives by the parties to the conflict; many Israelis and Arabs (including the Palestinians) perceive their version of history to be "true" and "objective," while the other side's is considered "incorrect" or "distorted." Such antagonistic narratives have often been accompanied by the use of stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions regarding the enemy.[50]

Indeed, various studies of Israeli perceptions have documented the existence of deep prejudicial attitudes toward the Arabs and stereotypical images of them during the years of conflict.[51] An international survey held before 1967 revealed that at all age levels Israeli children "would least like

to be Arab."[52] This negative attitude has also been reflected in the Jewish-Israeli stereotypical attitude of the Arab language and is still relevant at present.[53] Although the origins of these negative perceptions cannot be exclusively attributed to the impact of textbooks, it is still reasonable to assume that this medium has played a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes of several generations of Israelis.[54] It is only natural that a conviction of objectivity and truth be reflected not only in historiography but also in history textbooks, which primarily rely on this historiography. Inasmuch as beliefs and images acquired from textbooks constitute the reality for their readers, these perceptions later function as lenses through which incoming information is interpreted. A cognitive self-selection mechanism filters out information that contradicts existing knowledge while allowing in information that confirms it. In this way, stereotypes and prejudices are entrenched and perpetuated because in order to avoid "cognitive discrepancy" people cling to their beliefs. Unfreezing them, therefore, is a long and complicated process.[55]

For most Jewish Israelis, the Arab (whether the Arab in Israel or in neighboring states) is the "other." Ilan Peleg describes this situation (called "otherness") as "a social condition in which certain individuals or groups are perceived, described, and treated as fundamentally and irreconcilably different from the reference group." Moreover, he claims, "all negative qualities are projected onto the Other, often the very qualities that the perceiver fears or even recognizes in himself."[56] In his opinion, otherness is an expected perceptual device in sustaining intergroup conflict. In fact, he continues, "not to view an adversary as the Other often produces painful ambiguity, a serious and unsettling cognitive dissonance. Perceiving an adversary as a totally negative, evil entity is thus not an unreasonable solution for people locked into conflict."[57] Undeniably, the existence of a delegitimized "other" has served as yet another mechanism in molding the Jewish identity. In the present context, Peleg sees a strong link between the gentile perception of the Jew as the other and the Jewish perception of the other—in this case the Arab. This link, he concludes, "has created fertile conditions for the emergence of a new structure of otherness, fed and sustained by the Arab-Jewish rivalry."[58] The existence of this psychological process is crucial, since the "otherness" phenomenon is "disseminated through the process of socialization in which one generation transmits values, norms and beliefs to other generations."[59] It is highly likely that, in this context, school textbooks serve as important agents for implanting these beliefs and images.

This study is concerned with illuminating how the Arab-Israeli conflict and the image of the Arab have been portrayed in Israeli history and civics textbooks since 1948. These issues have been partially dealt with in previous studies.[60] The present work, however, differs in several respects. First, it offers a systematic analysis of textbooks over a period of more than fifty