This text was actually on the list of suggested reading for my International Relations MA module – the Arab-Israeli conflict. As such, I’m glad that my course convenor had the foresight to include a text, that some with a less multidisciplinary outlook might consider outside of the remit of International Relations. However, Nurit Peled-Elhanan delivers a wonderful text, accessible not only to academics but casual readers alike. She superbly blends sources resulting in an analysis that stretches easily across the fields of education, linguistics, sociology, psychology, history and politics.

As the title suggests, Peled-Elhanan’s main premise is that Israeli school books are highly-politicised in that they proliferate and maintain racist images of Palestinians. She examines the influence that these images and perceptions have on the children living through the conflict. She undertakes a well-balanced study of Israeli school books in the subjects of geography, history, and civic studies.

Chapter One, *The Representation of Palestinians in Israeli School Books* is thorough in its depth of research. The author demonstrates the dehumanisation of Palestinians in Israeli school books on two levels, through images or lack of, ‘None of the books contain photographs of Palestinian human beings and all represent them in racist icons or demeaning classificatory images such as terrorists, refugees and primitive farmers’ (p49). The choice of language in school books is also pertinent. The reluctance to name Palestinians as ‘Palestinians’ in Israeli school books, is also noted as another technique of creating a misunderstanding of the Other for Israeli school children. The author quotes well from *Literacy in the New Media Age* by Kress, G, ‘Things don’t have meaning unless they are named.’ Another aspect of the use of language as quoted from is called the ‘language of self-presentation and language of other-presentation’ (Van Dijk, 1997), which is manifest in Israeli textbooks in the ethnic classification which differentiates between the Israelis or Jews and the ‘Non-Jews’ who are the Arabs (p49-50). This differentiation facilitates and legitimises verbal racism in Israeli school books, as well as visual racism, which the author contrasts with official images of Israelis who are represented as close and familiar. This chapter continues to analyse the representation of Palestinians in Israeli schoolbooks, and thoroughly addresses all the surrounding issues one-by-one including; The Expulsion of the Palestinians, Palestinian Nationality, and The Intifada.
The Second Chapter *The Geography of Hostility and Exclusion: A Multimodal Analysis*, looks at the geography curricula and the use of geography to the propagation of ‘territorial identity’ (p101). Peled-Elhanan concludes that the basis of geography school books is based on Zionist ideology, which denotes as a given that Israel is the land of the Jewish people who have rightfully resettled it. The term multimodal is used in this chapter to demonstrate the various ways in which geography transmits meaning to children such as through maps, diagrams, text, images and photographs. The author uses semiotics, the study of interpretation of signs and symbols, as a main method through which to substantiate her findings. The manipulation of maps and their subsequent power is well noted by Peled-Elhanan through the depiction of land size as well as place names. The recurring use of Samaria and Judea instead of the actual ‘West Bank’ on maps in Israeli school books further emphasises the underlying aim (p123). The Chapter concludes that through the use of these multimodal tools, ‘Geography school books teach Jewish Israeli students to see themselves as masters of the Land of Israel/Palestine, to control its population, its landscape and its space, and to do whatever necessary to increase Jewish domination and its ‘development’ which really means its expansion’ (p136).

The Third Chapter, *Layout as Carrier of Meaning: Explicit and Implicit messages transmitted through layout*, examines how the layout of images and text in Israeli school books creates new meanings and interpretations of the text and images themselves, when laid out in a specific way that triggers a relationship between them in the readers mind, hence creating an alternative perspective.

Chapter Four, *Processes of Legitimation in Reports about Massacres*, states that the massacres of Palestinians at Deir Yassin (1948), Qibya (1953), and Kaffer Kassem (1956) are mentioned in some Israeli mainstream school history books. But Peled-Elhanan reminds us that these acts are not ‘a very courageous educational act’ (p173) but all the reports of these massacres use symbols and signs to build up legitimating claims that justify the outcome (p173-174). The chapter goes on to detail four types of legitimation and applies them to the reports on these massacres. The main argument of the reports seems to be that ‘the massacres, regrettable as they may be, were beneficial for Israel, and other nations and armies would have done the same under similar circumstances.’ This normalises the massacres in the minds of school children; and persists when they are adults whose understandings stem from the education received in Israeli schools.

Overall, the text questions the use of Zionist ideology as a basis for education due to the foundational tenet of the ideology itself being based on what could be considered mythology. The mythologizing parts of Israeli history alongside the ambiguous notion of the definition of the Jewish religion vs the Jewish race, serves propaganda purposes that support the Zionist ideology; whilst simultaneously presenting ‘Others’ as an opponent, particularly in terms of the geographic notion of the ‘Land of Israel’.

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